

The Deacons

by John Calvin

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There were always two kinds [of deacons] in the ancient Church, the one deputed to receive, dispense and hold goods for the poor, not only daily alms but also possessions, rents and pensions; the other to tend and care for the sick and administer allowances to the poor. This custom we follow again now for we have procurators and hospitalers.

The number of procurators appointed for this hospital seems to us to be proper; but we wish that there be also a separate reception office, not only so that provisions be in time made better, but [also so] that those who wish to do some charity may be more certain that the gift will not be employed otherwise than they intend. And if the revenue assigned by their Lordships be insufficient, or should extraordinary necessity arise, the Seigneury will advise about adjustment, according to the need they see.

The election of both procurators and hospitalers is to take place like that of the elders; and in electing them the rule proposed by Paul for deacons is to be followed.

With regard to the office of procurator, we think the rules which have already been imposed on them by us are good; by means of which, in urgent affairs, and where there is danger in deferment, and chiefly when there is no grave difficulty or question of great expense, they are not obliged always to be meeting, but one or two can do what is reasonable in the absence of others.

It will be their duty to watch diligently that the public hospital is well maintained, and that this be so both for the sick and the old people unable to work, widowed women, orphaned children and other poor creatures. The sick are always to be lodged in a set of rooms separate from the other people who are unable to work: old men, widowed women, orphaned children and the other poor. Moreover, care for the poor dispersed through the city should be revived, as the procurators may arrange it.

Moreover, besides the hospital for those passing through which must be maintained, there should be some attention given to any recognized as worthy of special charity. For this purpose, a special room should be set aside to receive those who ought to be assisted by the procurators, which is to be reserved for this business. It should above all be demanded that the families of the hospitalers be honorably ruled in accordance with the will of God since they have to govern houses dedicated to God.

The ministers must on their side inquire whether there be any lack or want of anything, in order to ask and desire the Seigneury to put it in order. To do this, some of their company with the procurators should visit the hospital every three months to ascertain if all is in order.

It would be good, not only for the poor of the hospital but also for those of the city who cannot help themselves, that they have a doctor and a surgeon of their own who should still practice in the city, but meanwhile be required to have care of the hospital and to visit the other poor. As for the hospital for plague, it should be wholly separate and apart, and especially if it happens that the city be visited by this scourge of God.

For the rest, to discourage mendicancy which is contrary to good order, it would be well, and we have so ordered it, that there by one of our officials at the entrance of the churches to remove from the place those who loiter; and if there be any who give offense or offer

insolence to bring them to one of the Lord's Syndic. Similarly for the rest of the time, let the Overseers of Tens take care that the total prohibition of begging be well observed.

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