

Based on the Livability Bible Studies ‘Together for Good’ which aim to increase well-being for individuals and communities.

Creating Community

“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it...” (1 Cor. 12:26)

Humans are social beings – it is one of our most fundamental characteristics.



I have been very struck by how Christchurch, NZ has come together as a community – a community made up of different faiths, and people of no faith; in contrast to Britain which seems to be becoming ever more divided. The Bible has much to say about living in community, particularly Christian community, but let us remember that the Corinthian church was surrounded by and embedded in a secular society in which there was not only pagan worship, but worship of the Roman Emperor as a god.

Bible Study: 1 Corinthians 12 (being the body of Christ)

Some key points emerge from the passage:

1. Like constituent parts of a body, we are all very diverse, as individuals and as groups, each with our own special gifts and abilities (v 4-10)
2. But we are nevertheless members of just one body (v 12-13)
3. There is only one head, one Lord (v 4-6)
4. Each individual member is valuable – including those less visible (v 15-25)
5. The relationships are so closely connected and integrated that if just one person suffers (or rejoices), it has an immediate and profound effect on all the others (v 26).

Questions:

- What examples of Paul’s teaching can you think of in your experience of church community life?
- How much of this applies to our relationships with people outside the church – for example, people in the local community?

The value of community

Human beings function best in groups – yet as a society we are not doing well with community relationships. Loneliness is becoming a huge problem.

Sociologists call the ties that bind people together in communities, **social capital**. If a neighbourhood has high social capital there is much connection, trust and cohesion. Two types of social capital are described. The first is all about **bonding** – tightly-knit groups who look, think and act like each other (family, friends, and ethnic groups function in this way). However, generally, there is less interest and welcome for people who are different. The second type of social capital is termed **bridging**. Here, people from one group reach out to another group that is very different. This is much more challenging, but it provides the opportunity to break down age-old barriers and bring new and fresh life to groups that hitherto had no interest in each other.

Questions:

- What causes a community to turn in on itself, to focus only on bonding, with no interest in bridging to other, different groups?
- What might help such a community to turn its attention outwards?
- What groups exist in your locality that have little or no contact with our church?
How might we as a church begin to make contact with them?
- I’ve heard people say that there is a lot going on at St John’s (in the building), and there is, but how much do those activities connect people to the church as a community? Do they create a sense of community?