

Third Corinthians Talk 1 Cor 12 12-31

In the past I have been on many courses to do with work although courses I go on now tend to be mainly golf courses.

A popular theme for a work type course is teams, team building and development, leading teams and so forth.

Very important that in any organisation the **whole** is **greater** than the **sum of the parts**.

Hence we get such insights as:

- no I in team,
- **T.E.A.M.** together everyone achieves more.

Many away day type activities have been invented to support team development and bonding from building structures from newspaper or uncooked spaghetti, paint balling, even boot camps.

Paul's vision for a team, in this case Corinth's Christian community, comes in our first reading - have it please p1089

His picture of a team is based upon the human body and its various parts.

- The body has not one part but many v 20, and **all** are important v25, 26.

We all have a part to play, certainly **different** parts but **all** make a vital contribution.

- Indeed all are **equally** important v22, 23. We will not be indelicate here but the parts that seem weaker receive affirmative action to ensure that there is equality, even a place of special honour.

St Laurence of Rome was asked to give up the treasures of the church. He presented to the emperor's men a number of disadvantaged people, the poor, the crippled, the blind, the suffering, declaring, in line with Paul's model, that these were the **true treasures** of the church. This act led to his martyrdom.¹

- Paul is very conscious of differing **levels of self esteem**. In v 15 the foot says because I am not a hand I don't belong. The foot has low self esteem and sees itself as less than the hand. Contrast the head v 21 which has excessive self esteem and is dismissive of the feet saying I don't need you. In v17 we get the absurd picture of a whole body being an ear – just an ear!

Each part is equally important, none should see themselves as better or inferior. No place for excessively **self effacing** behaviour equally no place for any **pompous posturing** as though no one else's contribution counts.

It is this body that is the community of Christians, ie the church. The people of Christ, the men and women of the cross.

I came across this WSC speech recently made to the Canadian parliament in 1941.

¹ From Wikipedia web search

*There is no room now for the dilettante, the weakling, for the shirker of the sluggard. The mine, the factory, the dockyard, the salt sea waves, the fields to till, the home, the hospital, the chair of the scientist, the pulpit of the preacher – from the highest to the humblest tasks, all are of equal honour; all have their part to play.*²

Here the **whole allied cause is a team** all have a part to play.

The underlying theme for this mini series is **the church that is purpose driven**. What is our **purpose**? What is the aim, the reason for our existence? What is our mission, **our purpose**?

The mission of the allies was obvious – military victory, we shall never surrender. But what about us, the church?

In v27 we have *You are the body of Christ, each one of you are part of it.*

When Jesus was on earth he had a human body. Now his body is **ourselves**. On earth his mission was **to announce and to proclaim the kingdom**, and then, as we saw last week, to secure it by dying on the cross.

So too our mission as the new body of Christ is to worship God, including that **same kingdom work of proclamation** that Jesus did.

The church is the body of Christ. In scripture the word **ekklesia** translated church is used many times. It never means a building; it **always means a community**, a body, a team. (As we saw on one of our history evenings, church building started centuries later.) We need to rediscover that **community** meaning and learn how to be that **effective team**, like in the human body each one of us a part.

At the last Parochial Church Council meeting (PCC = elected reps of the whole community) we discussed just this – **what is our purpose as the body of Christ?** According to national CE legislation, the PCCs job is 3 fold³

- To promote the Gospel of our LJC, then
- ‘to cooperate with the incumbent in promoting to the parish the whole **mission** of the church, **pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical**’, then and
- almost as an after thought it adds something about ‘**maintenance responsibilities for our premises**’.

Here then is our mission. To work with leadership – and any team needs a captain, a leader – to **promote the gospel** and engage in the whole mission of the church

How well are we doing? What would Ofsted (or Ofchurch) have to say? I suspect we are better in some areas than others. Where we take things on as a team we do well, **social** might be an example of that, lots get involved. Where we maybe leave it all to others,

² Quoted in Farmelo’s 2009 biography of Paul Dirac ch 23.

³ Our own APCM annual report Doc B 27 April 2009

such as the clergy, we do less well **pastoral and evangelism** maybe examples of that. **Maintaining buildings** we are probably quite good at.

OFSTED now sometimes issue to school something called '**a notice to improve**'. Once this category was called '**serious weaknesses**'.

One area which I feel passionately that we need to improve is **evangelism**, seeking to bring folk to faith, from darkness to light. Getting people converted. Notice to improve!

CT Studd, England cricketer who became a missionary in China, India and finally Africa put it like this: (he played in the 1882 Oval test where the bails became ashes! His contribution 0 and 0*!)

*Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.*⁴

Of course we don't always talk that way anymore, but if terminology has changed the real **biblical gospel** hasn't and we are all **missionaries to the UK, to Broxbourne-Wormley. Church is about rescue!**

Let us be quite clear **all** Christians have this task. As Jesus said, '*let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*'

We may need help and this came out of the PCC discussion. How can we in modern sophisticated Hertfordshire tell our personal story of faith to others, draw new folk into God's way as it were, without looking like some kind of eccentric fanatic?

I am convinced that perhaps our greatest **team** challenge as a parish is to help folk to faith, and thence to discipleship. In my recent training review with Ian I identified training in personal evangelism as something that might help. Maybe it's something we all need and I am looking into that.

So Evangelism. One example of an area to work on, and one we must come back to.

If there are things you can offer, gifts you have, time you can give, to support any aspect of the church's mission including practical work on our facilities, then please speak to us.

It is important for us all to look at ourselves and consider what **more we might do in any area of service** and be for Christ as members of his body, just as Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians.

RS

⁴ Cricinfo website

