

The Relationship between the Board of Deacons and the Church Priest

First: The relationship between the priest and the board must be a relation of spiritual love where the members of the board feel the spiritual fatherhood of their priest while dealing with him in the true spirit of sonship. Priest and members should have their eyes set on the success of the service and its growth to the glory of our God Jesus away from personal objectives and self-glorification. I say this so that the relationship between them is neither reduced to an administrative one where the members feel that they are dealing with a president of board of directors rather than a father priest nor does the priest feel that he is dealing with a group of employees rather than his spiritual children.

Second: The fatherhood of the priest becomes apparent in his spiritual guidance to the work of the board so that the service doesn't swerve from its spiritual direction. It is also manifested in a big heart capable of withstanding the weaknesses of his children while seeking to correct them by education and guidance as the Discalnia says, "removing guilt with education." If he had to warn let that be in tears as Paul the apostle did (Acts 20:31) and if he had to discipline let that be in humbleness (2 Timothy 2:25) and if he had to rebuke let that be in patience (2 Timothy 4:2).

Third: The members show that they are the priest's sons and daughters by their submission and obedience to him and their cooperation with him in building the church. Even when they disagree with him in opinion, they do so in love and objectivity that they may safeguard the reverence and respect due to the holy mystery of priesthood.

Fourth: Different opinions inside the board are perfectly acceptable as long as this diversity doesn't violate the spiritual framework of the Orthodox Church. The reason behind having more than one member on the board is to benefit from their diverse experiences for the good of the church and to serve its interests. I say this because some think that diversity in opinion is a form of rebellion especially if there is disagreement with the father priest. That's why I say that there is nothing wrong with the priest taking

the opinion of the board and actually making the final decision based upon the board's suggestions as long as it is in the interest of the church and within the general spiritual framework (This can be applied to many administrative and organizational issues especially if there are experts in these fields).

Fifth: The father priest must always confirm the spiritual framework, and he has the right to stop any decision that may have adverse spiritual effects or that violates the Orthodox Christian teachings but this must be done in a spirit of love, advice and guidance.

Sixth: The job of the board of deacons is to help the priest not to take account with him. I say this because some think that their service on the board gives them the right to question, investigate and judge the priest in violation of the biblical teachings which gives this right only to the Pope or the Bishop (1 Ti 5: 19-21). But if there were some clarifications or explanations concerning administrative or financial issues (which fall within the duties of the board), these have to be made in the spirit of sonship and in humility.

Seventh: The board of deacons is also responsible for facilitating the work of the father priest rather than obstructing it. I say this because the service comes to a halt due to routine issues or because the execution of the decisions of the board and their follow up falls on the shoulders of the father priest as if the duty of the board is to suggest and decide only, but the execution is the father priest's duty.

Eighth: It is extremely inappropriate for the board to take a decision without the knowledge of the father priest. It is equally inappropriate if the priest handles financial or administrative matters (the responsibilities of the board) without the knowledge of the board. This will not happen of course if Christian love and a spirit of truth and clarity exist.

Ninth: Questioning the father priest on spiritual issues is not at all a part of the duties of the board but it is the right of the Pope or the Bishop. Sometimes the board asks the

father priest for a report on visitation, Sunday school services, pastoral services, etc which is inappropriate. However, if there is a comment on the service- for example, a certain family needs visitation or spiritual follow up- one can inform the father priest away from the board meetings in humility and in a spirit of sonship, being his spiritual son/daughter and regardless of board membership. This spiritual approach will not bother the father priest because he knows well that God allows his sons (who are his creation and his slaves) to speak to Him in service issues as Abraham interceded on behalf of Sodom & Gomorrah and as Moses interceded on behalf of his people the Israelites.

Tenth: What happens inside the board of discussions or disagreements of opinion shouldn't affect the spiritual relationship between the father priest and the members of the board. These differences shouldn't turn into attacks in the board meetings or outside them against the priest or vice versa. Should this happen, it evidences lack of true love that is not angry, but bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things (1Co 13:5,7). If there is no love then there is no God because God is love.