

## **Fourth Mark of a Healthy Church**

### **Facing the cost of growth and change**

**Exodus 18: 13-27; Matthew 5: 17-20**

**Acts 6: 1-7**

Ministry is not a solo activity and nor is it a designer activity. Ministry is a shared, agreed consensus of leadership in certain areas, practiced in accordance with gifts, skills and callings. It is also tested and affirmed within the denominational structures of the church it serves.

Moses acts as a ministerial judge for the people of God, arbitrating disputes and exercising judgement in accordance with God's Law. It is getting to the stage for Moses where he cannot cope. The workload is overwhelming. Maybe people are not getting the justice they deserve or it is delayed in coming. Jethro, his father-in-law, gives Moses the proverbial tap on the shoulder. He offers Moses the benefit of his wisdom and he can see that the current situation is not sustainable – either for Moses or the people.

Moses needs to find delegates as a matter of urgency – not anyone, but able, God-fearing men of integrity who are not after dishonest gain. We should not confuse this action with an abdication of responsibility, but rather with creating an 'enduring' system of government. Moses' role becomes one of teaching and oversight. This is a change for both Moses and the people, but one that had to happen for the benefit of the whole community.

Fast forward into the New Testament, and a similar thing happens in the early church. The disciples cannot cope with the ministerial demands. The Hellenist widows are complaining of neglect. The only way forward is to appoint deacons to 'wait on tables' although there is obviously more to it than that. Stephen, chosen as a deacon, gives one of the most eloquent, theologically astute speeches in the whole of the NT as he is facing his martyr's death. He is a truly gifted apologist.

The point is that ministry is shared with others who are commissioned through the laying-on of hands, anointed and filled with grace and the Holy Spirit. The choice of the deacons is not random but divinely inspired; a choice which involved the whole community and served the needs of the whole community.

Behind shared ministry, whatever forms various ministries take, is the underpinning of God's commandments or *rules for living in love and faith with God and his people*. Every ministry, whatever its shape and focus, should be centred on God's righteousness, and be publically affirmed, recognised and authorised both locally and in the context of the wider church (diocesan and nationally). The sharing and delegating of ministry can necessitate change and how we handle change is the subject of Mark 4 of a Healthy Church.