

# TFTD L19 "Now you are the body of Christ"

Many thanks to Rod Hill for this personal reflection based on 1 Corinthians 12.27-30.



One of the 'gifts' that the Methodist Church gives to its ministers is a period of 3 months of sabbatical leave every seven years. I was due to take my final sabbatical from March to May of 2020 and, as part of that, to visit Western Australia and explore what they were doing with regard to Fresh Expressions of Church. I was due to fly out on the day that the first lockdown started, but it didn't happen! So, I will be taking this period of sabbatical leave over the next three months, starting on April 4<sup>th</sup> – next Monday.

A sabbatical is a period when we are freed to do ministry differently. We don't stop being ministers, but we do less of the usual 'ministry things.' It gives us time to read, reflect, contemplate, pray ... I shall be taking time to reflect on my 33 years as a Methodist minister, but I'm already very clear that I have been really privileged to work with some highly gifted people over the years – gifted in all sorts of ways and amongst those have been my ecumenical colleagues in ministry.

In my first appointment, in rural East Yorkshire, the Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches worked very well together and one summer we ran an ecumenical mission to the town. As part of that the Parish Priest and I preached in each other's churches. Of course, it wasn't possible for me to receive the elements at the Roman Mass, nor for my colleague to receive at our communion service. We talked at some length about this, and Fr. Michael concluded by saying "This is just one of the painful things with which we must live on our ecumenical journey."

In Wimbledon, a fantastic group of clergy met together every year for six weeks of Bible study (once a week) in Lent and pre-advent. It was a wonderful time of sharing and valuing the rich variety of gifts of my colleagues, but it was always my Roman Catholic colleague, Fr. Martin, who kept reminding us of the need to read the text, "Let's get back to the text," was his constant plea as we wandered off into our own experiences and reflections!

In Sheffield I was the Methodist minister in a remarkably effective Anglican-Methodist Local Ecumenical partnership. I know that I was something of a 'Thorn in the Flesh' for my Anglican colleague, Nick, as I kept reminding him that the property in which we worshipped was a Methodist building; but we were constantly working together to develop

a new church that brought out the best of our two traditions and what a rich blessing of traditions that is. I remember well the nerves I had before presiding for the first time at a sung Eucharist, using the 1662 rite, but what a privilege! What a joy to have Nick as a full member of our Methodist circuit staff team!

Here in Alderley Edge, it's a delight to see Churches Together in Alderley flourishing. It's a joy to work with such a great Ecumenical team on these 'Thoughts for the Day,' Lent study groups and in all sorts of other ways. We are stronger together!

I am really looking forward to sharing Holy Week with you all in Alderley Edge this year, part of our ecumenical journeying together; and what a fantastic team of ministers we have to share in that journey. But it isn't all about the ministers! It's about the churches.

Over the years I have been fortunate to have worked with Church people from a wide variety of traditions and experience and what a blessing it is. God gives gifts galore to the people of God.

A little while ago Walter Bruggeman wrote a paper entitled "The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity" in which he developed his thesis that God created a world of great abundance. If we share, there is enough for all. He was writing, of course, about sharing the abundance of material things on earth, but I think that it's also true of the gifts and graces that God brings. God is a God of generosity, who gives and gives and gives again. What a blessing!

God gives all of the gifts and graces that the Church needs in order to fulfil the mission to which God is calling us "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12.27)

© Rod Hill  
Methodist Minister  
31st March 2022