

“A Miraculous Body”  
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a  
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The human body is a miraculous creation. The adult human body contains 206 bones that support the body and protect vital organs. Without a skeletal system, the human body would be limp and floppy and I would not be able to stand here. The 639 muscles within the body act in both voluntary and involuntary ways. Muscles send signals to the brain that then sends a message about how to move. *Take your hand away from the hot stove!* The nervous system, known as the control center of the body, interprets the senses and enables you to respond. *I smell smoke, get out of here!* (That’s just an illustration.) The respiratory system breathes in oxygen from the air and expels carbon dioxide. Some preachers are known to expel an inordinate amount of carbon dioxide. The system of blood, blood vessels, lymph vessels and heart, known as the circulatory system, pushes blood through the body’s network of arteries and veins. Add to that about six pounds of skin, a most marvelous brain, fat and fluids and you have the human body. Every time we take a breath, a taste, a step or hear a sound, hundreds of different parts of our bodies function as a whole, our minds and our bodies working as one miraculous unit. The human body is one of the most complex systems that exist. The human body is a miraculous creation!

The image of the miraculous human body is what the Apostle Paul chooses as an image of the church. The Body of Christ—one unit made up of many different parts—just like the human body. The worldwide Body of Christ now numbers 2 billion people made up of some 38,000 different denominations. Unity and diversity joined in one body. When we speak of the Body of Christ we infer the entire worldwide body as well as the portion of that body known as Fairmont Presbyterian Church.

You and I belong to the Body of Christ. We come as individuals to be baptized, and the water—that visible sign of God’s grace—changes us as it includes us into the church universal, the Body of Christ. After baptism, we are more than just individuals, we are individuals connected with others within the Body of Christ. One of our human needs is the need to belong. We all want to matter, we all want to have a place in the world. The Spirit gives us the gift of belonging in Baptism. We are given a place in the Body of Christ.

Some members of the body use their gifts in their local church, others contribute at the higher governing levels of the church. A friend told me of her experience as a newly ordained Elder that took place at a Presbyterian church out of state. During coffee fellowship time after worship, she and several other members were appreciating the new carpet in the Fellowship Hall. Before long, children of the church appeared and the conversation turned to dismay over the crumbs being dropped on the new carpet. “What in the world am I doing in this organization?” my friend asked herself, perturbed at people’s response to the children. A loyal Presbyterian suggested she get involved at the Presbytery level

which she did. She later became a delegate to General Assembly in 1983, the year the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches reunited. While at General Assembly, she was astounded at the stands the PCUSA was taking on important social issues. "Seeing the larger national church at work was my saving grace," she says. "It helped me see beyond the narrow focus of my local church." She found the larger expression of the Body of Christ meaningful and uses her gifts mainly at the Presbytery level. Other members use their gifts mainly in the local church. Some of the beauty of the Body of Christ is that we have a diversity of opportunities to serve through. Isn't it meaningful to see the faithful use of gifts from people in the pews around you? Notice the people sitting around you – go ahead, look around. What gifts do you recognize in others to be used for the common good within our church and our community? What are some of those gifts? What about your own gift? Think about the magnitude of gifts within this church alone.

A church member that is a plumber by trade dismantles the industrial disposal in the church kitchen and gets it fixed saving the church the \$3,000 cost of a new disposal. A gifted teacher generously shares his gift in the Adult Education program. A retired social worker uses her skill to listen and care for homebound members. Members with savvy business skills that help the church wisely invest. Faithful Elders who collectively discern how to balance the budget. Members who make others feel good about being here through their genuine caring. Parents who teach their children a life of faith, basically Christian Education within the home. Many members use their gifts to help sustain the Body of Christ known as Fairmont Presbyterian Church. And yet, there is room. Room for the gifts of other members, ways you can contribute to the common good if you are not currently doing so.

There is room because there are members who want to belong without belonging. There are those members that die and in preparing for their memorial services I become a detective. What can you tell me about Mr. Jones? Did he serve as an elder, deacon, trustee? Do you know anything about Mrs. Smith? Church records show she joined in 19whatever. It is a mystery how some people join the church, yet do not belong.

According to 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, there is no such thing as belonging without participating. If part of the human body or the Body of Christ checks out for a few years it throws the rest of the body out of balance. It is much easier to recognize a human body with a bad knee than it is to recognize how we limp along as the Body of Christ because a member's gifts are absent. Belonging is a two-way relationship. We are given the gift of belonging in baptism and we take on responsibility for functioning as the Body of Christ.

Even if declining health or the declining health of your spouse hinders your involvement there are other ways you can participate. You can pray for others, care for others through cards and phone calls, support the church financially. Belonging in the Body of Christ continues your whole life long.

We all belong in the Body of Christ and everyone, every single person, has something to contribute within the Body of Christ.

A person with a mental disability was a member of a church I served many years ago. Although in his early thirties, he had the mental capacity of a ten year old. He was very friendly and extremely curious about the service. "What do you have to do in order to get to serve communion," he asked. "Why are the juice glasses so small?" "Who picks the hymns for worship?" "Can we sing some of my favorites?" He often had questions about my prayers, especially if I used abstract images, words like justification or sanctification, or referred to the mystery of God. He wasn't interested in the mystery of God, he wanted to hear how God loved him and was present in his life. Don't we all? Over time, I learned to describe God in concrete rather than abstract terms, relying on images of God rather than words about God. My prayers began to make more sense to John. Thanks to John I am a much better public pray-er. At my farewell reception at that church, he gave me a handmade card that said, "Thank you for teaching me how to pray." Actually, he taught me how to pray. Every member in the Body of Christ has a gift to contribute. Paul speaks of how members of the Body both suffer and rejoice together, we share each other's lives in good times and in bad. As we do, we become tangible expressions of God's care. We are a visible expression of the love of God for a hurting world, those known to us within these four walls as well as those known to God.

Nowhere is the Body of Christ more clearly demonstrating God's care than through relief efforts in Haiti. There has been a worldwide outpouring of aid, millions of dollars donated, thousands of people lending their medical knowledge, others doing whatever they can to help, millions of people around the world lifting up the people and situation of Haiti to God in prayer. It is not just Christians that have responded but the Body of Christ is clearly visible. The Spirit of God has encouraged individuals to share what they can for the common good in this situation and God's love is clearly visible.

The Apostle Paul gives us the Body of Christ as a metaphor of church. The Body of Christ is a vision of church, not a building but a body of people caring for one another and sharing the love of God in the world. It is a body that conveys unity of purpose through a diversity of gifts and people. It is a body helped by God's Spirit working in and through each one of us. You and I are members in the Body of Christ. And it is a most miraculous Body. Amen.