



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### HG47: Growing The Church (5/6) *Growth In Generosity*

**Acts 6:1-7**

### Home Group Study Notes

27<sup>th</sup> March 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.*



### Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

During his ADCM talk, Paul wondered what would happen if we, as a church, were to embark on a campaign of Blessing the community in Jesus' name in 2011. Paul asked whether Home Groups would commit themselves to Acts of Random Kindness this coming year. What sparks your imagination for your Home Group?



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





## Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read through the text for this study Acts 6:1-7, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

Do you, like those early disciples, ever struggle to prioritise your Christian life? Is your service to the Lord high on your list of priorities? Share your dilemmas and/or concerns with your Home Group and offer prayerful support for each other.

**The Problem:** Are you aware of any 'problem areas' within Emmanuel (and/or our community) in which people (young and old alike) or ministries are being neglected? If you can't, why not 'brainstorm' new areas of ministries where the Lord might be calling you to serve!

**The Solution:** If so, what might the solution be? How you could you (as an individual and a Home Group, perhaps) and we as a church family, respond to this need? Might the idea of 'blessing' (which Paul suggested last Sunday) be part of the solution?

And the same goes for each of you in your professional careers, in business, industry, home, school - wherever Christians are they have a ministry to perform. I believe we need to recover this vision of the diversity of ministries to which God calls His people.

The apostles were not too busy for ministry, but preoccupied with the wrong ministry. So are many clergy today. Instead of concentrating on the ministry of the word become overwhelmed with administration and, as a consequence, the standards of preaching and teaching decline - and I'm sure that's exasperated even more through the parochial responsibilities of the CofE. In recent times, as you know, I've restructured the way DCC works and we're planning to reintroduce a 'new' Leadership Team which will include the chairs of the Action Groups so that we can effectively administrate both the practical and spiritual aspects of church life, with the sole purpose of releasing you into effective mission and ministry. What need to remember the basic, biblical recognition that God calls different men and women to different ministries and for men and women to be willing to serve the Lord through the ministries God has given. It is the Holy Spirit which enables and guides our own ministry as his followers. Indeed it is the Spirit, and only the Spirit, which allows us to be fruitful with our lives.

**The Result:** As a direct result of the apostles delegating the social work in order to concentrate their pastoral priority, vs7: "The word of God spread and the number of disciples increased rapidly." Of course, the word cannot spread when the ministry of the word is neglected, conversely, when pastors devote themselves to the word, it spreads. My understanding of the 'word' here in scripture involves both the preaching of God's word and the proclamation of God word (evangelism).

**Conclusion;** In conclusion, this short reading from Acts 6:1-7, is particularly informative as a pattern for church life today. In the first instance, the early church took very seriously the combination of spiritual and material concerns in carrying out its God-given ministry. In doing so, it prioritised the importance of prayer and preaching, but never to the exclusion of helping the poor and correcting injustices. And, even when the church found it necessary to divide internal responsibilities and assign people to different areas of service, they always saw these as being part of one larger ministry to the community.

We see how the early church were prepared to adjust its procedures and alter its organisational structure to develop new positions of responsibility in order to accommodate the existing needs for the ongoing proclamation and preaching of the Word of God. We see how discerning the apostles were in being alert to the devils schemes through being distracted in their ministry of prayer and preaching. How we need that same discernment in our own lives. We need that same life-giving Holy Spirit of love and power so, like those early disciples, we can find ourselves ablaze with a passion to extend God's kingdom and to proclaim God's truth.

God needs Christians who, with all the painful priorities of life surrounding them - screaming at them - will not take off their uniforms and mingle with the crowd. God sends us into the world in Jesus' name to be like him and take his power, love, joy, peace and forgiveness into every situation. I pray that each of us are willing and prepared for the task that lies ahead?

In fact, I have to say thank you for making our ADCM last Sunday such a positive experience. Must be one of the best I've ever attended and certainly chaired. It's a good feeling when we can all see positive things happening amongst us as we move forward in our mission and ministry together.

And this happened in Acts 6. The church saw the reasoning behind the apostles plan vs5: "This proposal pleased the whole group." So the church chose seven men full of the Holy Spirit and Wisdom, and presented them to the apostles who prayed over them and laid their hands on them. The apostles commissioned and authorised the seven to exercise this ministry, not only on their behalf, but on behalf of the Christian community. A church that pleases God is not one in which there are no problems, but one in which the problems are dealt with in a way which pleases Him. It's quite interesting that the church were not afraid to adjust their structure to make room for a growing ministry. Perhaps there's a challenge in there for us somewhere ... especially if we consider that the areas of church life which are growing at the moment are probably the least resourced.

**The Principle:** We see an important principle illustrated here, which is of significant importance to the church today. And it is this, God calls all his people to ministry. The fact is that he calls different people to different ministries, and those who are called to 'prayer and ministry of the word' must not allow themselves to be distracted from that priority. This is where the strength/diversity of the church comes in. All of us have a gift, 1 Corinthians 12, which is given for the common good (vs7) so that we can serve the Lord, but importantly, so that we can serve each other. SHAPE'd for Ministry ...

It's surely deliberate that the Greek word used to describe both ministry and service is diakonia - which simply means servant. The ministry of the word and the service of pastoral care are one and the same. Neither ministry is superior to the other. On the contrary, both are ways of serving God and his people. Both require spiritual people full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom to exercise them. The only difference between them lies in the form the ministry takes, requiring different gifts and different callings. This delegation of social welfare to the seven is commonly thought to have been the origin of the diaconate. And, whilst we do not have a diaconate in the CofE, we do have churchwardens and Readers and those you elected to serve on DCC last Sunday.

I believe we do a great disservice to the church whenever we refer to clergy as the ministry rather than the laity. And when we speak of ordination in terms of entering the ministry. This approach implies that the ordained ministry is the only ministry there is. For, as John Stott suggests: "Too low a view of laity is due to too high a view of clergy, and too high a view of clergy is due to too low a view of the church." But *diakonia* is a generic word for service. It means something more when it is pre-fixed with pastoral, social, political and so on. All Christians, without exception, being followers of him who came not to be served but to serve (The Servant King) are themselves called to ministry. And, while I'm at it, the expression 'full-time Christian ministry' is not restricted to church work and missionary service; it can also be exercised wherever Christians find themselves. I was a fulltime Christian minister when I worked in the Building Trade and the Prison Service.

**The Principle:** Paul suggested that each one of us are called to 'full-time Christian service.' Explain why you think this may, or may not, be true for you. Encourage each other by sharing a recent story of when you have been able to share your testimony with someone who isn't a Christian.

**The Result:** The common theme through this series in Acts is that the early church grew in numbers whenever they allowed the Lord to set their agenda for mission and ministry. Following on from Paul's ADCM talk, what might you need to do in order to be active in your evangelism?

Following on from Paul's ADCM talk, and the distribution of the SHAPE'd for Ministry leaflets, how are planning to respond to the spiritual call to serve the Lord? Ask your fellow Home Group members to suggest an area (if you are not sure yourself) where they believe you have been SHAPE'd for Ministry.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## HG47: Growing The Church (5/6) *Growth In Generosity*

**Acts 6:1-7**

### **Home Group Sermon Notes**

27<sup>th</sup> March 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction:** Our reading this morning from Acts 6:1-7 explains something of the difficulties the early disciples encountered when they were eager to serve God through the ministry of preaching and teaching but were held back by other ministries that needed attending too. In many ways, they were only capable of doing half the job by the restrictions and expectations that were placed upon them. We live in a world of great need. The Christian community is a place of great need. How do we, faced with so many screaming, competing demands, prioritise our life and work out what it is God wants us to do? These few verses from Acts 6 (though few, had a significant impact on the ministry of the apostles) gives us some thoughts about our priorities. If you're wondering why I've entitled this talk 'Growth In Generosity' it is because of the generous spirit in which the early church responded to the dilemma in which they found themselves.

We know that Satan was attacking the church but not having a great deal of success. He tried through the Jewish authorities to suppress it by force and he tried, ch5, through the corrupt hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira to bring it into disrepute. You could say that distraction may be his best plan of attack - and so we have the situation we read about earlier where, if the apostles could be occupied with social administration - which, though essential, was not their calling - they would neglect their God-given responsibilities to pray and to preach and so leave the church without any defence against false teaching and false doctrine. In examining these few verses from Acts 6:1-7, I want to look at four headings: The Problem, The Solution, The Principle, The Result.

**The Problem:** The early church were experiencing growing pains. Vs1: "The number of disciples was increasing ..." and this was making it difficult for the apostles to minister to everyone. The excitement of church growth was tempered by the regrettable complaining of some. Human nature doesn't change does it? The complaint concerned the welfare of the widows whose cause God has promised, in the OT (Exodus 22:22ff, Deuteronomy 10:18) to defend. We must assume that the widows had no relatives to support them and were unable to earn a living. As a consequence, the church had accepted the responsibility to provide for them in the daily distribution of food vs2. However, there were two groups in the church and one group, the Grecian Jews, complained against the Aramaic-speaking Jews, because the Grecian widows were being overlooked! There had always been rivalry between these two groups in Jewish culture; the tragedy is that it was perpetuated within the new community of the Christian church, when Jesus' death had sought to abolish such divisions and disagreements.

I don't believe this oversight was deliberate, or that one group was given preferential treatment, it was more probably a result of poor administration and supervision. The fact that the 'outsiders' were being neglected created a situation that could have divided the church. There were language differences and this disagreement could have awakened old prejudices and resentments. The issue, however, was more than a cultural tension. The apostles discerned a deeper problem, namely that the daily organising and distribution of food was threatening to occupy all their time and so inhibit and restrict them from the work Jesus had specifically entrusted to them - preaching and teaching.

The apostles studied the situation and concluded that they were to blame. The problem was one of their own making because they were simply trying to do too much. It's significant that the apostles were not prepared to ignore the problem. They recognised that spiritual and material concerns are inextricably linked in the way that one always affects the other - for better or for worse. The apostles recognised that they couldn't pray and preach the problem away - it required new Spirit-filled leaders to solve it. Any growing body will have its share of aches and pains. Any growing church will have more than the occasional problem - we should expect them. Like a growing child, a lively family, or a thriving business, challenges arise within growing enterprises that have to be dealt with. It is not, in my view, a bad thing, but rather an indication that we're doing something right.

**The Solution:** I believe the apostles handled the problem with great wisdom and, in attempting to give a clear lead in responding to their predicament, they consulted the wider church to seeking to find a resolution. When a church faces a serious problem, this presents the leaders and church members with a number of opportunities. For one thing, problems give us the opportunity to do a bit of navel-gazing, to examine our ministry and discover what changes must be made and the best way to move forward. The season of Lent is a good time to do this. I believe this sense of self-appraisal is something that is healthy, and is one of the priorities of the Action Groups. There's something deeply significant about examining our lives and our ministries before we start taking what God has given us for granted and allow complacency to creep in!

There is no hint that the apostles regarded social work as inferior to pastoral work or that it was beneath their dignity. Vs2: "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables." It was entirely a question of calling and they didn't believe this was to be their priority so they made a proposal to the church, vs3-4: "Brothers choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." I guess, they were looking for those who were both practically and spiritually minded. We will turn this responsibility over to them and give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. It's quite interesting that the apostles added prayer to preaching in specifying the essence of their ministry.

For the ministry of the word - or indeed, any ministry - without prayer is unlikely to bear fruit. Church problems also give us an opportunity to exercise our faith, not only in the Lord, but in each other. Here we see that the apostles were thinking creatively, suggesting solution that all the members agreed with - amazing!