

## Church Anatomy

### 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

A bright yellow highway department truck crept along a city street. A worker slowly climbed out of the truck and dug a large hole in the grassy strip between the sidewalk and the curb. A few minutes later, a second worker got out of the truck. He filled the hole that was just dug and tamped down the dirt. A few yards down the street, they repeated the procedure, then again and again. An elderly woman was watching from her front porch. Finally, she walked over to the workers and asked, "What in the world are you doing?" One of the workers said, "We're on an urban beautification project." "Beautification?" the woman asked in dismay. "What's so beautiful about all those filled in holes?" "Well, you see," said the worker, "the man whose job is to plant the trees in the holes is out sick today, and there's nobody available to take his place."

Obviously, something like that would never happen in real life, right? It's just a tongue-in-cheek reminder that it takes the contributions of an entire crew to do the job assigned to it. Sometimes though, a little theater of the absurd like this can be just what the doctor ordered to shine a light on a situation that demands attention.

There were problems with the church of Corinth that the Apostle Paul knew cried out for attention. And he addressed some of them in this First Epistle to the Corinthians, through an absurd lesson in human anatomy. Paul pointed out that a physical human body is made up of a variety of different parts, each uniquely designed for a specific purpose, which is indispensable to the health and survival of the whole body. Feet carry us from one place to another. Eyes let us see where we are going. Hands build, plant and produce. Ears let us listen to instruction and guidance.

But Paul turns what everyone knows about the anatomy of the human body into an insight concerning the anatomy of the Church. He reminded them that together they are the Body of Christ. And just as a person's body is equipped with many different parts with all kinds of separate functions, in the end we are designed by God in such a way that all the different parts work together for the benefit of the whole body.

He cautioned against any one of them thinking that what they had to contribute to the whole wasn't important. He said, "If the foot would say, 'because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?"

Here's where I think a visual aid would have been a big help to Paul in getting his message across. Maybe one of those Mr. Potato Head toys that let you add, remove and swap body

parts on the potato body. He could have switched the positions of the hands and feet to demonstrate how having hands below our ankles would be a clumsy and inefficient means of getting from one place to another. And having feet where our hands belong would rob us of the dexterity needed to do tasks that hands are designed to do. Putting Mr. Potato Head's ears where his eyes are supposed to be would leave him bumping into all kinds of things.

Paul summed up his message in this way, "As it is, God has arranged the members of the body, each one of them as God chose." Which is true for both the human body, and the Body of Christ—the Church. Between the lines of Paul's lesson in Church Anatomy and how each of us has something uniquely essential to the ministry of the church, runs a deeper message. Which is, how being a participating member of the church helps us each realize a sense of our own value, not by comparing ourselves to others, but in appreciation of who God created us to be and what God created us for.

Most of you are used to seeing me up here by myself looking out at all of you and speaking to the whole congregation. But I am by nature an introvert, and back in my twenties, when I first started attending church of my own free will, I kept a low profile in a back corner pew and didn't have much to say. Then one day, someone approached me and asked if I would be willing to be in charge of asking people to set up and provide refreshments for the after-worship coffee hours. Uncertain though I was, I agreed to take on that task. The next Sunday, during the opening announcements, I took a deep breath, walked from my customary back corner pew up to the front of the sanctuary and for the first time ever, stood facing the whole congregation. I introduced myself and told them that I looked forward to getting better acquainted with all of them, because I would be asking them to host a coffee hour now and then.

That simple job was big step in my feeling like a real part of that church. Time went on and then, I was asked to help lead the Youth Group, and then to teach a Sunday school class and then to be a deacon and then to preach on laity Sundays. Until eventually, in all those voices inviting me to explore new ways of getting to know the congregation—and getting more in touch with my own sense of Christian identity—I began to hear God's voice, calling me to pursue the path to ordained ministry. But of course, it had always been God's voice speaking; speaking through all those other people, all those other times, with all those other invitations to my being more a part of the church.

When you go home this morning and log into the Annual Church Meeting on Zoom, you will notice that there are still unfilled positions. Vacancies in the anatomy of First Congregational Church. Maybe you were asked by a member of the Nominating Committee to serve on a committee or as an Officer, and you declined the invitation for very good reasons. Maybe nobody asked you, and so you think it's because you have nothing of value to offer.

None of us can be all things, all the time. But prayerfully consider if this might be **your time** to be who **you can be**. Let Paul's lesson in Church Anatomy remind you that there is a role in the church that you are uniquely qualified to fill. And that, sometimes it is in accepting or

volunteering for such a role, that you not only serve God, and serve others, but that you discover and appreciate the essential part of the Body of Christ that God has arranged for you to be.

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