

OUR MISSION

Ephesians 4:1-16

When papa put the paper on the wall
He put the parlor paper in the hall
He papered up the chairs; he papered up the stairs
He even put the paper on grandma's shawl

When papa put the paper on the wall
He spilled a pot of paste upon us all
Now we all stick together like birds of a feather
Since papa put the paper on the wall

What makes us as the Church stick together like birds of a feather? What is **the glue that holds this parish together** as a fellowship of Jesus Christ? Our parish mission speaks of it. So does today's Epistle lesson from Ephesians 4:1-16.

Our parish mission states that,

St. John's is a wonderfully diverse community of faith rooted in the heart of downtown Stamford, where the Holy Spirit is leading us toward a new humanity in Christ. We embrace this vision by welcoming all people to:

- *Celebrate God in the beauty of holiness through the richness of Anglican worship and glorious music;*
- *Strengthen their spiritual journeys through prayer, study and scripture; and*
- *Serve as instruments of God's peace, justice and love in the world.*

Our stated parish mission, hammered out by the Vestry over several months last fall and approved by the parish at our Annual Meeting in January, is very much a reflection of the admonition to the Church in Ephesians 4:1-16.

There are three key things this passage says about the Church of Jesus Christ. 1) First, we are **one**. Paul evokes all that we share in common. There is **one body** – the Body of Christ – and each of us are members of that one body. There is **one Spirit**. God's Spirit is not divided, even though that Spirit is poured out freely on all God's people individually, God's Spirit, God's purpose is singular. There is **one eternal hope of our calling**. We are called to *Communion* with God and one another – a communion that will last for ever. There is **one Lord** Jesus Christ who is our Lord and Savior. There is **one faith**. Despite all the differences and disagreements between Christians and Christian denominations there is but **one faith** we ultimately all share in Christ. There is **one baptism** into which each of us was reborn and adopted as God's own special children. There is **one God and Father of us all**. Jesus taught us to call God "*our Father*" and

through Christ Jesus' sacrifice on the cross we who were lost have been reclaimed as God's own beloved children. So, there is **one God and Father of us all**.

Our unity is a given – given us as a gift in God. It just is. We share **one body**. There is **one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all**. But, in another sense, our unity is a goal. Paul both reminds us that we are indeed one and admonishes us to work towards unity and peace.

A key concept in our parish mission statement was inspired from the words of Ephesians 2: 14-16. Paul passionately proclaimed that the dividing walls of hostility between Jews and Greeks, between different races and cultures and religions, had all been broken down by Christ. There are no longer chosen and unchosen people. For Christ Jesus

is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

We at St. John's are a wonderfully diverse community of Christian people gathered in the heart of downtown Stamford. In the midst of our diversity we remember particularly that the Holy Spirit is leading us to that "*New Humanity*" Paul spoke of in Ephesians 2:15. The divisions and challenges of race, culture, language, gender and even political opinions are overcome in Christ. And so we rejoice in and boldly proclaim our unity in Jesus. For in Christ we are part of a *new humanity*.

(2) A second thing this passage tells us about the Church of Christ is that we are uniquely and wonderfully *gifted*. The Holy Spirit gives each of us unique gifts and abilities to share with the Church. Paul focuses on gifts of leadership. In St. John's case *the gifts that he gave were that some would be Vestry members, some would be Wardens and Treasurer, committee members, teachers and door persons, acolytes, ushers, choir members and altar guild, some would be Children's and Family Ministry Leaders, and Administrators and musicians, seminarians, deacons and priests*. There are many different and ever changing roles but all are gifted by the Holy Spirit to work together as Christ's Body in the world.

We have our different roles and are all gifted by God's Spirit in community for a very specific purpose: "*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*" At St. John's, as we state in our mission, we equip people through worshipping in our Anglican heritage in the beauty of holiness with glorious music. We equip people as we strengthen our spiritual journeys in prayer, study and Holy Scripture. And we equip people to *serve as instruments of God's peace, justice and love in the world*. We are gifted and the purpose of our spiritual gifts

is to *equip* us all – to give us each the tools we need to be the Body of Christ and to do the work of ministry.

(3) The third thing this passage tells us about the Church of Christ is that we are to live into the example and the life of Christ. Jesus is the *goal*, the *means* to get there and the *standard*. Our goal is to grow into Christ as his Body. Jesus is the measuring stick– the *standard* – by which we do it. Jesus is our *example*. He showed us how to serve, how to love, how to give. The one who *ascended* into heaven is the one who first *descended*. God took on human flesh and *descended* to earth to take on our humanity. The incarnate Lord *descended* to the pain and humility of physical torture and death upon a cross in order to bear our burdens and heal us of our own brokenness. And it is by our new life in him that we are inspired and strengthened to love as he loved. A long time ago a theologian coined a phrase to remind us what Jesus was always doing: “*othering*.” We follow Christ and grow into Christ’s stature by putting *others* first and ourselves second.

St. John’s Church has many unique gifts and responsibilities. We are blessed indeed with a wonderfully diverse group of people in our congregation, something we all treasure. It is both gift and challenge to come together from different backgrounds and cultures and perspectives. We need to celebrate our differences as well as affirm our unity in Christ. Most of all we need to continuously work to listen to one another, to support, to share, to honor each other and to work together in love.

As a downtown church endowed with a significant income from property – Canterbury Green – developed on our land, as well as the significant gifts we each bring, we have an important role to play, offering a beautiful sanctuary for worship, and developing our large parish plant to be a usable center of support and ministry within downtown Stamford. We have a marvelous life in Christ to continuously celebrate, develop and grow as a Christian community. We have a marvelous life in Christ to reach out and share with others – perhaps our friends, family, neighbors and associates – who if we but asked them might be interested in discovering for themselves. We have marvelous gifts to share with people in Stamford, with our mission in Haiti, and beyond.

The glue that continues to stick us together is our loving Father. Like the papa in the silly song with which I began our Father spills his sticky love all over the place. It is in His love, by His grace that we come together as His Church, His holy people in the world. And it is by His love, His Grace that we are sent as his people in the midst of a needy world.

Amen.