

## **Members of One Body**

A sermon preached by Revd Charles Draper on Sunday 27 January 2019

*Refs: Nehemiah 8.1-3,5-6,8-10 ; 1 Corinthians 12.12-31a; Luke 4.14-21*

I wonder what mental picture you have of the church? Some people see the church as a bit like a double decker bus, with the Vicar as the driver. Maybe an old-fashioned bus with a bus conductor – perhaps that's the churchwardens! And everyone else just gets on the bus, sits down and enjoys the ride. I'm very glad St Peter's has never been remotely like that!

A better way to see the church is like a team. In a team each member joins in a unique way, with a different role. That's a good picture! The trouble is, on a Sunday morning, it can feel a bit like a football match with about 22 people up front busy doing various things, while everybody else watches the action and joins in the singing! And I'm glad it's not like that either. Because we're not an audience, we are a congregation, and that means we are all part of the team.

It's difficult to think of a team big enough for that! Maybe an orchestra is a good example – a 70 piece or even a 100-piece orchestra. Like an orchestra we're all in the team, each contributing in a different way. In an orchestra you have some people blowing, some people scraping, while other people hit things with sticks. And some have big parts, like the trumpets or French horns that get the big tunes, while others are very busy in the background, not very visible, like the back desk of the violas. (That's me in my experience in amateur orchestras – somewhere in the viola section, enjoying playing and hoping nobody can hear me!). People like that in the church have a vital role. Then the orchestra has a person who appears to be doing nothing but who is watching very closely. Just at the right moment they pick up their triangle and go PING! That's a vital role in the orchestra – and maybe there are people a bit like that in the life of the church as well.

So an orchestra is a good example of a large team of different people working together – a good picture for a church. But there's another picture of the church – a family – a big extended family. This reminds us that, above all, the church is about relationships and about caring for each other.

This new year, like every other parish church, we are renewing our Electoral Roll, our church membership roll. Technically being on the Electoral Roll allows you to vote at the Annual Meeting, but it is much more than that. It's about being fully part of our church – locally and nationally. Every year the Electoral Roll is revised, but once every six years it is renewed – we all come off, and we all must re-join.

It's a good opportunity to think afresh what church membership means for each of us. Today you will receive the formal Electoral Roll form with a short statement about what church membership is about and an opportunity to think about practical ways of being part of the church – offering our time and our talent and joining in - not only in worship but in fellowship, prayer and Christian learning. The leaflet gives a short summary, with a tear off response form, while the *"Taking Part"* booklet gives more details and ideas about ways you could become involved if you choose to.

Our epistle today is a wonderful passage about being members of the church. I wonder if St Paul had any idea that here he was giving us the perfect all-age sermon illustration for generations to come! – come back in February to our Family Communion for more! It's simple yet brilliant. We are, St Paul says, all members of one Body. And as in a human body, our diversity is our strength. He

mentions our hands, our eyes, our ears and our feet – each completely different, yet each having a vital role. We all have something different to offer, he says. And most importantly – one part of the body is not more important or more valuable than another – rather every member of the body is equally vital.

Further he says that all members of the body care for each other. When one part of the body feels pain, then the whole body feels pain. When one part rejoices, we all share in the joy as well.

So today we are inviting you to think about how you fit into the body, and what you would like to contribute to the whole. Please read the Church Membership leaflet and *Taking Part* booklet and think and pray about how you would like to be involved, particularly what time and talents you have to offer to the life and work of the church.

Just a quick word about money, and about our giving as members of the church. We're not majoring on financial giving as we had our Stewardship Giving campaign last summer. If you missed out on the opportunity last summer, then do tick the appropriate boxes in the response leaflet to find out more.

Someone may ask – what is all of this for? Do we have a purpose as a church – do we have a vision why we are doing all of this?

Our Gospel reading today is about Vision. Jesus found in Isaiah 61 his own vision statement. *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."* What an amazing vision statement.

We have our own vision statement at St Peter's. It is

*To become closer to God, celebrating his loving purposes, to reach out unconditionally showing God's love for all creation.*

Our Vision and Priorities process affirmed that we are a church for our local community. The local community is where we are to do this and, in order to bring this about, we need to grow in our prayer and spirituality.

So we're not doing all of this just for our own sakes. We have a purpose, to strengthen our ministry and our mission here in our local community of Wolvercote.

*Taking Part* has a section on Shaping our Vision and an invitation to become involved in shaping and implementing our vision for our church's ministry and mission.

This takes us back to realising our need for prayer, fellowship and Christian learning. Our first reading today, from Nehemiah, gives us a vivid picture of God's people gathered together at a vital moment, a turning point in their life together. At the time they were rebuilding their community life after returning home from Exile. They sat and listened to the scriptures, it says, from early morning to midday! Ezra the priest taught them, interpreting the scriptures, as it says - giving the sense so that they could understand the reading. It's a good example for us – taking the time to listen and be attentive.

One of things that attracted me to come to Wolvercote was that you take preaching seriously here. It is worth taking the time to prepare a sermon well because I know you are really listening! And I value that very much.

Today *Taking Part* and our leaflet offer other ways of being more involved in prayer, fellowship and learning. There are several tick boxes in the response sheet. Tick if you would like to know more about what opportunities we offer for prayer and spirituality, if you'd like to know more about Home Groups, which meet for learning from the Bible or Christian books, fellowship and prayer – praying for each other's needs, supporting and encouraging each other. Or you might like to know more about "Christ for Today", a course taking a fresh look at the basics of Christian faith and their relevance today.

To conclude. I hope you have a sense that all of this is so much more than just filling in an Electoral Roll form. Being a member of the church is an exciting opportunity to be a member of the Body. Sharing our gifts – which is about being able to be ourselves and being able to share the unique things we have to give. Learning together and sharing in prayer. Supporting and encouraging each other, caring for one another as members of the One Body. And sharing in a sense of vision and purpose with all our church family.

May we all find great fulfilment as we hear God's call, to give, to share, to learn and to pray, and to support and encourage each other as members together of One Body.

Amen