

Reading Family Church
Sunday 29th November 2009

Title: Crossing the Divide #4

This week we looked at how we at RFC can integrate new people.

Read Acts 6:1-7

The church in Jerusalem was made up of Jews from many different cultures, and in time, tensions arose. Diversity and integration is messy, complex and will involve confrontation. As a church we need to start thinking again about ways of adding new people:

By Assimilation – New people are absorbed with loss of the characteristics which makes them different. This approach is easier to manage, provides a sense of overall identity and avoids segregation. In a church, the majority group must make room for those coming in, but most of the change is done by the minority group. Minority groups can feel on the fringe.

By Pluralism - Pluralism primarily preserves the right of each group to maintain its cultural inheritance & distinctiveness. Because it allows ethnic divisions, the majority culture can feel displaced and fear an erosion of identity, tradition & culture. Within church life, pluralism makes room for different people but does not require them to change. Neither does it necessarily mean people are encouraged to mix.

By Integration - This approach allows cultural distinctives to be kept while adopting a common identity, it builds unity and allows for cultural differences. The church not only manages and values diversity but embraces it. It should result in a strong identity, that of 'in Christ' & 'in the local church'. People are encouraged to pursue meaningful cross cultural relationships. However, both the majority & minority will need to change; those coming in lose something, as does the majority culture. It requires high levels of cross cultural relationships and it is dependent upon the resolve of the leaders & the church to work through the issues.

Acts 6 shows us that systems can help with the process of integration, but the central real issue is our resolve to embrace diversity.

Suggested questions

Which group are you in at work & church: Majority or Minority?

Which model of adding new people do you see as most challenging or appropriate for RFC?

Which of these models of adding new people is your lifegroup most like?

What is the next step for your lifegroup?