

*When a church is looking for a new minister, there's 4 things people generally look for:*

- *Good preacher*
- *Pastorally caring and visits the parishioners in their homes often*
- *Good with administration*
- *Good with the youth*

*And it's generally believed that:*

- *If you get someone who meets one of those criteria, your church will generally stay about the same*
- *If you manage to get somebody who meets 2 of them, your church will generally grow*
- *If you're lucky enough to find somebody with 3 of the criteria, you can expect your church to grow exponentially, and soon enough, your church will probably be the biggest one in town.*
- *And if you find somebody who meets all 4 of the criteria, don't touch him – He's a freak....*

The old model of 'doing church', was "the minister did it" and the congregation turned up. But that's **not** the Biblical model, and it's not what we're about at Bush Disciples.... The biblical model is "The church is a bunch of Christians who meet together, and we all have **different** Spiritual gifts, skills and abilities. And in the power of the Holy Spirit, **all** of us are in ministry together". And I hope that's the way we see ourselves here – that **all** of us, are in ministry together.

And I believe, one of the biggest barriers to church growth, is the continued dependence of the church on too few of its members... And this can happen when either the members of a church don't step up, because they feel inadequate, or

unqualified, or just don't **want** to take on any ministry;.. **or** it can also happen when the **leaders** of the church don't give permission for the whole church to be actively involved in ministry....

One of the benefits of being a small church, is you don't really need a lot of structure and organisation, to 'keep it ticking'. But as a church gets bigger and bigger, most churches will need more and more structure, and more and more 'position recognition' (if you like), for it to keep functioning.

Now, I don't know how big the church in Jerusalem was, when they appointed the additional 7 church leaders to serve, but it must've been pretty big. Their number was being added to daily. 3000 were saved at Pentecost. In Chapter 4, we hear that the number of men who were saved, came to about 5000 (and I don't know whether that's the new total, or if it was an additional 5000 + women & children of course...

So, we don't know **how** big the church was... Certainly, it was in its thousands, although a lot of those could've been people who were in Jerusalem for the religious festivals, and they'd since returned home... But I think it would be safe to say, that it was at least in its thousands, and possibly in the tens of thousands...

And something that happens, when a church gets large, is people begin to invariably separate out, into their common groups... And that's something that **can** make a large

church seem attractive to some people, but I believe it also has a negative aspect. So, for example:

- Young people, will hang out with the young people, and yes, that church will become attractive to young people, because they don't have to mix with the older people, and they can just be with people who are like themselves. And that church can have a ministry, specifically geared, to suit just them. And yet, I believe there's something wonderful, and something Godly, about when the young people and older people get together, and they share with one-another, and learn from one-another

And likewise, in a big church:

- The businessmen will tend to stick together
- The young mothers will tend to stick together
- Social classes that are already in society, begin to form in the church
- And it's never an intention, but often in a larger church, some will end up feeling neglected, unwanted, unwelcome, and they'll feel as if they're a second-class Christian. Or that they just don't belong...

And there's nothing new in this – it happened in the church in Acts.

Most of the church in Jerusalem (not surprisingly), were Jewish Christians. But even so, there had formed 2 classes of Jewish Christians. There were the Hellenists, and the Hebrews – they were broken into 2 language groups.

A lot of Jews had become what was called “the Diaspora”... They had dispersed away from Jerusalem... And over time, they had no use for their Hebrew language (because nobody out there understood it) (in fact, when I learned Hebrew at

Bible college, you'd think I was trying to clear flem from my throat), and so they'd left their Hebrew tongue behind, and taken up the more common, universal language of Greek. And some of these Greek-speaking Jews had come back to Jerusalem... And they couldn't speak Hebrew, where as the Jews who had stayed at home in Jerusalem, continued on in their Hebrew language...

And so when they got together as a church, they would gravitate into these 2 groups – the Hebrew speaking, and the Greek speaking... And that's fine, but **not** if it causes divisions, and a division **did** form.

These were days when there was no pension. And so the church used to care for the widows – they'd provide them with food... But it wasn't long until the Greek speaking Jewish Christians reckoned the Hebrew speaking widows were getting better fed than **their** widows... and so they had a bit of a grumble...

And so the 12 apostles came up with a cunning plan: Their role (as apostles) was to preach and pray, and so it wouldn't be right for them to take up all their time overseeing the day-to-day running of the food bank (but obviously **something** needed to be done)... There were **other** people in this church... – people who were perfectly capable of dealing with this issue, and so 7 men were chosen as leaders, to take care of this issue, and presumably other issues as well.

So that's what this reading is about. But coming out of this reading, I want to share with you 9 Principals for Church life:

1. Firstly, ministry is **not** the job of just one person. I think we've already covered that haven't we??? Christian ministry, is the ministry of the whole people of God, working in the power of the Holy Spirit....

2. The second principal for church life, is the fluid nature of church structure. They didn't have a set structure from the beginning.... But as the need arose, the structure of the church evolved to meet that need.

Now, that's a bit different to how most of us perceive church today. We've grown up with a history of churches, and a variety of church structures. And it's very easy for us to come to the understanding that a certain structure is how all churches should be structured.... Some of us may have firmly set in our mind "there should be **no** structure"...

But as I read the New Testament, I find a church that does have structure, but it's also a church that evolves as it grows, and as its needs and circumstances change.

3. The third principal I find, is All ministry is spiritual in nature.

Some of us may feel that our service – our ministry isn't valuable, because it's just practical stuff. But I want you to know, "**All** ministry is spiritual in nature."

The need that arose here, could've been seen as an essentially "hands-on", or administrative duty,, but it had spiritual importance in God's plan.

4. Now, because of this, any recognised positions of leadership within the church, have the requirement, of a spiritual maturity.

The apostles said to them: **pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom...** Now these are signs of spiritual maturity. And anyone who we select, to a position of leadership, should be of good repute, and be filled with the Spirit, and filled with Wisdom.

Churches get themselves into all sorts of trouble, when they put someone into leadership, who either: is not wise; or is not of good repute; or is not filled with the Holy Spirit.

*And so, for example, a church may appoint an accountant or a financial advisor as their treasurer, and they don't even care if that person is spiritually mature, and sometimes, even of good repute...*

Leadership in the church, should **never** be based solely on physical skills and abilities. Leaders must be of good repute, full of the Spirit, and full of wisdom.

5. Fifthly, according to these guidelines, the whole church decided together, who were the suitable candidates.

The selection criteria, was set down by the apostles “of good repute, full of the Spirit, full of wisdom”, and then it was the whole church, who decided from their number, who it was, that best met that criteria.

6. The 6<sup>th</sup> principal, is Church leadership, is to be done in **God's** strength.

They chose the 7 men, and then the apostles prayed for them, and laid their hands on them. Biblically, when you lay your hands on someone and pray for them, you're asking God to fill them with His power. And so church leadership is to be carried out, not because we're so good at it, but because God gives us strength.

7. The 7<sup>th</sup> principal: Discontent, **must** be addressed. There was trouble brewing in this church, and if it was left unaddressed, that church could've been split right down the middle. But when the need arose, the right leadership was put in place... and what happened??? ... The word grew and the church grew... And we're going to find that phrase several times, through the book of Acts. The word grew and the church grew.

8. So, that can be the 8<sup>th</sup> principal if you like: when the word grew, the church grew...

9. And finally, No.9 – don't limit yourself... Stephen was chosen, as a church leader, basically to make sure that the food-bank was shared out fairly... But God took Stephen – a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit – and one verse later, in V8, we read **And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.**

Stephen wasn't just an administrator. When we do things in God's strength instead of our own, there are no limits.... God will do what God will do. When we make ourselves available in the little things, God steps in, and uses us for the big things...

So there you go – there's 9 principles for church life... Most presenters would probably try to find a 10<sup>th</sup> one to round it off, but I think 9's probably enough...

Questions???