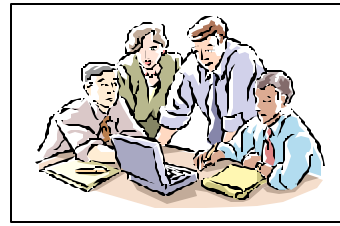


**Deacon Ministry Newsletter**  
**July Edition, 2005**  
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## **Transfers, Transplants and Tests**

In the last months I've encountered various situations where churches and communities are struggling with people who transfer membership from one church to another and/or persons who are transplants and are often referred to as 'come here's'. Situations I've heard about include:

- **“They are not like us”** – this can refer to persons who have a different idea of the way church needs to be done. This is often because persons have joined from a different denomination or a different size church or an area of the country where the culture was different than where they moved.
- **“Who are they”** – this is often an indicator of power struggles for control. Who has the most clout or power to change the way the church does things? Sometimes this occurs when there are more transfers or transplants on the leadership core than persons native to the community. Other times it becomes a battle between different cultures and different ways of doing worship, communion, youth ministry, Sunday School etc.
- **“Their beliefs are not ‘right’”** – this often is really not about core beliefs as much a personal preference values. Very often persons who transfer in or are transplants from other churches or other parts of the country prefer to do things a little differently. Because their behaviors and attitudes are not 'like those native to the area' the transplants or transfers are often accused of not being 'right' or in some cases they are accused of being 'heretical' simply because they desire to do things different than those native to the area.

## **Consequences of the Struggle**

Very often these mismatched situations have very intense consequences. The situation becomes emotionally charged when persons try to preserve their preferred style and heritage and isolate or accuse others. The congregation usually polarizes and quickly becomes a battle between 'us' and 'them'. Pastors and key leaders are sometimes terminated or deeply wounded by those they shepherd. These are only the internal consequence. The greater and more destructive consequence is impact it makes on the families, children, youth of those involved in the struggle. More often than not church becomes something they do not want to participate in ever again or the situation fuels their cynicism toward the church or persons who are different from their 'home'. An even greater consequence is how the community at large responds to rumors they hear at the coffee shop, workplace or in the media. The churched and the unchurched

who are not directly involved are often touched by the hysteria, lies, back-biting and hypocrisy they perceive coming from the local church. The damage is deep and personal and is frequently fueled by the people in the local church who are 'fighting for their personal preferences'. How sad! Once again the church not only 'shoots their wounded' in this battle but they 'pour gasoline on the already tarnished public image of the institutional church and Christians'. Isn't the church supposed to be about reaching others not condemning or judging others? Maybe the primary test here is how will the church choose to deal with diversity – a growing reality in our culture and world? How will we BE the salt, light and leaven 'in the world' and in the church?

### **What's a Deacon To Do?**

So what are a deacon and a church to do? Aren't we supposed to preserve our heritage? Shouldn't we fight for our faith? Can the transfers and transplants live together with the natives and established members of the church? These are heavy questions many are struggling with today. Let me simply raise some coaching questions that might be worth some dialogue in your next deacon's meeting or leadership council.

- What are the real issues at hand? How important are these?
- What are you willing to give up? What are you willing to gain?
- How can such tensions and personal disagreements be acknowledged and compromises made rather than attack those who are different?
- What is needed to help build bridges rather than create more barriers?
- What are the possible win/wins in this tense scenario?
- What adjustments are being called for? What are we willing to do now?

Links and resources you might want to explore:

Finding Faith by Brian McLaren – Zondervan, 2004

Teaching and Learning in Communities of Faith by Linda Vogel, Jossey-Bass

Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age by Edward Hammett, Lake Hickory Resources, 2005 [www.lakehickoryresources.com](http://www.lakehickoryresources.com)

<http://www.ats.edu/faculty/grants/lilly/proposals/callahan.html> Lilly

Foundation Research on Pastoral Challenges Amidst Diversity by Sharon Callahan.

<http://www.christianleaders.org/JRL/Spring2002/vol1no1Callahan.htm>

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