

Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church
Rev. Bob Undercuffler

August 24, 2014
Newark, Delaware

Psalm 138
I Corinthians 12:12-27

“We Are Members”

A member. A church member.

That word, “MEMBER” is repeated through the New Testament and you know that it means more than member of an organization.

**More than a club member or team member.
BUT MEMBER OF A BODY.**

Think about it ... look at your fingers ... they are members of your body.

**Your hand. It’s a member of your body.
Your arm. It’s a member of your body.**

**When we apply this idea of church membership as being ...
A MEMBER OF A BODY...**

**Membership within a body...
...we will have gone a long way towards
strengthening our church ...
refreshing our church’s life.
Indeed ...uplifting the entire
Presbyterian Church.**

**Paul considered THE BODY –
and in moments of insight and inspiration he
understood ...
THAT IS THE WAY IT IS WITH FOLLOWERS OF
JESUS CHRIST...**

**THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST ...
... AND EACH OF US MEMBERS!**

IN THE FIRST PLACE – a member is interdependent.

**Walking our neighborhood streets these days –
Or on Main Street in Newark --**

we may see some interesting sights –

**BUT I NEVER SAW A NOSE – UNAIDED AND
UNASSISTED – WALKING DOWN THE SIDEWALK.**

And athletes make incredible plays –

And though I watched quite a bit of the Philadelphia Little League team's march to the World Series in Williamsport, i didn't see mon'et davis throw her 70 mile per hour fast ball without an arm —

**NO -- THE RULE IS THIS – IF YOU ARE A PART OF THE
BODY YOU ARE INTERDEPENDENT. AND IF YOU ARE NOT
INTERPENDENT – YOU ARE NOT A PART OF THE BODY.**

WITH THE BODY -- THERE IS NO TIME FOR FREE-LANCING!

Around in northern Delaware, I've seen giant billboards advertising a church as Independent and Unaffiliated.

A church? Well, that's not my understanding of church.

Nor is it the Biblical understanding.

Certainly not the Presbyterian understanding of church.

LIKEMINDED PEOPLE, PERHAPS ...

**BUT NOT INTERDEPENDENT, RELATIONSHIP
CREATING... FELLOWSHIP EXTENDING –
HOSPITALITY CELEBRATING -- BODY MEMBERS.**

Recall how Jesus said, “Wherever two or more are gathered together in my name – there I am in the midst of them!”?

why not one? – Why does it have to be two or three – or more?

Because in Christ's body a member does not stand-alone.

In Christ's body members are interdependent. members delight in one another.

members exist with others.

and members exist for others ...

for our community ...

and for the world.

IN THE SECOND PLACE –

In the body ... ONE MEMBER UNITES OTHER MEMBERS.

The forearm links the hand with the upper arm.

The hand links fingers to wrist and forearm.

There are ligaments

And joints

And muscles...

...all hooking one member to another.

So with members of the church ...

Each member links with another member.

Saul, soon to be Paul, discovered that linkage in his own life.

He had been persecuting followers of Christ.

Then Christ changed his life while Saul was on the road to Damascus.

But did those early Christians graciously accept Paul?

No...They were afraid of him. They knew too much about him.

They had heard too much.

Can a leopard change his spots? they wondered.

No, they knew.

But Barnabas be-friended Paul and personally linked him with other early Christians.

Paul was welcomed through Barnabas's friendship.

Studies have been made asking – “Why did you join a particular church?”

The highest percentage of people reply ...”because I was personally invited by a church member.”...

and then I was linked to other members by that one who invited me – so I became a part of the body.

---- grafted-into the body.

NOW THE NEXT THING ABOUT BEING A MEMBER OF THE BODY IS CLOSELY RELATED TO #2 –

A MEMBER SUSTAINS – HOLDS-ON TO – SUPPORTS – GIVES STRENGTH to OTHER MEMBERS.

Now that's only natural because we already observed – a member unites another two members...

and what we unite we also sustain.

what we bring together, we also hold together.

You don't let fly off into space.

In the body, it's difficult – yes, even close to impossible ... and very painful to lose a member.

I come home one afternoon and Pat asks –

“Bob, where is your nose?” “Bob, where is your arm?”

“Oh, don't worry Pat, I left them in the car. – But don't be alarmed ... they are safe in the trunk.”

NO – NO – No. In the body one member sustains another member – holds on to other members.

...and dismemberment is always accompanied by great pain and suffering.

And how about membership in the body – the church???

Sad to report -- Too easily members fly off ---

Or drop off

Or drift off.

or march off.

I've been ordained for 50 years – served churches – been around church people for 50 years –No, really over 70 years.

I've seen it all. I've heard all the reasons.

Still, It's tough to understand cutting self from the body.
TO BREAK COVENANT WITH GOD AND WITH OTHERS.

And so we sing, “Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts/our lives in Christian love.”

In the fourth place ... **IN THE BODY A MEMBER RECEIVES NOURISHMENT AND PASSES ALONG NOURISHMENT.**

There's a whole system of arteries and veins and capillaries passing blood through the entire body...through the arms ...wrist ...hands and fingers.

Down to the legs and toes ... and back again around and through the heart.

...Always pulsing –

Always feeding

Always nourishing the members of the body.

And a body member doesn't say, "I'm worried whether I'll have enough blood for tomorrow ... I'll close down and keep this blood stored in my heart. In reserve here in my heart... This way I'll always be assured I'll have enough blood to nourish my entire body for all time to come.

Were that to happen ... the body will wither and die.

Rather, the blood pulsates through the body ...

A body member receives blood ... and passes it along.

A body member receives nourishment ...and the body passes nourishment along and the entire body is fed and thrives.

That's the way it is with members of the body – the church – we receive nourishment ... and we pass it along.

That's what is so exciting about church – and session – and deacons.

Thrilling about those who work with children and youth

Who sing in the choir ... Who participate in the variety of good works of Meeting Ground, and Deep Roots, Hope Dining Room and Elkton Community kitchen ... Who Mentor ... and provide meals ... and assist with home repairs, who gather and give school supplies for the children of Downes Elementary school.

Who care for others in a wide variety of ways.

That's the rhythm of life – the heartbeat of the church ...

...For the members of the body are created to receive nourishment ... and to nourish others. And so life flows.

In the fifth place, the members PROVIDE ELASTICITY FOR THE BODY..

Great elasticity of the body. Even getting older ... with some arthritis ...

Yet some amount of elasticity remains.

I fear the elasticity of the church is threatened ... and so our very existence is threatened. Saved only by the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hardening of the arteries ... hardening of the lines between us.

And it's fatal.

Some say, "Believe this!" They go on, "How can you believe and accept that and still call yourself a Christian?"

Over the years I've found some who say, "Sing this!"

How can you like that anthem? That hymn?

Well, how can you like that praise song?

That rhythm?

Some insist, "Read this!" Or "Don't read that!"

Use these particular words to express your faith.

"Why can't you name the time and place when you made a commitment to Jesus Christ?"

"Everybody do it my way –

AND EVEN WORSE – MORE DEVASTATING –

"EVERYBODY DO IT JESUS' WAY –

AND I WILL TELL YOU EXACTLY WHAT JESUS' WAY IS.

Rather, in the body there is great elasticity – gracious, gracefilled flexibility.

Yes – we can sing that anthem – enjoy that hymn – thrill with that spiritual song ... appreciate rhythms, organ, piano and instruments ... for we are the body of Christ. the opportunity is for dissonance to blend into glorious harmony.

AND NOW THIS WITH THE BODY ... IN THE BODY –
-- THE HEAD UNITES IT ALL.
MARCHING ORDERS COME FROM THE HEAD.

And then are passed-along through the members
 –and action happens. life advances.
 graves are flung open.

Yes, there is organization –
 There are lines of communication.
 But always from the head...
 and along to the members.

...AND THE HEAD – JESUS, THE CHRIST.

Not the pastor ...nor clerk of session ... not the
 presbytery exec ... not the presbytery ---
 Rather, those leaders, at their best, point us to the
 great head of the church – Jesus.

**YES, Jesus, the Christ is the head of the BODY –Head of the
 church –**

And we are MEMBERS –
 So be alert to orders.
 Consider the orders.

Pray over the orders. (perhaps they are more like invitations)
 Consult with other body members about the orders.
 Pass the orders along through the body.

SO NOW I AFFIRM ...

**YOU ARE MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.
 THE WAY CHRIST IS ALIVE TODAY IS IN
 AND THROUGH HIS BODY – THE CHURCH.
 YOU AND ME ...and a boat load of others.**

I had prepared and offered this sermon to you of Head of
 Christiana my second Sunday as your pastor back in
 February 2012 (I hope it sounds familiar) ...

For at that time, here at Head of Christiana the body was
 stressed ... divided – uncertain ... shall we live or die?

Shall we drift out ...

Or simply grit our teeth and soldier on and make
 the best of a weary situation?

The body – the body – you could hardly recognize it –

**you worked so hard – you risked –
you followed so obediently.
and you wondered, honestly ... is there a
pulse?**

**At that time I told you this story about when years ago and I
was pastor of Peace Church in Louisville, Kentucky.**

**Jim Williams, a ruling elder and Sunday School teacher –
Jim taught and was band director at the largest high
school in Louisville. His band was the best in Louisville
– probably in the entire state.**

**He worked with the kids, taught them the instruments and the
marching – they always marched in double time and their
ranks were arrow- straight.**

**Early one November morning I received a phone call from
one of Jim's neighbors. Jim's car had been hit at the train
crossing on his way to school --- dragged 100 yards down
the track ... emergency workers had gotten him out of the car
and he was on his way to Saint Joseph hospital.**

**I was jolted wide-awake...dressed...and rushed to the
hospital. Verna, Jim's wife had already arrived. She was
stunned. She clung to me. We waited. We prayed. She
received reports ... all bad. Broken bones. Shattered organs
shutting down --- He's still breathing ... there's still a pulse.
God, Jim is a strong man.**

**As I recall, he was in surgery the remainder of the day
and then placed in intensive care. And finally, Verna
was allowed to see him.**

**I accompanied Verna. And there was nothing – no
one -- to see. Only bandages.**

**Jim was completely wrapped in bandages. With tubes
running and machines beeping and nurses hovering – We
watched – waited – Verna touched the gauze – ran her hand
softly up and down the gauze ... and wept ...and the prayers
continued.**

Out in the hallway again ... as Verna gathered herself – she uttered something like, “The Doctor says Jim is breathing and has a pulse.”

For the next several weeks that was the recurring mantra ... ”breathing – and a pulse.” Then ... First a hand, and then an arm appeared out of that gauze pile. Verna could actually hold Jim’s hand and stroke his arm. He would squeeze ... then squeeze in response to questions. One afternoon the mantra became ... “The doctor says Jim’s breathing and his pulse is strong.”

Well, as happens with pastors, I received a call to serve a church in Texas. By the time we had moved, many of Jim’s bandages had been removed. He had severe facial scarring and one eye remained bandaged. Broken bones were mending. Jim looked at me and affirmed ... “Bob ... I’m still breathing and my pulse is strong – God is good.” And we prayed.

Well, over the years we kind of lost touch. A new pastor for Peace church arrived ... Pat and I exchanged Christmas cards with Jim and Verna and I carried Jim and his family in my thoughts and prayers. I knew they were safe and well cared for surrounded by their Presbyterian family.

About 20 years later I was in Louisville for the Gathering of Presbyterian Women. I was working the information booth for the Presbyterian Child Welfare Agency. A hand grasped my arm ... as I turned, I heard ...”Bob Undercuffler!” I blinked in amazement ... JIM WILLIAMS! Standing upright. He was working the Ten Thousand Villages booth as a volunteer. We embraced. Tears. Jim, how are you doing?

You know what he said? “Bob ... I’m breathing ... and my pulse is very strong! We laughed. Embraced again.” And the conversation continued.

FAITH-FILLED -- HOPE-FILLED – LOVE-FILLED BODIES ARE MEANT TO LIVE...AND THRIVE.

AND TO GOD BE ALL GLORY ...

**GREAT THINGS GOD HAS DONE –
AND GOD KEEPS DOING.**