

Weekly Bible Study for Highcliffe and Bransgore Methodist Churches

The Day of Pentecost by Phillip Dixon based on "Church, what we can learn from Acts" by Beki Rogers

Pray together and read Acts 1: 12-14 and Matthew 12: 46-50

The early Church was initially made up of a close friendship group. They were people who had spent time with Jesus, followed Him, listened to Him, seen Him die and encountered Him when He rose to life. This group were very much like a family, a family of faith with a common purpose (as church should be). "The believers" (in Acts 1:15) numbered about 120 and were a part of that very close community, sharing life and worshipping together.

Q1. Briefly reflect and comment on your local church family, who is part of it? Who isn't?

Q2. What other Christian communities are you a part of (e.g. online, religious communities/orders, rules of life or organisations) and how do you define those relationships? Also as family in the same way or different?

The Bible gives us two images when thinking about the Church as family. Firstly, the "Body of Christ" emphasised by Paul's letters to the Romans and Corinthians in which the Church is compared to a physical body with members having different parts to play, all of which are important and valued by having a different and unique purpose. All are connected and valued for their uniqueness and are dependent on one another. There is a very strong sense of belonging. If you do not attend or participate, the body (or family) is weaker for it, just as if you have an operation and lose the use of a part of your body.

The second image is that of "The People of God" a group of people travelling together (not literally) and connected like a family, this image is drawn from the people of Israel, initially an actual family, then a tribe and then an extended family. Belonging is a birth-rite, a tradition. Participation is preferred but not so crucial. You belong and are perhaps missed if not there but things still take place without you (one week someone may say "I haven't seen such and such for a while" and then you realise they have been missing for months).

Q3. Which of these images resonate best to you and have experienced?

Q4. What are the positive things in your local church community that help you to know you are a valued member of this family?

Q5. How does this family allow others to join it?

Q6. Are there aspects of your local church family that make it hard for others to join it or that inhibit it from engaging in its mission?

Conclude with a time of prayer and listening to what the Spirit is saying to each one of us concerning our church family. Thinking of those who are members of your local church family -your brothers and sisters- are there faces that you can picture in your mind whose names you do not know, let-alone know anything about them. What will you commit to do in the coming week to begin to improve your church family relationships?