

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

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Today we have heard part of an Epistle, an ancient letter written around the year 53 AD, by Paul an apostle, a follower of Jesus, to a church he founded in Corinth, Greece. The first churches, like the church in Corinth, were very diverse communities made up of Jewish and non-Jewish people, men and women, young and elderly, people who were slaves and those who were slave owners, those with abundant wealth and power and those with not enough to get by and no voice in society. This richly diverse group shared in leadership, worship, and community together. It shouldn't surprise us that it didn't take long for conflicts to arise and people to begin to ask "who is the most important in this new community?" That is what is happening in Corinth and one of the reasons why Paul is writing a letter to the church he founded there.

Paul gives a beautiful reflection on the blessings of diversity. He talks about the body, how it works together and how the parts that seem the weakest are lifted up and supported. He reminds the congregation that they are all one through God's Spirit, part of one body of Christ. He reminds the congregation that they are enriched by their diversity of passions, skills, and life experiences and how they should strive to lift one another up.

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Today we are marking our Annual meeting Sunday. It's a wonderful day in the church. It is a time to celebrate the great gifts of skills, passion, and relationships that are shared here. This church is richer because of each

one of us. We each shape this place and the ministry that happens within these walls and that flows out of this building. God's Spirit is alive in each one of us drawing us together, connecting us, and inspiring us to do great things as the Body of Christ, Christ's hands and feet right here and right now.

Today I'm inviting us to ponder, to allow God's Spirit to stir our skills, passion, stories, and imaginations as we reflect on who we are as Grace United Church and where God is leading us. We'll be reflecting on three questions, spending only a short two minutes on each one. Don't worry about getting everything down or finding the right words, just reflect and know that what you write is valuable. When you hear the sound of this singing bowl that means we'll move onto the next question. In your bulletin there are some post-it notes for you to jot down some of your thoughts and there are extra post-its at the back. In the pews are pencils, I know many of you have pens, and at the back are extra markers. At the end of the service, I invite you to put your responses in the baskets at the back of the church and at the side door. Our responses will be put onto poster boards later and displayed in the church hall during coffee hours. Our responses will help connect us and inspire us as Grace United Church.

When you hear the ringing of the singing bowl, that will be our time to move into the next question.

1. Each of us has chosen to be here today, and to be part of Grace United Church. I invite you to write the number 1 on the top of a post-it note and reflect on what in our church you celebrate?

- maybe it's the music, the people, an activity that is happening, something about worship... just write whatever comes to your mind.
- Let God's spirit stir within you and inspire you. What do you celebrate in our church?

2. A strong community is capable of holding both celebration and pain. There are painful pieces of our life together, disagreements and struggles, changes and challenges that are difficult to face. We shouldn't be afraid of pain and grief, they are powerful teachers. Put the number 2 on the top of another post-it note and ponder "what do you grieve in our church?"

- Maybe it's the absence of people no longer here through death, or changes in culture, or past disagreements. Maybe it's the empty pews. Maybe its restrictions placed on us by our building, or maybe something else.
- Let God's spirit stir within you and inspire you. What do you grieve, where do you find sadness, or longing, or pain in our church?

3. Theologian Matthew Fox notes that on the spiritual path of life when we are able to celebrate and grieve we enter into a place of creativity. I invite you to write the number 3 on another post-it note and ponder "what new thing would you like to see happen here? Or maybe it's something re-newed, what thing would you like to see happen here again? Don't worry about how it would happen, or costs, don't worry about limiting yourself.

- Let God's spirit stir within you and inspire you. What new or renewed thing would you like to see happen here in our community of Grace United?

We are one in God's Spirit, and though diverse we are all important parts of the Body of Christ, of God's rich presence in this world.

Inspired by God's presence, let us continue to create a sacred space in which everyone is welcomed fully and encouraged to share their skills, passions, and life-experiences. May we see in one another God's blessing, and may we share God's blessing with one another, with our community, and with our world. For we are all an important part in the Sacred story of life. Amen.