

1 Corinthians 12:12-18, 27-31 - Common English Bible

Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. Certainly, the body isn't one part but many. If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted.

You are the body of Christ and parts of each other. In the church, God has appointed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, the ability to help others, leadership skills, different kinds of tongues. All aren't apostles, are they? All aren't prophets, are they? All aren't teachers, are they? All don't perform miracles, do they? All don't have gifts of healing, do they? All don't speak in different tongues, do they? All don't interpret, do they? Use your ambition to try to get the greater gifts. And I'm going to show you an even better way.

When my son was quite young, around 3 or 4, we took him to a pediatrician. At the start of the appointment, a nurse first checked him in and took his weight, height, and blood pressure. When the doctor came in, she looked at the paperwork and said we had to weigh him again because the nurse had made a mistake, his weight was way too low. It was redone, and the weight was the same. Her eyebrows went up and she was instantly on alert. In her eyes, this was a problem. She ordered every test known to humankind and when everything checked out, it became my job to fatten the kid up! High fat yogurt, butter, ice cream — “make every bite count” was the mantra. In a culture that is mostly trying to lose weight, it's surprisingly difficult to do the opposite.

Bodies are alive. They change and grow. If they don't, you have a problem.

The apostle Paul described the church as “the body of Christ.” It’s a living and breathing gathering of people. Sometimes instead of seeing the church as the living Body of Christ, we think of the church as a building or as an institution, and we resist all change. In a world that keeps changing, we find comfort in institutions that don’t change. Cemeteries are nice peaceful places — museums can be like that too. But if we are going to live, we need to change and grow.



This church has seen a lot of changes. The building has changed a whole lot. One of the funny things about this church is that instead of starting over or changing locations as the church grew, they just added on. The oldest part of the church is what we now call the “Lower Hall.” When the church grew, they grew up – so that Heritage Hall (where we have coffee after service) became the sanctuary.

Then when that wasn’t big enough, they added onto this massive sanctuary. And as I talked about last week, they added the 1960’s wing with the gym and the Living Room. There are more roofs on this church than I can count, and one of them usually needs replacing. Lots of other changes have been made, including an elevator in the 90’s. This church has changed so much in structure. I think everyone knows that the building, if it’s going to last and be useful, needs to be maintained and has to change to meet the needs. That is part of our Strategic Plan...

But sometimes, *who we are as a church changes too.*

Wall Street has undergone quite a significant identity shift in the last 30 years or so. Once upon a time, this was an establishment church where the ‘who’s who’ attended. The pulpit was donated by the Fulford family (as in the Fulford mansion and Pink Pills for Pale People!). You can read about this in our history book. But one of my favourite pictures in the book was when one of the daughters of George T. Fulford was getting married here on September 7th, 1905.

The picture shows garlands of flowers strung from the front of the church to the side balconies. The prime minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, was present at the wedding,

along with several Cabinet Ministers, the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and people like Lord Strathcona — anyone who was anyone was here!

There were a lot of prominent people here over the years and the church had a formal tone. In the 50's the ushers wore morning coats to take up the offering, and when elders served communion, it was finely choreographed. They literally had rehearsals for communion!

I had a great aunt who lived to 103. Her father was a Methodist minister — my great-grandfather, who was ordained 100 years before me — served in churches around the Brockville area but never at Wall Street. My great-aunt towards the end had significant dementia. Whenever I visited her, she would ask me what I did for a living, and I would tell her I was a minister. She was always surprised, and then she'd ask me what church I served. When I told her 'Wall Street', she'd get a startled, disbelieving look and then she'd say: "Well, in *my* day Wall Street was *the* church!" (as if to say it's standards must have lowered significantly if I was the minister!). And indeed they have!

We are not that church anymore. About 25 years ago things started to shift. The church intentionally became more missional, reaching out to the Recovery community — those who were in programs of AA in our building and across the street at the residential treatment home for men, Brock Cottage. The Sunday suppers got going. The music began to change. The church offices moved from the back where only members could find them, to the front so that people who weren't familiar with the church might come and find the doors open during the week. **And slowly but surely, instead of the "who's who" coming to church, all sorts of characters started coming!** (Turn to your neighbour and say, "Clearly they'll let anyone in here!") There's a song we are singing after I stop talking, and there is a line in it I love that describes the church: "Come meet this motley crew of misfits, These liars and these thieves. There's no one unwelcome here ...!"

God Loves ALL. So do we!

We're shifting and growing again. The question we've been asking for the past year has been "What do we need to do to keep this church healthy and vibrant for the next many years, for the next generations?"

If our church went to a doctor, I'm not sure if they'd want to fatten us up or put us on a diet. I suspect the doctor would order both. At least that's what I notice in the strategic plan. On the one hand we need to streamline some of what we do, because we do a lot. We get new ideas and start those, but we have a hard time letting go of things that we've done for a long time. Some people call Fall the season of letting go. The trees let go of their leaves. What do we need to let go of? There is newness we are called into, and there are some things we have to let go of. We may change or let go of our governance structure. We need to streamline governance structure so that it is simpler and more efficient, with greater communication.

But we also need to find ways to grow and fatten up our leadership pool. We are often stretched thin. When it comes to being part of the church—part of the body of Christ—we are each given role and a gift to share.

In the scripture Paul doesn't just stop at saying that the church is the body of Christ, he takes it to the next level to say that "little or old, you matter!" The individual parts of the body matter! You who have decided to follow Jesus — you are one of the parts of the body. Paul's point is that different people within the church and different churches within the wider network of Christian churches have different callings and different abilities — but we are all part of the mission of Jesus. Unity in diversity and wonderful diversity in unity! We all belong together even if we are different, and our differences are part of what makes us strong and rich and beautiful.

Your part of the body, or your role in the church might be intensive, like chairing a team or a committee for a time, and it might be a quieter role of calling people through the 'In Touch' team to check in and see how people are doing. Neither is more or less important, and each is critical.

How do you know what part you are called to play in the church? This is what we call **discernment**. Pray about it. Ask Jesus, how do you want me to serve you? Generally, God uses us in ways that make sense. (The odds are slim that God is going to use me to bake lemon meringue pies for Yuletide Fare!) There are exceptions, but generally you'll enjoy and be good at what you are called to. You might need training and more practice, but a sign that you are called to it is that it brings you satisfaction and others value it, *and it meets a need beyond you*. You

might be a champion giant pumpkin grower but if it doesn't meet a wider need — that's a hobby, not a calling. Hobbies are good to have. But if you want to feel a sense of purpose, if you want to get at that question, "Why am I here? What's my purpose in life?" Then seek out God's call for you and exercise it. Nothing is more amazing when your gifts and passion meets the world's great need.

If we don't play our part, the whole body suffers. I remember Nicky Gumbel, of Alpha fame, used to say that the church was often like a Soccer match with "twenty-two people desperately in need of a rest, being watched by 22,000 people desperately in need of exercise." I don't think that is the case here in this church. We have an army of volunteers, but there are definitely gaps where we need more leaders. Two areas of significance are 1) people who are called to help children, youth and families grow in their faith; and 2) people who can serve God by helping with the operations of the church – the physical, but even more the financial/fundraising/ grant application.

With that I've covered two more themes of our Strategic Plan: *Leadership Empowerment* and *Operational Sustainability*.

If you're going to follow Jesus, you will always be called to grow. You will always be called into new places and called to let go of some old places or things. We need to focus on God's call for us today.

We are called to reach out with the transforming love of Jesus. The mission of the church really has not changed since the early days of this church but sharing that love has changed.

This church is giving new life and new hope to so many people who need it — including me. Hands up if you feel like there's some new life here. Hands up if you feel like you've changed, even just a little, by the love of Jesus flowing in this place.

I received this message from a former member who has since moved away and this is part of what they said:

"Your church helped me back to a sobriety Yes, saved my life you all did! All those hospitalizations while I was at your church ... I was a wreck. You came and prayed with me in hospital that one time, do you recall? Anyway, keep up the

good work. By the way, I will never forget how great your father was. Just excellent. Take care.”

“Saved my life you all did.” I marvel at statements like this! What did I do? Not much really. I said a prayer, I helped to create a space where all are welcome so that God can work! What did you do? Most of you also probably did small things that contributed to a miracle. God is at work in me and in you. Believe it! It’s true but let me tell you: when we come together as the church, as we become the body of Christ, the lost are found, the left-out find belonging, the despairing find hope and lives are literally saved.

May this church continue to grow and change — not just for the fun of it — but because Jesus lives in us. May we grow and change so that we can keep sharing that love and hope with others in our community and beyond.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. – Ephesians 3:20-21. Thanks be to God. Amen.