

The Bible is all about relationships – God’s relationship to humanity, and the human struggle to understand the meaning of that relationship; and our relationship with one another. Christian theology begins with an understanding of relationship – that of God in Trinity revealed through Scripture and the tradition of the Church. In Trinity God is in relationship – as the last Archbishop of Canterbury writes “God in God's own self is already a pattern of loving relationship: the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit” (from <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/585/the-finality-of-christ-in-a-pluralist-world#sthash.GvNxNdke.dpuf>)

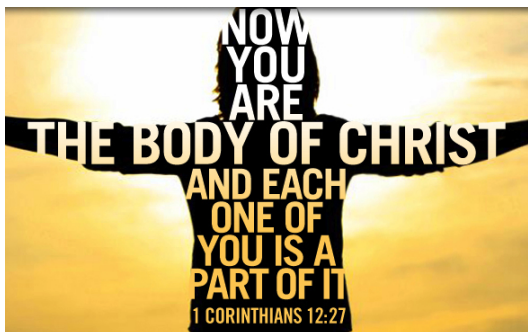
We are made to be in relationship with one another – from the creation myth of Genesis (“it is not good for the man to be alone” Genesis 2.18 – a statement not (I believe) solely regarding sexuality and marriage, but the essential nature of human beings...) to the description of the new community in Christ, the Church, we see our calling to be with, for and relating to one another. We often find it easier, however, to get to grips with loving those outside of the Church, and serving Christ in those who are in need, than we do to applying principals of Christ-like love to one another.

We are called not just to get on with one another in the Church but to be committed to one another, to love one another and even to serve one another. It’s so important that Jesus gave it as a command, not something he was prone to do. This command leads into a calling to serve and love one another – and is exemplified in Jesus washing the feet of his disciples as an example of the attitude we are to hold towards one another.



The early Church soon picked up on the importance of a shared journey of faith – so much so that the first record of anything like a ‘Church’ is described as gathering together in each other’s homes daily for worship, and they all ‘had everything in common.’ (Acts 4.32-34)

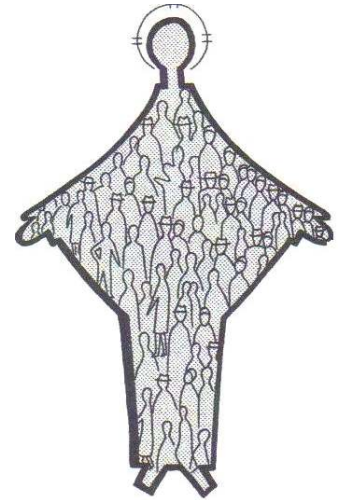
The most vivid image of Church, perhaps, is found in Paul’s image of ‘The Body of Christ’ – suggesting that those who are following Christ should be bound together as intimately as a human body is – with organs, flesh, tendons, sinew, muscle, bone all integrated. This is the calling of those who call themselves to be Christians

**1 Corinthians 12**

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit... ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

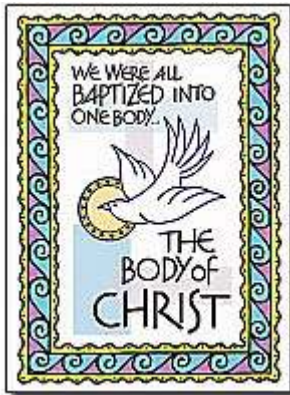
Paul's statement in **Romans 12.5** which is possibly his most carefully worked book of theological reflection on the relationship of God to humanity and humanity to one another in the Church continues this theme
“...so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”



The image of ‘members one of another’ suggests a mutuality, a shared interdependence that is the hallmark of the living body of Christ, the Church.

There's no escaping the idea that those who call themselves Christians are to be in a new kind of relationship with one another, centred on and built around the Eucharist and the shared experience of worship – as an expression of our togetherness in Christ. As **1 Corinthians 10.17** says “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

Of course this comes with a certain demand, that we open ourselves to one another, build up our fellowship, our friendships, our sense of community, our common life. Of course that should not just be in worship (though that is foundational) but in serious business of having fun and learning to enjoy one another's company. It should be in shared endeavour, in service to one another and to the world around us. It should be about learning to be a loving, welcoming, inclusive community.



We are the body of Christ.
In the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.
Let us then pursue all that makes for peace
and builds up our common life.
cf 1 Corinthians 12.13; Romans 14.19

*From: Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England.
Introductions to the Peace.*

And in case there is any doubt about how the early Church saw this intimate relationship then here is a part of Ephesians, commonly (though possibly erroneously) attributed to St Paul:

Ephesians 4

¹⁴We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

So we have three questions to ponder and take with us:

1. Who are “we”?
2. What does it mean to be a church community?
3. What do you feel nurtures your relationships?