

**Sermon to mark the inauguration of the Bishop's Hatfield Team Ministry, 29 January 2006, preached by the Bishop of Hertford**

*'Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many'.*

1 Corinthians 12:14

It is very good to be with you all this evening and for the first time to be amongst you in a new way, in this new grouping, the Bishop's Hatfield Team Ministry. For the people and parish of St John's, Lemsford and of St Mary's, North Mymms today marks a wholly new stage in your life and ministry, and your presence means that there is also fundamental change for the people and districts of St Michael's, St Etheldreda's, St Luke's and St John's. You together give fresh expression to the truth which St Paul proclaims - *'the body does not consist of one member but of many'*.

That theological reality - that we are not individual Christians or churches or congregations - can sometimes be obscured by our commitment and affection for the immediately local. When we speak of 'my church' we instinctively and naturally mean St John's or St Mary's, St Luke's, St Etheldreda's or St Michael's. Your new interdependence and structure proclaims that you know that the body does not consist of one member, but of many.

As I go about Hertfordshire it is a delight for me to be reminded many times a week that there are many of us in the body of Christ with varieties of gifts, services and activities serving God in the name of our one Lord Jesus Christ. It is not that it is convenient for us to be one in Christ, administratively helpful, or structurally neat, or financially desirable, or effective in mission - it is simply the truth - all the members of the body though many are one body. St Paul's famous words speak of our diversity, our rich diversity, but our fundamental unity.

We in Bishop's Hatfield have a special reason to celebrate that and to develop its implications for ourselves, for the Deanery and Diocese, and above all to be many-but-one for Jesus.

I wonder what you would say if you were asked to sum up what St Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

*‘To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.’*

Think back to your school days and précis those verses, or summarize them. You might say, ‘We are all so different because the Holy Spirit gives to each of us different gifts but it is the one Holy Spirit empowering every person’. Well you’d be right - but you’d have spoken in terms of difference. I’d prefer to say: ‘The Spirit empowers each one of us and we are distinguished by the variety of gifts we offer’.

When you turn to the back cover of tonight’s Order of Service you see a list of ministers who display a rich variety of God’s gifts in the service and faith of Jesus Christ. These people are distinguished by their skills, gifts, services and activities - and we honour them. If that is true of Readers and clergy - and it is -how much more is it true of the wealth of resources we have here in the people of this Team along with its church buildings, its halls, its schools and all its resources of time, talent and money.

Tonight we celebrate that wealth and the richness of God’s generosity to us, 13 ministers, a similar number of Wardens, electoral rolls of well over 600, committed members of church councils, reserves, plant and facilities, but above all personal presence in our communities as friends, neighbours and colleagues. Together we are many and we are rich in resources - how wonderful that we are not isolated for the one body is made up of the many.

Today we are at the start of a further adventure in discipleship. As friends and followers of Jesus Christ we are called to go with Jesus as he reaches out to the men, women and children of our parishes and communities. It is natural that we ask what we are to do, what we can

bring to the mission and to focus that willing love and service into what we call our Vision for Action. Like all Visions it involves ambition - and the hymn has put it well, 'We have a gospel to proclaim, good news for all'. Like any bold ambition it needs our active commitment - as another hymn tonight put it, 'Lord, in living power remake us...past put behind us, for the future take us, to live for Christ alone'.

In the Vision for Action prayer we ask God to equip, excite and empower us. I call them the three 'Es' of Vision for Action. Brother Roger, the founder and Prior of the Taizé Community in France (committed incidentally to an ecumenical understanding of a church of the very many but one in Christ) was brutally and tragically murdered during worship in Taizé last summer. Some of us from this new Team and elsewhere in the diocese had been in Taizé and with Brother Roger only a couple of weeks earlier. His 2006 annual letter from Taizé was in draft when he died and has now been completed and published as his Unfinished Letter. In it he asks:

*'are we sufficiently aware that God trusts us so much that he has a call for each one of us? What is that call? God invites us to love as he loves. And there is no deeper love than to go to the point of giving oneself, for God and for others. Whoever lives a life rooted in God chooses to love. And a heart resolved to love can radiate goodness without limits'.*

That is what we, many as we are, all want to do as one. So we pray to God, in the love of the Son, that the Holy Spirit will

*'equip us, for the challenge ahead,  
excite us to follow your vision,  
and empower us in witness  
and service'*

To God be the glory, through Jesus our Saviour and mighty Redeemer.

Amen

*[Shortened version of sermon preached on 29 January 2006 by  
Christopher, Bishop of Hertford]*