


Using the report on the training of elders and deacons of Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ to illustrate the attributes of informal education

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The ineffectiveness of some elders and deacons of Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ to implement their functions and duties contributed to the deterioration of the spiritual and material sustainability of the church. To counteract this corrosion, the church established a training team that instituted an informal programme as a means of revitalising elders and deacons. After running a pilot project to test the training programme, the team presented its report to the General Church Assembly. A selective interpretation of informal education can contribute to a misguided and limited perception of informal knowledge and acquisition as uncivilised and unsustainable. In this article, the researcher seeks to articulate the formal and informal dynamics of informal education. He employed an exploratory concurrent design of mixed methods research within an indigenous paradigm to analyse the report on training of elders and deacons. The researcher used a convenience sampling strategy to select the authors of the report, namely four trainers and four trainees, with whom he conducted a focus group discussion. Although strategically formulated, the learning activities and resources were continuously innovated in the informal programme for elders and deacons. The conclusion reached is that the learning process in informal education is flexible and mutually edifying for educators and trainees.

Contribution: Education for the proclamation of the gospel and church governance is not intended exclusively for ministers or theologians. Despite their diversity, elders and deacons need to be educated on the proclamation of the gospel according to the teachings of their church, using their respective contexts. Informal education, which comprises formal and informal dynamics, can contribute towards addressing the problem of untrained elders and deacons.

Keywords: training of elders and deacons; informal education; formal and informal dynamics; training report; servant leadership.

Introduction

The mainline churches, especially the Dutch Reformed family of churches, are reportedly declining in membership while the Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCCs) and African Initiated Churches (AICs) are emerging and growing (Chipkin & Leatt 2011:41). Contrary to the AIC, the teaching and orientation method in the mainline churches is highly formalised (Mutavhadsindi & Meiring 2014:3). One of the causes of the deterioration in spiritual and material sustainability of Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC), which is a mainline church, is the incompetence of its elders and deacons to implement their functions and duties. Boards of elders and deacons constitute important parts of church governance. The many elements of diversity found among the boards of elders and deacons include differences in age, literacy, and professional and academic levels. Supposedly, the difficulty in facilitating formal training for such a diverse group (Carr et al. 2021:2) contributed to the laxity of training of elders and deacons in MRCC. Hence, the church established a training team to reignite the functionality of elders and deacons. The training team decided to use informal training because (as will be clarified in due course) it is suitable for accommodating the diversity among elders and deacons in terms of age, cultural background, language, literacy, and professional and academic levels. The training team developed an informal training manual and reporting tools and then conducted an informal programme. The word 'informal' may be subjectively and incorrectly interpreted to mean less important training or learning that does not need much effort and attention. On the contrary, informal education comprises both informal and formal attributes. On the one hand, it is

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characterised as learning that takes place outside the curriculum structure, not limited to a regular classroom and sometimes with no clear objectives (Rogoff et al. 2016:390). On the other hand, it is described as a strategically formulated learning process with an intention of developing the society (Manuti et al. 2015:7). In this article, the researcher seeks to demonstrate how the informal education that was conducted by the training team of MRCC successfully articulated both formal and informal attributes of informal education.

Literature review

Origin and orientation of elders and deacons

Historically, Western missionaries introduced the gospel through formal education, which was labelled 'Western civilisation'. Other than proof of good morals, a certificate of confirmation from the mainline churches evidently testified that the bearer was a Christian, literate, and civilised (Chipkin & Leatt 2011:40). This created a stereotypical assumption that training in the church should be formal. However, the reality is that the literacy level of elders and deacons differs. Nevertheless, their service is of paramount importance to the livelihood of the church. When the church – which in the Old Testament was known as 'God's nation' – was first established, elders were the first leaders to be inaugurated so that they could help Moses (Ex 18:19–26 & 24:9). The disciples, in the New Testament, were recruited or called by Jesus Christ, who conducted informal yet valuable training with them; hence, they were later called 'apostles', which also means 'advocates'. In 1 Timothy 5:17 and Romans 12:8, Paul refers to these apostles as governing, preaching and teaching elders. They were responsible for both the spiritual and material wellbeing of the community of God, as narrated in Acts 6:1–4. Later, the apostles realised that they were not paying enough attention to the material needs of the poor and old in particular, so they chose the deacons to focus on the material well-being of the members, especially the poor and old (Ac 16:1–15). This traditional leadership of the church evolved as the church continued to grow through different dimensions, such as mission work, separations and the establishment of new denominations. Apart from being faithful and disciplined, persons must be able to teach to be eligible for election or appointment as elders and deacons (1 Tm 4:11; Tt 1:9; Eph 4:11). However, not all who satisfy the requirements pertaining to faithfulness and discipline are able to teach. Even when they are not trained as professional educators nor are academically advanced, elders and deacons are expected to be conveyors of the Word of God, church doctrines, policies, and procedures (Lau 2012:198).

In this article, the researcher shows that while MRCC elders and deacons received informal learning outside of a curriculum structure that was not limited to regular classroom instruction, there were set goals, as enshrined in Article 5 of the Church Order (MRCC 2018:31–32), and it was a strategically formulated learning process designed to revitalise the Church. The purpose of this article is to motivate church leaders to invest sufficient time in the training of

elders and deacons. Russell-Bowie (2013:47) declares that ability to teach, even informal teaching, boosts the confidence of the bearer of knowledge and ultimately enhances their performance. The researcher categorised the analysis of the training team's report into three sections: training manual; implementation; and cascading of the training manual, reporting, and evaluation.

Elders and deacons as servant leaders

Moss (2015:2) affirms the Reformed tradition and belief in God's calling and empowering of ministers, deacons, and elders to follow Christ's example of service. She describes these three categories of office bearers as people of spiritual commitment, living an exemplary life, of compassionate spirit and sound judgement. Moss explains the dictates of the formulary of inaugurating these office bearers, which states that while a deacon is called to serve the people, to provide a ministry of mercy, service, and outreach, to gather offerings, to care for the gifts faithfully, and to distribute them to persons in need, an elder is called to a ministry of caring for the church through oversight of all the members, ensuring that the Word of God is proclaimed and taught, and that sacraments are correctly administered.

Shimray (2001:81) cites Clarence (1961), who declares that the fundamental function of Christian leadership is to render service that will stimulate people's self-discovery and discovery of their fullest potential. He avows that Christian leadership is not about power, authority, or honour, but about servant leadership (SL). Shimray describes Christian SL according to Jesus Christ's own explanation of himself as a great shepherd who leads from the front, whose voice is familiar to his sheep, and who laid down his life for the salvation of his flock (Jn 10). He taught his disciples that they must continue with this type of shepherding after he (Christ) had ascended to heaven. Jentile (2021:9) agree with Manala (2010, 2014) on the notion of SL, which describes leaders as servants who render services to their followers. Bell and Hewitt (2021:2) concur by suggesting that leaders can successfully employ SL if their personal leadership (PL) is sound. Paul, in 1 Timothy, describes the characteristics of PL that are required of elders and deacons. Bell and Hewitt cite Pina et al. (2017), who describe PL as leadership where the leaders constantly evaluate their leadership behaviours. Activities that constitute training for elders and deacons should be aimed at instilling both PL and SL.

Historical development of church governance of Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ

Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ subscribes to the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dort (MRCC 2018:2). It also concurs with the Manual of Christian Reformed Government (Borgdorff 2016:16), which cites the Belgic Confession (article 31) in acknowledging Jesus Christ as the only head and ruler of the church. Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ employs a presbyterial

system of governance that differs from the congregational system. The congregational system of governance, according to Msiza (1997:58), as cited by Jentile (2021:7), encourages each congregation to run its own affairs independently. In a presbyterial system, the church is governed by the General Church Assembly (GCA), which makes resolutions that must be implemented at the congregational level under the monitoring of the circuit assemblies (MRCC 2018:33). Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ also acknowledges that all members – with diverse callings, spiritual gifts, and mandates – are equal in the eyes of God; they differ only in their functions. The church councils of MRCC, just like other Dutch Reformed member churches, comprise a local minister, all elders, and all deacons of the congregation. Dieleman (2020:31) cites article 30 of the Belgic Confession (1561): ‘There should also be elders and deacons, along with pastors, to make up the council of the church’. However, at the tenth GCA, the MRCC – formerly known as Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika (HKSA) – resolved to restructure its governance (HKSA 2006). The new structure dictates that elders and deacons establish boards of presbytery and diaconate, respectively, separate from the church council, and then delegate only two members each to represent them on the church council. This restructuring later elicited concerns about individuals who were considered lifelong elders or deacons. Moreover, elected elders and deacons who were not delegated to the church council evidently felt undermined and discouraged. This article seeks to demonstrate that informal education invigorated the feeling of self-worth among these disgruntled elders and deacons when they discovered the importance of their duties for the life of the church. Informal education facilitates peoples’ real self-discovery while stimulating self-worth and intrinsically motivating persons to want to do more (Taylor, Passarelli & Van Oosten 2019:4).

Informal education

Unlike formal education, which is acquired in a classroom setting and structured according to Eurocentric standards (Matambo 2018:3), Sungsi (2018:189) argues that informal education is the accumulation of knowledge that takes place anytime and everywhere. After analysing Sungsi’s argument, the researcher confirms that we learn new things continuously during our developmental stages and during different personal life episodes. These lessons are not confined to classrooms or lecture halls; we also learn while we are engaging in informal discussions with other people in different places, such as workplaces and at cultural or religious gatherings. The church reflects the demographics of the local community, which comprises people with elements of diversity such as age, language, gender, sexual orientation, racial grouping, cultural practices, social class, level of literacy, academic level, and areas of specialisation (Rivombo 2014:11). These are the demographics that are reflected in different boards of church governance, including elders and deacons. Education for such a diverse community should be as inclusive, informal, and conversational as possible (Sheridan & Mungai 2021:12).

Methods

The researcher employed an exploratory concurrent design of mixed methods (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017:108) within an indigenous paradigm to analyse the report on training of elders and deacons. An indigenous paradigm is an emerging model that persuades researchers to recognise and utilise indigenous knowledge (IK) to facilitate data collection and analysis (Wheeler et al. 2020:55). Gumbo (2016:14), Shama (2014:134–135), and Dei (2014:166) refer to IK as peoples’ wisdom or science that is based on local cultures and traditions. Romm (2015:421) cites Goduka (2012) who describes IK as communal knowledge that is developed and shared for the benefit of the people. Therefore, an indigenous paradigm helped the researcher to measure the extent to which the IK of elders and deacons was utilised. The researcher utilised a convenience sampling strategy to attract and select four trainers and four trainees, who co-authored the training report (Stratton 2021:373) and with whom he held a focus group discussion. The homogeneity of the focus group was based on their common interest and function of authoring the report (Nyumba et al. 2018:22). The discussion was aimed at corroborating the report that trainers and trainees collectively wrote and submitted to the Commission of the General Church Assembly (CGCA). The researcher here presents an analysis of the report concerning how the trainers engaged with the trainees. Pseudonyms were used for both trainers and the selected trainees.

The researcher requested and acquired an ethical research certificate from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the College of Education (CEDU) at the University of South Africa (Unisa). The ethical research certificate was attached to the letter addressed to the leadership of MRCC, from whom the researcher requested permission to conduct the research in their church. This permission from the church leadership was subsequently used to publicise the researcher’s intention to analyse the report. Consequently, four trainers and four trainees, as reflected in Table 1, were motivated to volunteer as participants.

Ethical considerations

An application for full ethical approval was made to UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee and ethics consent was received on 12 April 2023. The ethics approval number is 2023/04/12/90268628/30/AM.

Results

Learning took place outside of the curriculum structure

The researcher opened the focus group discussion by enquiring about the curriculum structure that they were using to develop their training manual. One participant said the following:

‘We cannot tell the type of curriculum that we followed. We are not even sure if there is a curriculum structure like this. What we can say is that we consulted the readily available resources of the church, such as, the Bible, the Creeds, teachings, and formularies that guides the church in electing, orientating and inaugurating elders and deacons of the church, the church order, and decisions of the GCA.’ (Gladys)

'The training manual comprised three main sections, that is: the significance of elders and deacons; functions and duties of elders and deacons; and implementation. Implementation embraced completion and submission of reporting tools.' (Thandi)

'Training sessions were introduced differently in different clusters. Some of the introductory ice breaking questions that we posed was "what do you think an elder or a deacon is?" or "who do you think you are as an elder or deacon?" or "why do you think you are so important to the life of the church, as an elder or deacon?"' (Lesiba)

A specific participant talked about their reference to the theological framework of the offices of elders and deacons:

'The theological framework was aimed at giving elders and deacons an opportunity to share their knowledge about the founding documents of the church such as the Bible, the creeds, and teachings of the church. Learning activities involved reading and discussing the implications of Bible verses that talk about elders and deacons. Practical examples that illustrated the implementation of creeds, teachings, and formularies of the church regarding the establishment and functions of offices of elders and deacons, were also discussed.' (Shadrack)

Sifiso admitted that the trainers talked about the section he liked best but did not know was applicable to the Church, namely the legal framework. He recalled that the legitimacy of the offices of elders and deacons was conferred by ecclesiastical ordinance and the decisions of the GCA, and that the observance and exercise of their functions constitute their legal duties as office bearers.

Learning activities were strategically formulated

When the researcher asked why the participants did not just read through the functions of elders and deacons, as they are clearly written in the church order, Sarah responded and said she was also reluctant to attend this workshop thinking that they were going to just read until they memorise them, but this different approach fascinated her.

'We deliberately avoided to read each function as reflected in articles 5.3 and 5.4 of the church order. Instead, we introduced reporting tools, saying, in answering questions that are posed in each reporting tool, they would be carrying out the functions that are reflected in articles 5.3 and 5.4.' (Gladys)

Table 2 shows extracts of articles 5.3 and 5.4 of the church order (MRCC 2018:31–32), which reflect functions of elders and deacons, respectively.

TABLE 1: Profile of participants.

Trainers			Trainees			
Name	Portfolio	Level of education	Portfolio	Name	Age group	Level of education
Gladys	Minister	†M. Theol.	Elder	David	Between 40 and 50 years old	‡Bed
Shadrack	Minister	§Postgraduate degree in theology	Elder	Sarah	Between 30 and 40 years old	Diploma in adult education
Lesiba	Minister	Master's degree in theology	Deacon	Sifiso	Between 30 and 40 years old	¶National senior certificate
Thandi	Training and development coordinator	Master's degree in theology	Deacon	Thuso	Between 40 and 50 years old	National senior certificate

Source: Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2015, 'Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework', *Government Gazette General Notice 38487 of 19 February 2015*, Department of Education, Pretoria

†, Master's degree in theology.

‡, Bachelor's degree in education.

§, Honours degree in theology.

¶, National Senior certificate – Grade 12 or standard 10 or Matric certificate.

Thandi referred members of the focus group to a booklet of reporting tools that was given to elders and deacons and which they were trained to utilise. The first tool is entitled 'Family profile'. This comprises items such as family name, members of the family, membership of family members in MRCC, employment status of family members, members' participation in the celebration of the holy communion, members' rate of honouring their dues, members' regular church service attendance, daily family devotions, and the family's needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, money, and medicine. Ward elders and deacons were expected to use this discussion item to formulate topics or questions that would stimulate discussions during their family visits. They were advised to generate files that comprise profiles of all the families within their jurisdiction. David said he became more interested when he realised that this form, somehow, value the information that we reluctantly discard.

Figure 1 shows the family profile form.

- Learning activities and resources were continuously updated and revised.

One of the participants explained:

'We tasked elders and deacons to, after collecting the information that was needed in the family profile, collate the totals of their wards into the tool titled: P1 and D1 [reporting tools for ward elder and ward deacon, respectively]. We knew that "family profile" form does not have sufficient information that can reflect the true picture of the ward. That is why we had also provided for catechism and youth elders' reporting tools, that is P2 and P3, respectively. After going through the reporting tools, especially after elders and deacons have visited families, reporting tools were refined.' (Gladys)

The catechism elder's reporting tool, which is known as P2, was refined so that it could guide the catechism elder to facilitate the establishment of the executive committee for catechism to ensure that members who are due for catechism enrol and receive proper instruction. Thereafter, the catechism elder had to collate the statistics according to age group, that is, Sunday school children, the youth, and adults. The tool was also refined to account for the number of teachers for different categories or age groups. A concern was raised about Sunday school teachers' being accountable to a catechism elder. They agreed that Sunday school serves as a

TABLE 2: An extract from the church order (MRCC 2018:31–32) – Functions of elders and deacons.

5.3 Functions of elders	5.4 Functions of deacons
5.3.1 Elders perform their functions in accordance with the vow made at the inauguration and as determined by the church order.	5.4.1 Deacons perform their functions in accordance with the vow taken at the inauguration and with stipulations of the church order.
5.3.2 Elders should attend training programmes regularly and reflect on the nature and content of the articles of faith in order to execute their tasks effectively.	5.4.2 Attend training programmes regularly and reflect on the nature and content of faith, in the light of the articles of faith in order to perform their duties effectively.
5.3.3 Must visit before every Holy Communion, all the families, members and office bearers in their respective wards where the Bible should be read, a prayer and pastoral conversation be conducted with members.	5.4.3 Visit families and members in his or her ward every month to collect offerings.
5.3.4 Must visit all the families annually with the Minister.	5.4.4 Practise compassion to members in the congregation and the community.
5.3.5 Visit and provide support to all the families and members who are bereaved, fallen by misfortune or face serious problems.	5.4.5 Provide guidance and assistance to the believers to show compassion and be compassionate to those who are less fortunate.
5.3.6 Must visit all newcomers in his or her ward.	5.4.6 Care for the aged, the sick and people with disabilities.
5.3.7 Look after the children in his or her ward and ensure that they attend church services, catechesis and participate in all the activities of the congregation.	5.4.7 Assist members in resolving their economic and social problems.
5.3.8 Teaches catechesis classes if necessary.	5.4.8 Do everything to promote the service of charity in the congregation.
5.3.9 Promote education and development of the children of church members.	5.4.9 Receive and distribute charitable gifts, alms, and funds among the poor in the congregation.
5.3.10 Ensures continued equipment and training of the youth and motivate them to take part in the activities of the congregation.	5.4.10 Attend services of the Word and sacraments.
5.3.11 Evangelise those who are estranged from the church and unbelievers.	
5.3.12 Lead funeral services and unveil tombstones if necessary.	
5.3.13 Responsible for the maintenance of order and discipline in the congregation.	
5.3.14 Attend church services regularly and, officiate at services of sacraments and partake of the holy communion.	
5.3.15 Hold family devotions and zealously study the Word of God and live in accordance therewith.	
5.3.16 Attend all meetings promptly and without failure.	

Source: MRCC, 2018, *The church order of Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ*, unpublished, Pretoria

Family profile.						
Congregation: _____		Ward: _____		Family name: _____		Physical address: _____
Name of the member	MRCC membership status (Y/N)	Employment status (employed/unemployed)	Membership in organs of support	Does he/she partake in the holy communion?	Does he/she honour his/her dues? Yes/no	Does he/she attend church services regularly? (at least 9 in 12 Sundays) Yes/no

Does the family need help with finances/food/medication/shelter, etc? Yes/no. If Yes, specify.

Does the family conduct family devotions? Yes/no. If Yes, indicate dates and time.

Family head/rep _____
Signature _____ Date _____

Ward elder/deacon _____
Signature _____ Date _____

FIGURE 1: Family profile.

foundation phase for youth catechism, hence the Sunday school syllabus, while addressing children's environment, should be preparing them for the youth syllabus that involves youth issues. Therefore, the catechism elder, together with the executive committee and teachers, should collectively create synergy between these levels.

Regarding the youth elder's reporting tool, which is known as P3, the elders and deacons raised a concern that it was focused on the organised league of church youth, called *Mokgatlho wa ba Batjha* in Sesotho or *Umkhandlo wa basha* in Isizulu (MBB). Concerned that the reporting tool would classify non-MBB members as unregistered youth, they suggested aligning the reporting tool for juvenile elders with that of the superintendent responsible for

juvenile affairs. Shadrack, Gladys, Lesiba, and Thandi agreed that the reporting tool should indicate a true reflection of youth in the church, especially the challenges that cause them to be absent to such an extent that they leave the church.

Another shortcoming that needed attention was that statistics of some ward elders differed from those of their ward deacons. This discrepancy must be addressed at the ward level. To foster teamwork between a ward elder and a deacon, the training team decided to combine P1 and D1 into PD1, on which information from P2 and P3 would be captured.

PD1 is shown in Figure 2.

- Reason for the establishment of boards of presbytery and diaconate.

The researcher noted that the training team's report to the CGCA emphasised the need to form boards of presbytery and diaconate, and he asked if this was necessary he responded:

'Yes, it was necessary. There are some congregations which are not using the new church governance yet.' (Thuso)

Participants declared that the establishment of the boards of presbytery and diaconate would relieve their fears:

'I was anxious that the church councils would not do justice to many reports that would be submitted by individual ward elders, youth elders, catechism elders and ward deacons. I was relieved when I learnt that information from P2 and P3 will be added in PD1 during the quarterly meetings of congregation's board of elders and board of deacons.' (Thandi)

'These boards are forums in which elders and deacons meet quarterly to consolidate their individual reports. Boards of presbytery and diaconate should elect chairpersons and scribes who would represent them in the church council.' (David)

'We were not comfortable with the issue of meeting quarterly to prepare for church councils' quarterly meetings. But after conducting the field work, we realised that we definitely need to regularly visit our family units, at least ones per quarter, check their wellbeing and update our records at ward level, then consolidate our ward's reports as a report of the congregation's boards of presbytery and diaconate. This will enable us to confidently give the church council and circuit board of presbytery and diaconate a true picture of the congregation through PD2.' (Sifiso)

In response to the researcher's question, 'What is PD2?':

'For now, the names appended on the reporting tools are not important. The value of the report is content on which the document is reporting. PD2 is the consolidation of ward, youth and catechism elders and ward deacons reports for submission to the church council and copied to the circuit board of presbytery and diaconate.' (Lesiba)

Sifiso said that PD2 is the climax of their training. Through it, they now know the strengths and weaknesses of their congregations and know what to do to revive their congregations. Shadrack reminded the focus group that PD2 resulted from experimenting with many versions of reporting tools.

PD2 is shown in Figure 3.

The researcher asked if one of the focus group members could summarise their training and reporting process. Sifiso agreed to summarise the reporting process from the family unit up to the national level:

'Preparedness to populate PD2 implies that family units have been visited to discuss items emanating from PD1, P2 and P3. Discussion items of PD1, P2 and P3 cover the functions of elders and deacons that are reflected in Articles 5.3 and 5.4 of the church order. PD2 comprise tables A to I. Table A reflects all elders and deacons of the congregation, their chairpersons, and secretaries.

Tables B and C is about statistics, table D is about family units, their needs and assistance from the church, table E is about membership in different organs of support, table F is about people who need catechism, table G is about catechism teachers, table H is about gratitude, discipline and obedience which enquire about total number of families visited prior reporting, number of members who regularly attend Bible study, church services, partake in holy communion, honour their dues, and hold family devotions. It also enquires about elders and deacons who attend church services and meetings. PD2s from different congregations are consolidated in PD3 as reports from circuit boards of presbytery and diaconate which are then consolidated into PD4 as national boards of presbytery and diaconate.'

Evaluation of the training process

When the researcher asked members of the focus group discussion how they benefitted from the training process, David, Sarah, Sifiso, and Thuso indicated that they were surprised by the introduction, which asked them to comment on their importance:

'I was challenged by the question that wanted me to say why, do I think I am important as an elder. I discovered that the space that I am occupying is empty while being occupied by me. As we progressed with the training, I made a commitment that my presence in this office will be valuable.' (Sarah)

The trainees emphasised what they had discovered during the completion and analysis of their reporting tools:

'I have learnt to translate functions into practical activities. Now I know that for me to be able to support my members to regularly attend church services and honour their dues, I must be a good example.' (Thuso)

A participant confirmed the rationale for the establishment of the training team:

'Our elders and deacons are not fully functional because they are not capacitated and mentored. Hence, we, after visiting families and completing visitation tools, agreed to hold quarterly meetings. The statistics have decreased dismally and is worsened by absenteeism which was nurtured by lock down.' (David)

Sifiso was concerned about the lack of financial commitment, spiritual, and diaconate function of church members. He stated:

'Our financial commitment is at its worst state. Only 23% of church members honour their dues. Our spiritual life is at risk. Only 39% hold family devotions. We have forgotten about our diaconate function. The church could only help 20% of families who needed material assistance such as food, shelter, clothing, money, and medication.'

Thuso reiterated the need for coordinated systems of catechism, including Sunday school children, the youth, and adults.

Discussion

While strategic planning was necessary for informal education for elders and deacons, Shadrack, Gladys, Thandi, and Lesiba did not concern themselves with searching for the curriculum

PD1: A reporting tool										From: a ward elder and ward deacon to: the congregation's board of presbytery and diaconate																
Ward: _____																										
A. Statistics																										
Confirmed members										Unconfirmed members						Total membership										
Employed or self-employed			Unemployed			Students			Total of confirmed members			Catechumen		Infants		Total of unconfirmed members		Total of confirmed members		Total of unconfirmed members		Total membership				
M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
B. Family units																										
Total no. of families in the ward	Families with slight challenges	Families that need help on:				Families that received assistance on																				
		Medicine	Finance	Food	Shelter	Medicine	Finance	Food	Shelter																	
C. Membership in organs of support																										
MRMU			MRWL			MRFU			AMADODANA			MBB			Grand totals											
Active	Inactive	Total	Active	Inactive	Total	Active	Inactive	Total	Active	Inactive	Total	Active	Inactive	Total	Active	Inactive	Total									
D. Number of people who need catechism																										
Adults			Youth			Sunday school kids			Grand totals																	
Teaching proceeds	Not taught yet	Total	Teaching proceeds	Not taught yet	Total	Teaching proceeds	Not taught yet	Total	Teaching proceeds	Not taught yet	Total															
E. Collection of offerings and charitable services																										
Money/offerings that was collected or received this quarter/year				Expected or targeted revenue as per confirmed membership				Shortfall	Prevailing reasons for shortfall				Proposed remedial actions													
F. Gratitude, discipline and obedience																										
No. of families that I visited this quarter	No. of members who regularly attend Bible study sessions (at least 3 out of 4 sessions)	No. of members who regularly attend church services (at least 9 out of 12 weeks)	Number of members who took part in the celebration of the holy communion this quarter	No. of members who regularly honour their dues (at least twice in 3 months)	No. of members who were trained on offerings	No. of families that hold daily devotions	No. of Sundays that I attended church services this quarter	No. of meetings that I attended this quarter																		
Elder. Deacon:							Elder. Deacon:	Elder. Deacon:																		
Ward elder: _____																										
Surname and initials			Signature			Date																				
Ward deacon: _____																										
Surname and initials			Signature			Date																				

MRMU, Maranatha Reformed Mothers Union; MRWL, Maranatha Reformed Women's League; MRFU, Maranatha Reformed Fathers' Union; AMADODANA, Men's league; MBB, Mokgatlo wa ba bacha – Youth movement.

FIGURE 2: PD1 – Ward elder's and deacon's reporting tool.

structure that would suit the training. With a strategic goal of reviving elders and deacons, both theoretical and experiential learning were characterised by personal and SL. Questions such as 'Why do you think you are important as an elder?' and

'How regularly do you attend church services?' encouraged the officials to do some introspection. Servant leadership was examined in terms of discussion items or questions that enquired about the wellbeing of the congregants, their

PD2		From: congregation's boards of presbytery and diaconate to: 1. The church circuit 2. The circuit boards of presbytery and diaconate																						
A. Board membership																								
Elders				Deacons																				
Chairperson		Scribe		Chairperson		Scribe																		
Surname & initials	Contacts	Surname & initials	Contacts	Surname & initials	Contacts	Surname & initials	Contacts																	
Ward	Name	Surname	Contacts	Name	Surname	Contacts																		
1/A																								
2/B																								
B. Statistics																								
Confirmed members												Unconfirmed members												
Ward	Employed or self-employed			Unemployed			Students			The aged & the disabled			Total of confirmed members			Catechumen			Infants			Total of unconfirmed members		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
C. Total membership																								
Ward	Total of confirmed members						Total of unconfirmed members						Total membership											
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T			
D. Family units																								
Ward	Total no. of families in the ward	Families with slight challenges	Number of families that need help on				No. of families that received help on																	
			Medicine	Finance	Food	Shelter	Medicine	Finance	Food	Shelter														
E. Membership in organs of support																								
Ward	MRMU			MRWL			MRFU			AMADODANA			MBB			Grand totals								
	Active	Inactive	Total	Active	Inactive	Total	Active	Inactive	Total	Active	Inactive	Total	Active	Inactive	Total	Active	Inactive	Total						
F. Number of people who need catechism																								
Ward	Adults			Youth			Sunday school kids			Grand totals														
	Teaching proceeds	Not taught yet	Total	Teaching proceeds	Not taught yet	Total	Teaching proceeds	Not taught yet	Total	Teaching proceeds	Not taught yet	Total												
G. Educators for catechism/catechumens																								
Sunday school kids				Youth				Adults				Total												
Name and surname		Contacts		Name and surname		Contacts		Name and surname		Contacts														
H. Gratitude, discipline and obedience																								
Number of families that I visited this quarter	Number of members who regularly attend Bible study sessions (at least 3 out of 4 sessions)	Number of members who regularly attend church services (at least 9 out of 12 weeks)	Number of members who took part in the celebration of the holy communion this quarter	Number of members who regularly honour their dues (at least twice in 3 months)	Number of families that hold daily devotions	No. of Elders & Deacons who regularly attended church services this quarter (at least 9 out of 12 weeks)	No. of Elders & Deacons who regularly attended church meetings (at least 3 out of 4 meetings)																	
							Elders: Deacons:																	
I. Conclusion																								
Achievements						Challenges						Recommendations												
Chairperson: _____																								
Surname & initials						Signature						Date												

FIGURE 3: PD2 – Congregation's board of presbytery and diaconate reporting tool.

employment status and needs, and the role that the church is playing in assisting those who are in need. Training in SL occurs when elders and deacons are encouraged to work as servants of the Lord, to keep God's children spiritually nourished, and the church financially viable.

The learning process in informal education is flexible (Valtonen et al. 2021:384). Therefore, as learning progressed, both trainers and trainees discovered new knowledge and continuously restructured their reporting tools and contents by, for example, merging P4 and D1 into PD1. Hence, this flexibility of the learning process was enhanced by the mutual education of trainers and trainees.

Abdulrahman et al. (2021:59) suggest that informal education that accommodates all elements of diversity can be facilitated through daily activities related to work, family life, or leisure. In this case, the daily activities of elders and deacons are reflected in articles 5.3 and 5.4 of the church order (MRCC 2018:31–32). In the study in question, the trainers did not just read through the articles, as that would have enhanced only a low level of cognitive learning, which entails memorising and reproducing. Instead, the trainers facilitated discussions about their engagements with the families that they were shepherding.

Conclusion

Through informal education, the elders and deacons learnt that the growth of the church starts at the level of the family unit, then expands to the ward/cell and, finally, to whole congregation. Hence, the functionality of elders and deacons at the ward level is imperative. The significance of family visits by elders and deacons was reignited by the need to complete this report. However, that enthusiasm needs to continue, as it is one of the primary functions of elders and deacons.

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