

Stewardship Sunday 4/4 – Theme: Community

Address by PCC Member and former Churchwarden Ian Kelly, at the Solemn Eucharist

I suspect over the last few weeks you have been bombarded with leaflets from various political parties seeking your vote.

As I read through the plethora of broadsheets and pamphlets I could not help but notice how often the word **community** appeared.

I was advised that **community** policing was to be improved; that a **community** centre was to be built close to the **community** care home. This was to be funded by a modest increase in my **community** charge. I was also informed that young offenders would be required to repay their debt to society by completing a longer period of **community** service.

What does the term **community** mean?

A google search confirmed that **community** is drawn from the Latin *communis*, meaning “shared”.

Definitions in the oxford dictionary list **community** as:

- A) A group of individuals with some common characteristic
- B) Joint ownership or participation
- C) Social ties and fellowship

Community is in fact a condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common.

It is a sense of place, it is a group, section, body, set or circle.

A recent study identified four elements of **community** namely;

- 1) membership
- 2) influence
- 3) integration and fulfilment of needs and
- 4) a shared emotional connection.

Over the last three weeks we have considered the architectural magnificence of our church; the impact it has on our numerous visitors; the inspirational music and stimulating preaching and liturgy we experience at each service.

This week we are considering how we operate as a church **community** and what it means to each one of us.

On entering church, a clear statement is displayed on the notice board. Stating:

‘we are an inclusive church **community**. There is no discrimination based on gender, disability, race, age, sexual orientation or social class’.

Prior to joining Great St Bartholomew, I attended my local parish church in Holloway. The churchmanship was liberal middle of the road and it had a profound sense of **community**. This was not something I found at Great St Bartholomew when I started attending nearly 20 years ago. I found the church a place of anonymity which may have appealed to some but I had been used to a warm welcome and a sense of fellowship.

At that time the parish had, as it still does, a very small local residential population. This about to alter dramatically.

The redevelopment of the former Barts hospital buildings and the opening of Crossrail will bring major changes.

We will be sited in the centre of a significantly revitalised area enhanced with a blend of residential, commercial and retail properties and outlets. This will present us with a wonderful opportunity to grow and develop our church **community** just at the time we are about to appoint a new Rector.

It is pleasing that much has changed at Great Saint Bartholomew over the years.

Today we are a congregation which is open and democratic in governance.

As a caring **community**, we share respect for each other and a willingness to listen and support each other.

As a church family, we share each other's joys and sadnesses; we rejoice with those who marry in our church (and then so often subsequently present their children for baptism).

We applaud father Jeremy for the work he does with young families who bring their children to The Less. *Their nativity play each year is not to be missed!!*

Today I ask you to consider if there is something more you can do to share in the work of our church **community**.

When did you last speak to a visitor you may not have seen before?

Could you consider joining the serving team or perhaps the sidesman team?

What about putting your name down for a stint on the coffee rota or at least from time to time just joining those staying on for refreshments after mass? This time of fellowship provides an excellent opportunity to get to know other members of the church family.

A letter or telephone call to a member who is unwell or who we have not seen for some time is often gratefully received.

You will have seen in the notices that Tracey is in the process of organising a Christmas fair on lord mayors show day and I know she would be most grateful for any assistance you might be able to provide.

Another area where you can make a significant contribution to the growth and development of our church community is to reassess your giving remembering that every pound gift-aided is worth £1.25.

I urge you to consider, without detriment to yourselves or connections, if you could afford to increase your contribution toward the cost of maintaining our church.

By completing a standing order, even if you are not at church on a Sunday, we can still depend on your support. It also makes life so much easier for our hard-pressed treasurer if she can budget in the certain knowledge that funds will be forthcoming.

Your support in any of these areas will have a huge impact on our church **community** life.

And now, mindful of Mark Twain's salutary reminder 'what he lacked in depth as a speaker he made up for in length' I will draw to a close and thank you all for your attention.