

Our Boat, the Church, and Raising Our Sails

I Corinthians 12: 4-7, 12-13, 27-31

June 4, 2023 *Sailing Lessons for the Church #5*

Rev. Cynthia Cochran-Carney, First Presbyterian Church, San Rafael, CA

Our church is like..... a sailboat. There are different jobs, different tasks on the boat. Each person on the crew has different skills and experience. Crew members learn from each other and help notice what those gifts and skills are. Maybe we would like to try something new. Martha, who is charge of singing on the deck, asks everyone to sing along. Marquise invites people to try ringing the bell. The session members will seek out members of the crew to help with reading the maps, suggesting new ports to visit. Deacons are caring for the crew. There are times we are invited to be quiet on the boat because we are praying and being open to the winds of the Spirit. There are many people who make up the crew, but we are one crew on a sailboat together.

Our church is like a sailboat. And our church is like a body, a human body, with so many parts working together for life. Here is what Paul wrote to a church, a community of followers of the Way, or we might say sailors on Christ's boat. Reading from The Message.

God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit.

God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit.

God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people!

You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts - limbs, organs, cells - but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of the one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which Christ has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of this resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain - Spirit - where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves - labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free - are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

You are Christ's body - that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in the church, which is the "body": apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, organizers, those who pray.... But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that Christ's church is a complete Body and not one gigantic, unidimensional Part? It's not all

Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healer,.... And yet some of you keep competing for so-called "important" parts. But now I want to lay out a far better way for you.
I Corinthians 12: 4-7, 12-13, 27-31

Our Church. A community of deep belonging. Of being a body with different parts and working together, a living body of Christ. A crew that has different jobs and seeks destinations and new ports along the way. And faces storms together as the

This image of sailboat church means we need to raise our sails. As we have played with this image I have enjoyed looking at images of the variety of sailboats or maybe more accurately ships with sails. Like this tall ship. Look at all those sails. That is a good image for us. We raise different sails as First Presbyterian Church. And like parts of the body, we don't expect one to be the primary. We are a church of wonderful worship and music. We are a church that celebrates the arts and young musicians and young people. We are a church that is committed to social justice and addresses current issues.

We are a welcoming church where all people, all people are welcome. We are church where people who identify as LGBTQ are leaders, elders, deacons, pastors, members. This was not always true. I appreciate that many of you have told me some of the stories of our church wrestling with how public to be about being an openly welcoming church. After much discussion, many conversations, presentations and discerning, this sail was finally raised. We are a More Light Church. This is important as a time in our country when again there are laws passed to deny the full humanity to people who are part of the LGBTQ community. Our church is a place of welcome and inclusion.

We are a church of contemplative spirituality and practices. We take time to deepen our experiences of the Holy. Centering Prayer, One World One Spirit retreats and so much more. This sail is seen from miles around.

We are a church who is called to see and encourage and lift up children and young people in our community who are underserved and need particular kinds of support in order to thrive. IN order to know they are indeed beloved children of God. That is a very important sail.

The church is a Divine and Human sailboat. We are a community empowered by the Spirit. We find our direction in the teachings, the maps, the stories of Jesus and the whole biblical narrative.

Our church has survived rough seas at different times in our history. As one person said to me, there were times our church was in rough seas. It felt like we were tipping over and taking on water. But we did not sink. We are still here. We are thriving.

