

**CHALLENGE OF MINISTRY PLACEMENT AFTER SEMINARY
EDUCATION IN THE CHURCH OF NIGERIA (ANGLICAN
COMMUNION)**

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Abstract

Ministry placement is one challenge postulants face after graduation from the seminary or theological college. Whereas postulants are endorsed for seminary education by bishops, at the end of their theological studies in the seminary they become stranded about where to begin the pastoral ministry. This paper seeks to proffer solutions to the challenge of ministry placement by postulants after seminary education. Engaging the use of primary and secondary sources, the paper exposed that postulant can overcome this challenge by creating vacancies for themselves through hard work, diligent study, discipleship, proof of their calls while in the seminary, and the seminary should enroll dioceses to pray for the postulants. The paper concluded by redirecting the postulants to both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. The paper recommended that the postulant should imbibe the spirit and culture of hard work, take their theological studies serious, submit themselves to discipleship and begin their ministry while in the seminary, and the endorsing bishops should not send candidates who they will not be willing to admit into the ministry of their dioceses upon graduation.

Key Words: Ministry, Bishop, Postulant, Seminary, Theological Education.

Introduction

Seminary education is a prerequisite for placement into the order of ministry in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). Whereas some decades ago, postulants did not have any challenge being engaged in the ministry of dioceses upon graduation from the seminary. Recent experiences as testified by some postulants suggested that not all postulants endorsed for seminary training by bishops eventually gain

acceptance into the ministry of diocese. This was not the case some decades ago when Archbishop Peter Akinola, the former Primate of the Church of Nigeria (Gbesan, 2009); Archbishop Benjamin Kwashi, the Bishop of Jos and GAFCON's General Secretary (Boyd, 2019) ; Archbishop Ikechi Nwosu, retired Archbishop of Aba Province (Onuoha, 2009); Bishop Emmanuel Ajulo, former Bishop of Okene and Professor of English University of Jos (Ajulo, 2017); and Bishop Duke Akamisoko, the Bishop of Kubwa (Ojosu, *et al*, 2021), and many others gained acceptance into theological training and dioceses' ministries upon graduation. These 'church fathers' did not struggle with the issue of placement after seminary education because their commitment and value were evident to the people. They were all recommended for theological training either by their Vicars, Church elders, or Bishops based on the evidence of their calls into the Ministry; thus, at graduation, they were accepted and posted into the ministry of their dioceses. This was the testimony of Buddy Harrison the writer of the small book titled *Choosing Wisely in Life* (2003). Harrison started off his discernment for ministry with labour and hard work.

In the present dispensation of ministry in the Church of Nigeria, the postulants have revealed that having being endorsed for theological training they are left to scout for acceptance in dioceses upon graduation. Although this is not a general case about all postulants, for some, this challenge is confirmed. Also, I have been called by different postulants to assist them to get placements in dioceses. One question worth asking is: why a bishop would endorse a candidate or candidates to the seminary or theological colleges without planning to admit them into the diocese upon graduation? Other postulants in such unpalatable situations are sometimes placed in what is called the "common pool" whereupon graduation they are posted to dioceses at the discretion of the seminary. Postulants who are not posted to dioceses bear the burden of searching for placement in ministry for themselves as it rests squarely on their shoulders.

This experience has frustrated some postulants and they have left the Anglican church to join other denominations. Some have taken up teaching jobs with schools just to be able to earn a living while waiting for the opportunity to be invited into the ministry of a diocese. Some, out of frustration have abandon the call and have become objects of unbelievers' mockery of the church and her ministers. The difficulty in finding placement into the ministry of the church in dioceses is caused by many factors such as non-suitability of placement, bishop's rejection of postulants posted to them, diocesan incapacity to pay workers, overstaffing, unqualified postulants, etc.

This paper seeks to proffer solutions to these challenges of placement into the ministry of the church.

Seminary Education in the Church of Nigeria

Seminary education is important as it fashions and positions postulants with the necessary discipline and tools for pastoral ministry after graduation. Good seminary education strengthens the mission and ministry of the church against atheists, apostates, heretics, and false teachers; therefore, its importance cannot be underestimated. This position has been captured by Asubiaro in his book, *The Authority of a Christian Minister* (2014) thus:

Some people believe that when God has called us, there is no need for any other theological training. Others are of the opinion that only an elementary theological acquisition is required. However, we should understand that, in ministry, the level of our knowledge affects our influence on the audience. This is why it is important for every minister to gain knowledge in theological and other related areas of interest as the Lord permits (p. 115).

The same writer had earlier noted the importance of theological education when he said, that “theological knowledge is needed to counter every opposition in the academic field” (p.114). This justifies the constitutional provisions of the Church of Nigeria, which demands that all her ministers must be trained in the seminary or theological college before ordination. It is necessary in order to ensure that the Church's stand for the biblical faith that was once for all delivered to the saints remains untainted by the corruption of the present world (Jude 3). In order to strengthen this position on the training of those to be ordained in the different Dioceses of the church, the, particularly Canon XXI titled "*Of the Training of Priests*" notes:

1. Subject to such exemptions and variations as may be specifically permitted by a bishop within his diocese, the normal training required of a priest of this Church shall be as follows:
 - (a) he shall pass through a period of not less than three years as a candidate aspiring for theological training;
 - (b) he shall undergo a formal training in an approved theological institution for a minimum period of four years leading to a degree in Theology;

- (c) where the Postulant already has a degree in another discipline from an approved institution, he shall need only two years formal training in a theological institution;
 - (d) he shall not be less than twenty-five years of age;
 - (e) he shall have a minimum of a first degree in Theology or any field of study from a recognized university or tertiary institution;
 - (f) where the degree is not in Theology, the candidate shall in addition have a minimum of a first degree in theology from an institution recognized by the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion).
2. Any person who does not have the above qualifications, shall not be ordained as a priest of the Church and accorded the rights and privileges appertaining thereto (*Church of Nigeria Constitution and Canons*, 2020pp. 71, 125-126).

It should be noted that the constitutional demands above are not difficult to achieve based on the number of Seminaries and Theological Colleges in the Church of Nigeria. There are seven (7) nationally recognized seminaries besides Crowther Graduate Theological Seminary, Abeokuta and other credible seminaries running independently of the national church by some Dioceses. The major difference between the seven (7) seminaries and theological colleges and those owned by individual Diocese or group of Dioceses is the fact that the former receives annual subvention from the national Church and admit their candidates through the Church of Nigeria Joint Entrance Examination (CONJEE). However, all the institutions are affiliated to recognized universities in Nigeria with some of them having affiliations with Theological Colleges overseas.

The seven (7) nationally recognized Seminaries and Theological Colleges include:

- 1. St Francis of Assisi College of Theology, Wusasa, Kaduna State.
- 2. Vining College of Theology, Akure, Ondo State.
- 3. Ezekiel College of Theology, Ekpoma, Edo State.
- 4. Bishop Crowther College of Theology, Okene, Kogi State.
- 5. Trinity Theological College, Umuahia, Abia State.
- 6. Immanuel College of Theology and Christian Education, Ibadan, Oyo State (jointly owned by the Church of Nigeria and the Methodist Church of Nigeria).
- 7. Institute of Theology, Paul University, Awka.

8. Crowther Graduate Theological Seminary, Abeokuta, Ogun State. This is the apex theological institution of the Church of Nigeria where higher theological training is undertaken.

The Church of Nigeria is an affiliate member of the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN), Bukuru, Plateau State (owned by the *Tarrayar Ekkliyyar Yan'uwa a Nijeriya* (TEKAN). Other Anglican Seminaries and Theological Colleges within the Church of Nigeria include the Christian Institute, Jos, Plateau State (owned by the Anglican Diocese of Jos), Adam Igbudu Christian Institute, Emevor, Delta State (owned by some selected Dioceses in Bendel Province), and Lagos Anglican Bible College, Lagos State (owned by the Anglican Dioceses of Lagos and Ogun States).

Each of these institutions is managed by a rectors or dean in conjunction with their separate governing boards, under the general supervision of the Bishop Theologian of the Church of Nigeria. Although these are the institutions that those to be ordained as priests in the Church of Nigeria are expected to enroll in for theological training, bishops at their discretion have the prerogative of permitting the training of their candidates for higher theological training in other seminaries or theological colleges that they adjudged have content that is agreeable to the teachings of the Church of Nigeria.

Apart from what the canon of the Church of Nigeria says on the criteria for admission into theological training, the seminaries and theological colleges have theirs as well. An important entry qualification into any of the Anglican seminaries or theological colleges is the endorsement of a bishop. Non-Anglican candidates are permitted to get their forms endorsed by their church leaders or senior pastors. To that effect, bishops only endorsed candidates who they want to train as part of the workforce of their dioceses, in which case, at graduation such candidates return to them and they are ordained into the ministry of the diocese. But there are bishops who for some reason still go ahead to endorse candidates that they are not prepared to admit into their dioceses at graduation. This should be discouraged except where such candidates indicate from the beginning by signing that they are attending the training, not for the purpose of joining the pastoral ministry.

As a matter of importance, the criteria for those who wish to join the pastoral ministry of the church must be strictly followed before candidates are endorsed into the seminary or theological college. Although the right of enrolment into the ministry of the dioceses is the prerogative of the bishop, a general policy and guidelines issued

from the national church could help to reduce the number of postulants seeking ministry placements in dioceses after graduation from theological training.

Solutions to the Challenge of Ministry Placement

The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne in Australia has a detailed policy presented below that can be adapted for use in the context of Nigeria. In Melbourne, candidates are assessed based on personal, vocational, and professional suitability before they are endorsed for seminary or theological college training.

(a) Personal

1. Most basic of all is Christian faith and character.
2. A candidate must be able to give a clear explanation of his/her discovery and realization of Christ.
3. There must be evidence that Christian character is held as a high priority.
4. A person must exhibit strengths of character and courage, and be able to resist personal, peer, and community pressures.
5. They must possess physical and psychological fitness.

(b) Vocational

1. A person must exhibit a 'passion' for 'God in Christ' and his Church, and show evidence of a desire to talk about 'God in Christ' to others.
2. There must be evidence of a capacity and a desire to lead communities of faith.
3. The person will need to possess people and community life skills and sensitivities.
4. The person will be aware that simply to have a desire to be a Priest or Deacon or to have an 'attraction to the spiritual life' are not necessarily a call to ordination. God's call must be tested by the Church.

(c) Professional

1. The person will need to have the intellectual capacity to study and reflect on Scripture and Theology and to have high regard for these sources.
2. It will be important to have an ability to communicate the Christian faith in a way that is attractive to the contemporary ... [community].
3. Any potential Ordinand will need to have a good understanding of the Anglican Ordinal and of the essence of Anglicanism: The Bible, the Creeds, Church Polity, and Liturgy; and demonstrate flexibility and generosity of experience consistent with the historical diversity of Anglicanism.

4. Candidates should come from a background of strong parish involvement.

The following are proffered solutions that can resolve the challenge of Ministry placement after seminary education for the postulants:

1. The Postulants should create vacancies for themselves: This can be done through hard work and self-development. The postulants should build themselves and be equipped to offer value in ministry. Hard work and diligence recommend and create vacancies not only for theological training but for placement in Ministry after graduation. The Church fathers cited earlier did not struggle for placement in Ministry because they were seen to be of value to the Ministry. It is rather sad that today there are many in the Seminaries and Theological Colleges and even in the ordained ministry of the Church that made their way there for selfish purposes and have nothing to offer to the Church by the way of ministry. Onuoha (2009) noted, "today, many a people now join the Ministry out of so many obvious reasons including but not limited to a desire to become rich, to command obedience of others, lack of job or near (sic) frustration in life" (p. 24). Postulants who have value to add to the Ministry of the Church cannot be stranded in finding Dioceses to exercise their ministry. The Postulants should undertake critical studies of the lives and ministries of the Anglican church fathers Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury who was the architect of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP). What about the early missionaries? Church Missionary Society (CMS), Cambridge University Mission Partners (CUMP), Sudan United Mission (SUM), Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), William Carey, the father of modern mission, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first black Anglican Bishop, many others were persons who had value to add to the Ministry of their time. In the Bible, Joseph, Daniel, and his 3 Hebrew friends created the vacancy that they occupied in Egypt and Babylon respectively, through the value they offered.

2. Take Theological Training Seriously: The postulants need to understand that the seminary or theological college is a ground for them to cultivate and grow the necessary heart and hands that can be useful and relevant to the ministry of the church. Etymologically, seminary means "seed-bed," thus a nursery where seeds of ministry are nurtured. Good postulants will make good pastors in the ministry. While undertaking theological training, the postulants should be committed to:

- (a) be true students of prayer and the word of God which should reflect in their charisma and character. Note that charisma without character is a put-off to the

bishops in the Church of Nigeria. The postulants should train themselves to be persons of honour and dignity and not allow others to look down upon them (see 1 Tim. 4:12).

- (b) be humble, dutiful, hardworking, and studious postulants while in the seminary. This will earn them positive recommendations of the rector, deans, and other lecturers to the bishops. The seminary may decide to retain some postulants as graduate assistant lecturers which is equally another form of ministry placement within the Church of Nigeria.
- (c) be available for service as a postulant. Do not grumble or dodge whenever the seminary calls you to serve. Also, always think of how you can contribute through hard work and labour to the building of the seminary. Give attention to the wisdom of God in Proverbs 22:29 that says "Do you know a hard-working man? He shall be successful and stand before kings!" This was rendered in other words by Zig Ziglar, thus, "success occurs when preparation meets opportunity."
- (d) not follow the crowd but set out to follow God's direction and hold unto God's standard.

3. Engage in Discipleship: Discipleship is a key ingredient in the formation of the postulant for ministry in the church. In Christian discipleship "self" has to be dealt with so that the seed of godly life and ministry will be nurtured to grow. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). Postulants do not need to wait until they have been placed in the ministry of the church before obeying this command of Jesus. Those who neglected the "heart" issue and thought they can handle it by changing the environment (the monks in the monasteries) will soon discover the folly of their wisdom. If the heart is handled, the environment can easily be defeated (David Tripp, 2012). The heart of the issue is truly the issue of the heart. To deny oneself means to undress oneself of all human achievements, attainments, and entitlements and consider them rubbish, just like Apostle Paul (Phil. 3:4-14). Postulants should be able to stand straight as worthy ministers even if all human achievements, attainments, and entitlements are removed from them. This can be made possible in discipleship. Acquiring academic or theological knowledge is not an end in itself, but a means to self-discovery under God. Whereas bishops might be thrilled by sound theological

knowledge, what they are on the lookout for is the evidence of a transformed life that is the product of such sound knowledge. Tripp (2012) said, "bad things happen when maturity is more defined by knowing than it is by being" (p. 42). He later said, "I wanted my students to understand that they are called not just to preach exegetically correct and theologically precise sermons but also to pastor people, to walk, live, support and suffer with them" (p. 43). Of course, this is what any bishop would expect from priests working in his diocese. There are gifted with bishops and clergy who are willing to guide postulants in the context of discipleship. What is lacking or docile in a postulant can be watered and nurtured to grow in godly discipleship.

4. Postulants should prove their Call into the Ministry while in the Seminary:

Postulants must be fruitfully engaged in the work of the ministry while in the seminary, especially during vacations. They should engage themselves in one-on-one evangelism in the community, streets, hospital, motor parks, etc. They should start home cells, Bible reading clubs, Bible study platforms in his community. They should engage themselves in community service as well. Postulants must do all these without demanding payment from the people who benefit from their ministry and services. Ajulo (2017) said "pastors as men who answer God's call should go out and serve God's people not tables!" (p.106). The heart of ministry is service; therefore, a postulant should be the servant of all just as Jesus exemplified by his life (Mark 10:35-45). The work of the ministry in the Anglican church is service. At the ordination of both the deacons and the priests, the bishop examines and charges them to the cure of souls under them. To the deacon the bishop in examining him says,

A deacon is called to serve the Church of God and to work with its members in caring for the poor, the needy, the sick, and all who are in trouble. He is to strengthen the faithful, search out the careless and the indifferent, and to preach the word of God in the place to which he is licensed.

And to the Priest, the Bishop says,

As priests, it will be your task to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to fashion your life in accordance with its precepts. You are to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor, you are to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to preside at the administration of the Holy Baptism and the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's body and blood, and to perform the other ministrations entrusted to

you. In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of His grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come (pp. 278-279).

The Postulants should study these charges to the deacon and the priest and ask God to transform them through purposeful learning. These are not mere casual exercises of the deacons and the priests but are great and important spiritual ministrations to be performed in the pastoral ministry. Those who have taken these charges casually have become casualties in the ministry. The postulants must learn from the mistake of others and avoid going down the road that leads to casualty in ministry.

5. The Seminary and Theological Colleges should back up their Postulants in prayers: The place of fasting and prayer helps not only in the discernment of the call of God, but also the place of ministry in the body of Christ. Barnabas and Paul received their placement into the ministry and missions of the Church while they were praying (Acts 13:2). Therefore, the seminary should first of all engage the postulants in fasting and prayers seeking God's direction and placement for them in the ministry of the church. Additionally, and of great importance, the seminary and the theological colleges should group the postulants and send their names to different dioceses to be part of the prayer lists of the dioceses.

Conclusion

As one who has also passed through seminary education and lectured there for many years, I can confirm that the contents of this paper if followed will reduce the challenges of placement in ministry after seminary education. More so, Jesus has offered a blanket placement to all believers into his ministry, which the Church of Nigeria is only a part of the whole, so no postulant should get himself stranded in getting placement in ministry (Matt. 22:34-40; 28:18-20). The postulants have to discern God's calling upon their lives because God has not called all His children into the ordained ministry but to all facets of life (Religion, family, education, government, media, arts, & business). Therefore, while praying for placement in the ministry of the Church of Nigeria in the different dioceses, they should not forget that they have already been commissioned to go and disciple the nations for Jesus.

Recommendations

1. Postulants should imbibe the spirit and culture of hard work so that they would be known by such character. Hard work shows they have value worthy of the ministry.
2. Postulants should take their theological studies and training seriously. This will position them for lecturers' positive recommendations to bishops.
3. Postulants should submit themselves under discipleship while undertaking their theological training.
4. The postulants should not wait until they have graduated from the seminary or theological colleges to start ministry. On the contrary, while in the seminary, they should engage themselves in ministry within and outside the seminary premises.
5. The seminary or theological college should send out the names of their postulants to dioceses for prayers. Barnabas and Paul received their placement into missions through prayer (Acts 13:2).
6. Bishops should not endorse candidates that they are not prepared to admit into the ministry of the church in their dioceses for theological training.