

Acts 6:2 in the Navajo Bible

Ákohgo naakits'áadahígíí éí ídahoo'aaahii t'áá át'é álah ádayiilaago ádeidíiniid, Ch'iyáán nidei'niih doo biniyé Diyin God bizaad nahji' nidadidiit'álgíí doo bohónéedzâa da. (Acts 6:2)¹

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right [*ouk areston*] for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. (Acts 6:2)²

Introduction

In Acts 6:2 the issue was how to care for the needs of the poor within the congregation. The inner circle of Jesus' followers were naturally leaders of the church. In this verse they come to realize that they should not be the only leaders. Others would be needed to take care of supporting ministries not directly connected with the preaching of the word. If the Twelve took the whole burden of administration on themselves, their usefulness would be cut short. They needed help. In coming to this conclusion they were following a biblical model.

Helpers in the Time of Moses

When Moses led Israel out of Egypt, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came to visit them while they were still in the desert. He rejoiced at all the good things God was doing for the people, but pointed out that Moses could not do all the work himself.

Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸ You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. ¹⁹ Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. ²⁰ Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. ²¹ But select capable men from all the people— men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain— and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. ²² Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. ²³ If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied." (Exodus 18:17-23)

Moses took this advice and was better for doing so. Later on, when the sanctuary was erected, God made certain people priests, but there were Levites to help them. Levites were from the same tribe as priests (the tribe of Levi), but not from the same family within that tribe.

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

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Priests had to come from the family of Aaron. Levites could be anyone from the tribe of Levi who was not in the family of Aaron. Levites were the ones who kept the fires burning and made sure fresh bread was set out on the table in the first apartment of the sanctuary, and they had many other tasks. When the sanctuary needed to be moved from one place to another, they were the ones who moved it. The priests did not do these things. The Levites did them.

Deacons in New Testament Times

In the book of Acts, the responsibilities for church administration could not all rest on the disciples. If they tried to do it all, the work would be too heavy for them and they would not accomplish what they really needed to do. There is no question that this was the case, but there is a question how to say it.

Was it impossible for the leaders of the church to do everything themselves, or would it be merely inappropriate to try? Those are different concepts. In Acts 6:2 the Greek says *ouk areston* ("it would not be useful or fitting"). The Navajo states this much more forcefully. It says *doo bohónéedzǫ́ da* ("it would not be possible"). No doctrinal issue rests on this difference, but my point is that the two ideas are not the same.

In any event, the solution was to appoint deacons. This was a new office in the church, which was similar in some ways to the role of the Levites in ancient Israel. Levites were the deacons of ancient Israel. Deacons are the Levites of the Christian church. Their job was, and is, to make sure the pastor has time to do his real job, which is the ministry of the word.

Discussion

Whatever place we occupy in the church, there will always be someone we can help. Helping can take many forms. We can do things for the pastor that will free his hands, like the deacons in our passage. We can bring food when the church has a dinner. We can help a person who is either very young or very old find the right page for a Bible text or a hymn.

If you come to church hoping to receive a blessing, sometimes you will receive one and sometimes you won't. But if you come to church looking for some way to help and bless other people, you'll always find what you're looking for and in the process you'll receive a blessing yourself. There will always be someone in the church with a need you can help fill.

Conclusion

Whether it's impossible for a pastor to do everything himself, or merely inappropriate, in either case it's something he shouldn't be doing. Helpers are needed. That means you. Helpers don't have to be people who are elected to serve as deacons. They can be people from the congregation who simply notice what needs doing and do it. Every member of the church can be a helper.