**ISM SC15**

**Acts 6 (TNIV) – A case study in unlikely leadership**

Summarize the problem –

* Greek culture Jews and Hebraic Jews; the latter had power, the former were looked down on as kind of worldly, mudbloodish;
* Widows were without resource in those days and dependent on the church for their sustenance; the Greek culture widows were being neglected;
* The apostles seem to be unaware of the issue, until the complaints of discrimination became too loud to ignore

How does the leadership respond?

* The chapter has lots of other topics, but I am interested in how the apostles, Hebraic Jews all, would address this cross cultural situation. Would they ignore or deny it? Would they seek to assimilate the Greek cultured Jews into their Hebrew paradigm for leadership?
* What they do is in v.2-3: *So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*
* It seems that they address the problem at hand by suggesting that it wasn't faithful to their vocation as apostles to ensure food was distributed fairly, so they set up a process for sharing the leadership: to invite the community to choose their leaders, or at least to nominate them. The process is to choose seven people, and the qualifications are two: to be filled with the Spirit and with wisdom—I think they mean people who are known to be both spiritual and practical.

How does the community respond? –

* Who do they put forth? *5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented them to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*
* The seven put forth presumably have these two qualities, but they also having something else in common--all of them have Greek names, and are likely from the Greek culture group, though we cannot be sure.
* Whether the apostles were apprehensive about this we cannot know, what we do know is that they accepted the Seven, and shared power with them.
* We also don’t know whether the seven were unsure if they wanted to do this, or were hesitant to assume some authority; but the text suggests that they were.
* This situation seems appropriate to the ISM context; we have majority culture models for leadership, and they aren’t wrong necessarily, but they can overlook the needs of others, and the way others assume leadership. What lessons do we learn about this from Acts 6?
1. God is at work among non majority communities, preparing them for increased responsibility. We can trust that God is doing this in our chapters, with our international friends. We cannot think pragmatically, that only those who lead like we do, or whose culture is close to ours, will be able to lead in IV chapters. Nor can we have just staff and volunteers, most of whom are Americans, assume all the significant leadership.
2. Some leaders don’t put themselves forward, they need to be asked, to be chosen, to be told of their qualifications. Share about Ram
3. It is unclear if these seven did wait on tables, but it does suggest something like that. That would be a good discipleship cycle it seems, to invite them to something practical and doable, caring for people and needs that they themselves care about. Note also here that the word for waiting on tables is the same word used in the next verses about the ministry of the word. Both are servant leadership, there is no dichotomy here.
4. What we do see them doing is advancing the mission in incredible ways. *7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.* Stephen goes on to become the first to die for his witness; he has the longest speech Luke records in Acts (indeed in the whole Bible!) and Jesus himself rises to stand in witness to Stephen’s courage. And Philip goes on to Samaria, and then speaks to the Ethiopian eunuch – acts that the Hebraic Jews weren’t leading in, despite Jesus command. It turns out that when we empower unlikely or minority or cross cultural leaders, great things happen. New work opens up, new preachers and evangelists emerge, the mission advances.
5. Many internationals are unlikely leaders; they can feel the neglect but rarely put themselves forward; they have gifts but don’t often share them. They advance the mission if we recognize and pray and lay hands on them, empowering them for the work. I recognize that the language of leadership is a great challenge for our international students. We might need to find new language or models. But what we cannot give up on is the great need for these students to advance the Kingdom, to bear witness as Stephan and Philip and all the rest of the unlikely leaders did that Jesus would be known to the ends of the earth. If some would rather be referred to as big brother or Auntie, great! But no less is the need for real courage and risk in making the Savior known.
6. Internationals have a great opportunity to make a difference not *despite being in the cultural* minority but precisely *because* they are in the minority. They have an understanding of the gospel that is different than most Americans; that gives them an opportunity to influence other internationals and Americans.
7. Is this a passage you could use to work with international students to give them a different lens to view leadership? To invite them to live into the gifts that God has given them?