

Acts for today**'The Growing Church in the Acts of the Apostles'****No. 3: The Seven Deacons**

Somebody once defined a football match as '22 men on the field desperately in need of rest watched by 22,000 spectators desperately in need of exercise!!'

It can feel like this in the church, as the apostles found in the young Jerusalem church (Act 6: 1-7). With over 5000 members, they were under pressure with the distribution of food to the widows (1,2). They needed others to take over this ministry or service (lit: diakonia v1/4), in order to devote themselves to 'prayer and the ministry of the word' (4).

The lesson for us is clear: if the church is to grow, everybody (leaders and members) has to be released into their God-given ministries. Is this happening in our own church and what can we learn from them?

They addressed the needs:

Distributing food was a practical issue, but they saw it as a spiritual one affecting the church's growth. How do we approach such practical needs?

They took responsibility together:

The leaders asked the church to choose those who could take on these practical roles. How do we involve others in taking things forward?

They called spiritually qualified people:

The 7 people chosen were all 'full of the Spirit and wisdom'. What qualities do we look for in those we ask to get involved?

They were available to be used by God:

While Philip became an evangelist, Stephen was the first martyr. Do we actively encourage people to develop in ministry?

As a result of all this activity, 'the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly.' (7). If we want our church to grow, to what extent are we addressing these issues ourselves?

*The Rev Paul Hardingham
continues his series on the early Church.*

He who kneels before God can stand before anyone.