

Diakonia in the New Testament and a vision for a biblically based ministry plan



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When a local congregation holds the Bible as its authoritative source document in a post-Christian milieu and embarks on developing a ministry plan, it should base its plan on the Bible as the revelation of God. One aspect of a ministry plan of a local congregation is the service ministries (διακονία). In this article, I attempt to answer the question what previous exegetical studies by the author and other researchers of the *diakon*-words in the New Testament could contribute towards the development of a biblically based ministry plan for a local church. The principles for service ministries identified from the results of the previous exegetical work, are presented in an overview and integrated into a plan for service ministries. The conclusion is that the exegetical studies of the διάκον-word group in the New Testament have provided valuable insight into the service ministries and therefore contribute to an overall ministry plan of a congregation.

Keywords: Diakon-Words; Ministry Plan; Congregation; Deacon; Elder; Ministry; Truth; Love.

Introduction

The central theoretical argument of this article can be stated as follows: Valuable conclusions can be made from previous studies of the διάκον-word group in the New Testament with a view to make a contribution to the vision of a ministry plan for a local congregation that holds the Bible as the Word of God (Belgic Confession, art. 3–5). Such a ministry plan should be based on thorough exegesis of the Word of God. I have studied one aspect of the ministry of a congregation, namely the διακονία, and the results have been published in different articles, chapters and a dissertation. This article builds on these exegetical results and those of other researchers in taking a step further towards the praxis of congregational ministry. Several biblical principles for the service ministries (διακονία) in the New Testament are identified from the results of my previous exegetical studies of the *diakon*-words. These principles are suggested as a contribution to an overall ministry plan of a congregation. The principles, as revealed by the *diakon*-words (indicated in the headings), are now discussed.

Biblical principles for the service ministries (διακονία) according to the New Testament

God's ministry determines the ministry of the congregation

Ephesians describes God's eternal plan for all things (Breed 2015a; Floor 2011; Petrenko 2011:79–97; Pretorius 2006:256). God is executing this plan by what the Father has done and is doing through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (Eph 1–3). He also uses people to execute his plan – people like children, beggars, the apostles, prophets, elders, evangelists, teachers and every believer (Eph 3–6; Petrenko 2011:11–128). In the final analysis, however, the execution of the plan is in his hands (Stott 1991:29, 87, 143, 211). In Ephesians, Paul¹ demonstrates dependence on God by his consistent prayer to God to strengthen the believers in their knowledge of his grace and love for them (cf. Eph 1, 3). He also urges the believers to depend on God and his strength to be able to stand up in the war against evil spirits and sin (Eph 5, 6; Breed 2015a:11). Jesus showed the same dependence in his διακονία (Breed 2014a:5).

A congregation that holds the Bible to be the Word of God should build their ministry plan on the work of God (Nel 2015:43). God, the Father, elected people and adopted them as his children (Eph 1). By his mercy, which flows from his love, he raises them from their spiritual death and makes them alive (Eph 2). In Christ, he creates them for the good works that he has planned for them (Eph 2:10). He makes them part of his covenant and promises, and makes them one in Christ

1.The name Paul is used for the author without going into the debate on authorship.

(Eph 2:11–22). His Holy Spirit lives in them and builds them up as a holy temple where he lives (Eph 2:12, 22; Breed 2017a:120). Jesus Christ gave his life as ransom (Mk 10:45) so that they may receive redemption through his blood, forgiveness of their trespasses and victory over evil powers and sin (Eph 4–6). Because they know Christ through faith, they are renewed in their hearts and minds, and can grow to become more and more like him (Eph 4:21–24).

In Ephesians, the Holy Spirit is presented as the one who works in believers to be regenerated, to believe and to continue to grow towards Jesus Christ (cf. Vorster 2017:276; Vriezen 1966:146; Welker 2013:211).

He works the unity in the congregation and is grieved when the unity is endangered by the wrong conduct of believers (Eph 4:30). To walk in the way of God, believers must be filled with the Spirit (Eph 4 and 5; cf. Arnold 2010:278, 305–307, 348–351).

In 1 Corinthians 12, the Holy Spirit is presented as the one who gives gifts according to his will and places people in the congregation. The congregation is the body of Christ with and through whom he continues his work. He enables the church to do their *διακονία* (Eph 4:12–15; Breed 2017a:120; Thielman 2010:379).

Dependence on God must be part of the design of a ministry plan. Prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit is essential (Eph 1:15–23; 3:14–23). It is necessary to be aware that the ministry plan is a plan for God's ministry. However, it takes place through people in the body of Christ as the temple that is being prepared by the Holy Spirit for God (Eph 2:1–22; cf. Van Aarde 2014:96).

The *διακονία* of the congregation is part of the eternal plan of God. He activates the *διακονία* through the gifts given to every believer by the exalted Christ. The Holy Spirit empowers every member for their *διακονία*. Additionally, there are persons (like apostles, evangelists, shepherds and teachers) given as special gifts to the congregation to equip the believers for their *διακονία* (Eph 4:11, 12).

The knowledge of Christ's direct involvement through the Holy Spirit prevents the congregation from getting despondent when the success of the ministry is not achieved in the way they have envisaged. This also stands in contrast to a ministry where some people act as if they own the ministry and speak about 'my ministry' or 'my church'. A whole ministry cannot be built around one charismatic personality. It is always God's *διακονία*, which is done by his *διακονοί* in the attitude of Christ (Mk 10:42–45; Phlp 2:5–10).

The congregational ministry is built on the foundation of the apostles' ministry

According to Ephesians, the work of the apostles was fundamental to the ministry of the church (Eph 3; Breed 2017a:125). Paul's *διακονία* (and that of the other apostles)

is the instrument through which God established the foundation for the execution of his plan through the church (cf. Nel 2015:152–154). The good news, which is recorded in the books of the Bible, should be studied and used as the starting point for all ministries in the church. In-depth teaching of the Word of God, which follows thorough exegesis, should govern everything that is done in ministry (Buys 2017:193–196).

This stands in contrast to a ministry that is based on a haphazard plan that seems to work for another congregation, or on the untested revelation somebody got in a dream or from another source. It also stands in contrast to a ministry that was inherited from the tradition and is not thoroughly and continuously tested according to the Word of God.²

The ministry is done by congregants as representatives of Christ

In all the passages (Mk 10:45; Jn 12; Eph 4:12–16; 1 Pt 4:10) that have been investigated in my previous research (cf. Breed 2018), both the church as a whole and the individual members constituting the church, have been presented as representatives of Jesus Christ, also through their *διακονία* in light of the Son of Man, Jesus' revelation of his Father (cf. Koester 2008:128–129; Köstenberger & Swain 2008:69–70; Meyers 2012:162–163). According to the Gospels, he said that he only spoke the words of his Father and only did the deeds of his Father (Jn 14:10, 24). Furthermore, Jesus told his disciples to follow him in his attitude and in his words and deeds (Mk 10:42–45; Jn 12:26, 13:15). Each of his followers should reveal God through their *διακονία* (Du Rand 1991:318). He would send his Spirit to remind his disciples of his words, and he promised them that they would also do great deeds. As the Father had sent his Son, Jesus sent his disciples to teach others (Jn 20:21; Breed 2015b:1, 6; James 2013:377).

Paul says that the church under the Gentiles came into being through his *διακονία* (Eph 3; Breed 2017a:120). The task of the church is to show the grace and wisdom of God in Christ Jesus. The church is called the body of Christ in Ephesians and 1 Corinthians 12; it embodies his fullness and should grow to maturity to display his image (Eph 4:12–16; 5:1, 2; Van Gelder & Zscheile 2011:4).

Peter (1 Pt 4:12–16) calls upon his readers to follow Christ in their suffering. Under the greatest provocation they should still live with the attitude of Christ who continued to do good and trusted his Father to exalt him (1 Pt 2:20–23; Breed 2014b:5; cf. Joseph 2012:147–171). As stewards of God's manifold grace, they should serve (*diakoneo*) each other with their gifts by being humble and hospitable, and by loving each other (1 Pt 4:10). The leaders and every member should follow Jesus in his attitude of humbling himself under the mighty hand of God, and they had to wait on him to exalt them in due time (1 Pt 5; Breed 2014b:2).

²While there is not space in this article to discuss the current ministry practice in churches that accept the Bible as the source document for the principles of their praxis, the following sources can be consulted for a description thereof: Blaisdell (2018); Bridgers (2009); Kalu (2009); Van Helden (2010; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2018).

A congregation that holds Scripture as the revelation of God, should therefore always remember that they are representatives of Christ when putting a ministry plan together. As a congregation and as individual members, they should know their identity as representatives of Jesus Christ. In their teaching and in their structure, this truth should be a priority. Children should be led to enter the covenantal space to confess Jesus as their Lord, to accept his grace and to know their identity in him as his representatives. A congregation that wants to live up to the covenantal relationship as it is sealed in baptism, must incorporate a ministry that promotes healthy families. Families must actively be guided in areas like parental harmony, effective communication, wise parental control and parental nurturing (Breed & De Wet 2012:28–40; Strommen & Hardel 2007:41–75).

These principles are clearly opposed to a ministry that is based on social gospel, prosperity gospel or feel-good gospel where the focus is on the well-being of people in the first place, and not on representing God (Breed 2014a:4; cf. Dean 2010:29).

Okonkwo (2006), in his book, *Hidden keys to divine prosperity*, can be regarded as a typical proponent of the prosperity gospel:

Prosperity, truly speaking, involves the totality of God's supernatural abundance or goodness, which includes divine health, protection, provisions, direction, salvation, and deliverance of your soul from all the works of Satan. It means absolute fulfilment in whatever you set your hands to do. (p. 20)

Adu (2015) interprets the main argument of the prosperity gospel as follows:

In other words, your obedience to God through the instruction of the man of God that is your pastor or religious leader, guarantees doing well in life. (p. 23)

The study of the *diakon*-words in the New Testament showed that Christ's will, and the growth of his body should be the sole centre of congregational ministry, which requires the believer to seek the glory of God and not his or her own glory.

The congregation is a serving community

Being a representative of Christ means you exist to serve and not to be served (Mk 10:45). In Mark (also in Matthew and Luke) (Breed 2017b:353), Jesus says his purpose of coming to earth is to serve (*diakoneo*). If anyone (also the church as body) wants to serve Jesus, he or she must follow him in this objective (Jn 12:26). The church should therefore be a serving community, serving each other and serving every person they meet. They are the workmanship of God, created in Christ for the good works God has prepared for them (Eph 2:10). Through the *diakonia* of the church, God will effectively work all things in all (1 Cor 12:6), gathering people to the congregation, as they receive God's grace through the *diakonia* of the church (Breed 2016a:278). The *diakonia* of the saints is

the final outlet of God's grace to the body of Christ and to the world (cf. Barth 1984:477–478; Lincoln 1990:xxxvi).

I have argued that Mark links *diakonia* closely to love and compassion (Breed 2017b).³ According to Mark, Jesus taught his disciples to be open and convivial even to the least deserving people. As regards John, it is argued that John 12, 13 and 21 are thematically and semantically connected and that the connection links *diakonia* closely to the love of Christ for his disciples and the disciples' (especially Peter's) love for Jesus (Breed 2018:79; cf. Van der Watt 2008:91).

In Ephesians 4:2, the *diakonia* of the congregation goes hand in hand with an attitude of 'lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love', and with communication that gives grace to the hearer and builds other up, being 'kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you' (Eph 4:32). Peter connects the use of the gifts of the congregation to the fervent love for each other, 'using hospitality one to another without murmuring' (1 Pt 4:9; cf. Breed 2016b; Clowney 1988:169–188).

The ministry plan of a local congregation should enhance the discovery of the gifts of every member and lead them to use their gifts to serve (*diakoneo*) each other and every person they meet without expecting to be served. An attitude of love, hospitality and forgiveness should be nurtured in the congregation. The congregation should be a place where God's grace is served to each other and people outside the congregation. The ministry should not only be aimed at convincing people to do certain things, but at helping them to become more and more the new persons they are in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

This is the core of a diaconal church. It contrasts with a ministry where the members only attend the meetings of the church, while the elders, ministers and deacons serve them (Van Helden 2010:83, 84). It is the opposite of a ministry that focuses only on the well-being of the members without reaching out to the community, friends, colleagues and others. The new life of the members does not mean adhering to certain laws or prescriptions, but it is a new way of thinking, which flows into a new attitude and a new way of living by following and walking with God in love through their *diakonia* (Eph 4, 5).

This stands in contrast to the opinion of Blaisdell (2018:44), who rather sees the church as a movement and as 'post-denominational'. For a congregation to be what is described in Ephesians, there should be a certain structure in which the members can be cared for, the gifts can be discovered, members can be equipped and where there can be oversight of what is said and done. It is clear from the description in the New Testament that the church quickly developed from people coming together under the leadership of a few

³This is in opposition to the opinion of J.N. Collins (Breed 2017b), who believes that the *diakon*-words never have the meaning of service out of love or compassion towards other people.

apostles to the body of Christ with different leaders and prescriptions on how things should be done or not (Ac 6; 1 Cor 12–14; 1 Tm 3).

Equipping believers for their *διακονία* is a *sine qua non*

Equipping believers for their *διακονία*, serves as a bridge between the indicative of God's work, which flows from his mercy, and a life based on the knowledge of Christ (Eph 4; Van Aarde 2016:6, 7).

A ministry plan should facilitate the congregation's growth in knowledge of the grace of God as explained in Ephesians 1–3 and other books of the Bible (cf. Van Aarde 2016:8). The congregation should be clear about their identity and calling to be a witness to the greatness of his grace and his wisdom. Every demand made on the congregation should build on the knowledge of the indicative of God's grace (Breed 2018:38, 39).

Equipping the saints should focus on activating each member's unique gifts and the use of opportunities (Breed 2018:109). Each member of the congregation is placed in that body with a specific purpose, and that purpose should be discovered and pursued together with every member (1 Cor 12; cf. Vorster 2017:285). This would mean a very individualised and work intensive ministry, in which every member that has already grown to maturity, should be involved in equipping and caring for others.

The purpose of equipping the saints is also to help them to live as representatives of God. They should know their calling to make God visible through their *διακονία* (Du Rand 1991:318). Only those regenerated by the Holy Spirit can meet God in his Word and see God's work in their daily lives. An important focus in the ministry should be to lead every member (also children) patiently to confess Jesus as Lord (1 Cor 12:1–3). To confess Jesus as Lord, means to follow him in being obedient to the Father, even to death, doing the Father's deeds and speaking his words (cf. Thiselton 2000:916). Equipping the members to use their gifts for their service (*διακονία*) is always done in the expectation that God's power will work all things in all. By this powerful work of God, the body of Christ is built up to stability and maturity (1 Cor 12:4–6; cf. Breed 2018:17). The congregation should structure the ministry plan in such a way that opportunities are created for members to serve each other (Breed 2018:90), and that they will be equipped to use other opportunities created by God to the fullest.

Children should also be guided to do service work (*διακονία*) so that they can discover their gifts and the place they want to serve. Practical training for all members in a certain field of the *διακονία* is a necessity. Equipping is a process, not a happening. The child should work with adults (his family) to see, experience and be equipped in the same way Jesus did with his disciples (Breed 2018:90). As members mature, the ministry plan should put members of the congregation to

work, to help and equip other members. The vision of everyone working and contributing with the gift they have received, should be an integral part of the ministry plan.

This vision contrasts with a ministry where the congregation are only told what they should do and are not informed and shown how they should do it; they are therefore not practically equipped for their *διακονία*. Equipping courses for the members of the congregation should be part of the ministry plan.

Working towards the body of Christ as a space where members can speak the truth, in love to each other as part of their *διακονία*

From my exegesis of Ephesians 4 (Breed 2018:32–51), it has become clear that the growth of the body is closely linked to the truth and to knowledge of God's plan of grace. Being equipped with the truth, the members will be able to withstand the onslaught of people with sly plans to take them away from the truth (Eph 4:12–16; Hoehner 2002:554). The congregation that is growing towards maturity will learn more and more to speak the truth in love to each other as part of their *διακονία* (Eph 4:15; cf. Stoker 2017:92). Ephesians 4:29 (see below) could be considered as a further explanation of what is meant in Ephesians 4:15. The whole of Ephesians 4 is enclosed by Paul's call for them to live with each other in peace under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (see Table 1).

Lincoln (1990) says the following about truth and love in Ephesians 4:15:

A conceptual link with the notion of growth is to be found here in any case, since the whole clause, 'speaking the truth in love', should be understood as the means of the Church's growth. The association of truth and love in this clause is a significant one. Any claim to loyalty to truth which results in lack of love to those perceived to be disloyal stands as much condemned as any claim to all-embracing love which is indifferent to truth. But it is not as if two competing claims or two quite different qualities have to be held in balance. Ultimately, at the heart of the proclamation of the truth is love, and a life of love is the embodiment of the truth. The Church reflects this relationship when its witness to the truth has love as its style and as its power. (p. 260)

Part of the growth process in a congregation comprises that it becomes a place where sins can be confessed, forgiveness can be received and instruction in the truth can be given. The congregation should, via their ministry plan, work towards becoming a safe place for sinners to come into the light and

TABLE 1: Paul's call in Ephesians 4:1 and 4:29–32.

Ephesians 4:1	Ephesians 4:29–32
¹ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all humility and meekness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.	²⁹ Let no corrupt word proceed from your mouth, but only what is good for edification, that it may give grace to them that hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and blasphemy be removed from you, with all malice. ³² And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as also God in Christ forgave us.

receive healing by the truth that is spoken to them in love. Part of the ministry should also be that unrepentant sinners could be reprimanded with the truth in love. This can only happen if the attitude as described in Ephesians 4:1–3 and 4:29–32 is an ever-growing entity in the congregation. In this way, the unity of the Spirit is preserved (Eph 4:3) and the Spirit is not grieved (Eph 4:30; Hoehner 2002:564, 565). Practical measures such as small groups, courses for addicts and marriage and family accountability groups can be part of a ministry plan that adheres to this view on ministry.

Speaking the truth in love is contrary to a ministry where condemnation of the fallen member is the accepted attitude. This will promote the pretence of everyone that everything is fine in his or her life. People hide their sins, struggles and hurt. Speaking truth in love is also contrary to the practice of disciplining members without first calling them to the love and grace of God. Truth and love should go together in everything a congregation does.

Apportioning leadership for effective service

Every member should be cared for and should be equipped and have the opportunity to do his or her *διακονία* (cf. Breed 2018:90, 184). Members should be activated to use their gifts for their *διακονία* in and outside the congregation. In that way, they will grow to maturity towards Christ (Lincoln 1990:xxxvi). Jesus, in his ministry, cared for the most important people, as well as for the outcasts of society.

He taught his disciples openness to children, the demon-possessed, beggars, prostitutes and other people including those acting in Jesus' name (cf. Sabin 2005:87–89). Paul (1 Cor 12) taught the congregation to take special care of the seemingly most unimportant people (like children) and that they are indispensable in the body of Christ (cf. Breed 2018:90).

To fulfil this task, the leadership should be apportioned so that more people would become involved in ministry, but each one should do only as much as they can handle effectively (according to time and capacity). Each of the leaders should focus on his or her primary task; they should appoint other leaders to do the things that will distract themselves from their primary task (Ac 6; Breed 2018:184–208; cf. Koet 2011:87). Thus, the *διακονία* to the congregation would not be compromised in any way.

In the ministry plan of a congregation, the tasks of the minister, elders and deacons should be clearly demarcated. Each one should focus on his or her primary task and as soon as the task becomes too big to handle effectively, it should be divided among other leaders or members of the congregation (Ac 6). Under the guidance and overseeing of the leaders, as many members as possible should do the work. God prepared good works for the members, who are his handiwork and whom he created for good works (Eph 2:10). When the members are entrusted with some responsibility, their *διακονία* will grow as God reveals to them what he wants them to do.

This ministry plan contrasts a hierarchical ministry or a ministry where a few (paid) persons must do all the work, or a ministry where there is no leadership and everybody do as they see fit. Malphurs (2005:81) and Maloma (2011:136) both opt for a ministry model based on policies. 'Here policies are defined as the beliefs and values that consistently guide or direct how a church or para-church governing board makes its decisions', Maloma (2011:136) explains. There should then be a policy for every form of ministry. This then places the governance of the congregation solely in the hands of a few people on a church board. The diaconal ministry model rather points to the diversification of responsibilities for governance as pointed out above.

Appointing elders to be shepherds and overseers with Jesus' attitude

From the exegesis of 1 Peter 4 and 5, it has become clear (Breed 2016b) that the elders have a special *διακονία* in the congregation, namely overseeing and caring for the flock. Peter makes it clear to the elders that they should have the attitude of Christ by not seeking their own benefit, but serving willingly and eagerly, not wanting to be rulers, but being examples of the attitude of Christ. They must lead the congregation to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, expecting to be exalted in due time (1 Pt 5:1–6). In a ministry plan, the growth of the members in their faith and dedication to Christ, from the youngest to the oldest, should be sought after fervently. When leaders have the attitude of Christ and they become elders in the congregation, they serve as examples to the congregation. Thus, following their example, the whole congregation will grow in the attitude of Christ. Equipping the equippers (elders) should be a practical part of the ministry plan of the congregation. The purpose of the equipment should always also be the growth of the elders' trust in God, to exalt them so that they can, based on this certainty, serve in humbleness and lead the congregation through the same process and to the same end (1 Pt 5:1–6; Breed 2018:182; cf. Green 2007:163).

This is contrary to choosing leaders in the congregation merely because of their status in their community, or even their natural skills. The aim of a ministry plan should be progressive equipment of the members by involving them in the ministry on an ongoing basis. Before somebody becomes an elder, he should have shown the characteristics and gifts necessary for an elder in his ongoing ministry over time. The congregation should know him for being led by the Spirit of God, and then choose him to be an elder.

Giving deacons leadership in activating the members' gifts for *διακονία*

I have argued (Breed 2018:184–208) that confusion exists about the essence and content of the deacon's work. There are no clear prescriptions in the New Testament as to what the essence and content of the deacon's work should be.

From the study results of the *διάκον*-word group, I have made a proposal about the possible essence and content of the

work of the deacon (Breed 2018:209–243). The leadership in the congregation can be divided according to the two parts of the ministry of Jesus, who spoke the *words* of the Father and did the *deeds* of the Father. The same two parts functioned in the first church (Ac 6), when the apostles chose the *διακονία* of the Word and prayers, and the seven received the *διακονία* of the tables. In 1 Peter 4:10–11, the author seems to refer to the same two parts when he says, ‘If anyone speaks, let him speak as the utterances of God. If anyone serves, let him serve as from strength, as God supplies ...’.

If my proposal is accepted, a congregation should determine the whole spectrum of the *διακονία* that God wants them to do in the congregation and in the community. The *διακονία* should take place under the leadership of people who can live as examples and are able to equip and organise the congregation.

It is therefore important that the ministry plan should spell out what the tasks of the elders and the ministers are according to the Bible. The rest of the *διακονία* should fall under the leadership of the deacons. The deacons can lead the congregation in the practical *διακονία*, equipping the congregation to discover, use and develop their gifts. Within this part of the *διακονία*, the deacons should each choose his specialised area.

Some can assume leadership in pastoral care of members; others in pastoral counselling; some in child and youth ministry; others in the prayer ministry, and so on. The task of the deacon is not to do the work on their own, but to lead the congregation to use their gifts to do the work of *διακονία*. A deacon then plays the activating, organising and equipping role for a specific part of the *διακονία* of the congregation. In this way, the variety of gifts and *διακονία*, and their effective working, to which 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 refers, is actualised.

This approach is contrary to a ministry plan where the deacons do not really know what their task is, or where they have a very limited task or is just an assistant to the elders or minister. In other contrasting approaches, the deacons (elders and minister) do all the work in the congregation. The members do not serve, but demand to be served.

Living as a missional church

A major part of God’s eternal plan is to free people from the rule of evil, to be renewed in Christ through the work of the Spirit. A congregation should always be missional⁴ in all its ministry work and be open to the fact that people from various cultures should be included in the body of Christ (Mwiti & Dueck 2007:69).

A congregation should try to make certain during its missional ministry⁵ work that individuals have been regenerated before

4. ‘Missional’ means that a congregation should reach out to all people with whom they come into contact, in all its actions by all the members.

5. ‘Ministry’ means the service of the congregation to all people with whom they come into contact, in all its actions by all the members.

bringing the imperative of the new life to them. To ask them to live according to the Word of God before they have been regenerated, is to ask something impossible of them. The indicative of God’s grace should always precede the imperative. When somebody is freed from the reign of the evil, there may be enormous guilt, shame and deep wounds (cf. Kommers 2017:27; Vorster 2017:275–280).

Coming into the body of Christ entails a total new way of thinking and doing, namely living from the knowledge of God’s love and grace in Christ. For that to happen, the person should grow in his knowledge of God and be equipped to break with the old lifestyle and live as a new man or woman (Petrenko 2011:99–110). An essential part of being a missional church, is that the members of the church should be equipped, motivated and held accountable to use the opportunities God creates for them each day, to serve other people with the undeserved love of Christ. Serving people with the love of Christ, reveals the love of God to people and the *διακονία* can thus be the seed of faith (cf. Thielman 2010:268–274).

Conclusion

It has been shown that the results gleaned from studies of the *διάκον*-word group in the New Testament reveal principles for a services ministry plan of a congregation. Such a plan can make a valuable and central contribution to the overall ministry plan of a congregation and, in this way, verifying the value of research into the diakon-word group.

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