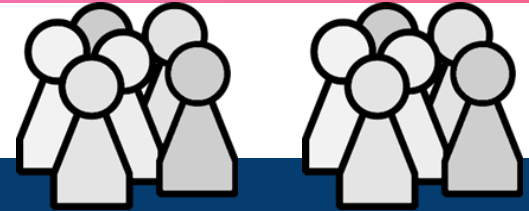


# Resources for Churches...

## Responding to the Coronavirus

### Family Division



#### The Acts of the Sent Ones - Acts 6: 1-7

So to our next instalment in the story of what happened next after Jesus sent out his disciples with the presence and power of his Spirit within them. Acts 6 comes with another reminder that when the Holy Spirit is at work, things do not stay the same. And as things change, so the church needs to adapt and develop ways of doing things which fit with the present situation.

As the church in Jerusalem grew, so did the amount of need that the community was having to meet. As we already know, the believers were living together as a family, among whom all things were shared. Clearly, the bigger the family grew, the more of a logistical problem this presented, and a greater degree of organisation was needed. But the problem that had arisen was not only a practical one, but also a relational one. Tension had emerged because the Greek-speaking Jews felt that their widows were not receiving a fair proportion of the daily food handouts. Widows had no other means of provision, and so inevitably were among the group of poorer members of the church who needed support. However, the issue was not that it was widows that were being neglected, but that those who were missing out were all from similar ethnic and cultural origins. The widows among the Greek-speaking group (who were therefore more likely to have moved into Jerusalem from countries some distance away and have no family support available) felt the more local Aramaic-speaking Hebrew group were receiving preferential treatment. This had been brought to the apostles' attention and their response was wise and Spirit-inspired.

It is interesting that we are not told whether this was deliberate discrimination, or just that the system they had evolved had an in-built subconscious bias towards local people, or something of both of these. That doesn't matter. It is sufficient that there was the perception of inequality, that the fellowship and unity of the community was under threat, and that this needed to be acted upon rather than left to escalate. The matter was dealt with, the gospel continued to be preached and lived out, and the number of people becoming followers of Jesus continued to grow.

What parallels can you see between this episode and an earlier story of God's people? (Read Exodus 18:14-23).

Why was it so important that the people chosen to help were known, Spirit-led and wise?

Practical issues in church life still have the capacity of causing people to break into factions today. Why is it therefore important that people given responsibility are chosen not just for their practical ability or willingness to do the job, but also for their spiritual maturity and the way they deal with people?

Apart from the more obvious qualities of compassion, sensitivity, and the capacity to be non-judgmental, what other fruit of the Spirit should the church look for when appointing people to help share the load?

Can you identify any needs in our church which are being overlooked at present? Are they an issue for any group in particular? How could they be addressed in a way which does not overburden the already busy leaders? How might God be calling you to help meet the need in our church at the present time?

We can all feel neglected or discriminated against from time to time, perhaps particularly so in challenging times. What is a Christ-centred way of responding to this?

Are you aware of any historical tensions in the church which the Holy Spirit would want to heal and resolve? How is he promoting you to respond? Does God call all of us to be peacemakers (see Matthew 5:9)?

#### To pray:

- for church leaders to respond prayerfully and wisely to problems which arise within the church family.
- for those with responsibility in the church to grow in spiritual wisdom and Christ-like character.
- for the whole church to learn to respond to practical problems in ways which avoid building tension and causing division
- for church life to be characterised by forgiveness, reconciliation, inclusiveness, love and unity.