

Chapel

Recently, our little fellowship has been growing. Not in a major way: you won't need to scour the internet for tickets to the Sunday service. We don't have crowd-control problems, hooliganism...or any of the other stuff that often goes with large gatherings. There's no-one selling programmes or hot dogs - and if there has ever been a stalker, it must have happened while I was praying with my eyes closed.

Part of our growth has been an increasing number of young children coming in. They have fantastic time at Sunday school, but they also enjoy the rest of the service. The reason for that is, they're allowed to be themselves. A few weeks ago – during the first worship song – a couple of them pulled out harmonicas and started blowing into them (I hesitate to say they *played* them – they just need a little more practice). There was music, so they joined in - and we really loved the idea they felt free to take part. Another time, a two year-old brought new meaning to the phrase “taking up an offering”: he crawled up behind me while I was preaching, and made off with the collection. I could hear money dropping as he headed for the door, but his mum grabbed him before he could spend it on anything unsuitable. I was very disappointed by this behaviour – I was going to ask him to bring me back a choc-ice.

But the freedom enjoyed by the kids, is also shared by the adults: in our fellowship, people can and do come up the front and share what God is doing in their lives. They can bless the congregation with poetry, prose...perhaps a song, or an uplifting reading. Some may choose to open the service, or to lead prayers. As the bible points out, we each have a role to play in building up our Christian family, and we each have gifts to share with them. But if we are moving away from the traditional, regimented expression of church, it is only because that itself represents a move away from what church originally was. Church was designed to be joyous, free and exciting – a celebration of knowing Christ and learning more about him.

The Apostle Paul compared being in fellowship with being like the various parts of the human body – each person functioning for the good of the whole. In his description of “the body of Christ”, he talks about hands, eyes and feet all doing their bit for the benefit of all. As an allegory, it works very well, though there are a few more things he *could* have mentioned: the head is always Jesus – not the pastor. The bloodstream is *love*...and there is never an appendix in the body of Christ. There may be some who imagine they are the appendix in the body of Christ (a grumbling appendix, usually) but I think Paul left that out for a reason.

It's fair to say that all our people serve the fellowship in one way or another. They do it out of love, which is the only worthwhile motivation. Service is an essential part of the authentic Christian experience...as are joy, freedom and that sense of excitement which comes from knowing Christ and taking part in what he is doing. It is those things which I believe are the hallmarks of a successful fellowship, rather than the number of bums on seats. And though we are growing, our sense of intimacy and belonging remains intact...it just extends to include a few more people.