

Church Partnership

As we come to the time again of renewing our Church partnership or perhaps undertaking it for the first time I thought it would be a good opportunity to look at what it means to be part of God's church and in particular at church partnership in Nuneaton Christian Fellowship. Some of you may not even be aware that we have members or "Partners" as we refer to them.

When we join something there are several different ways in which we can act upon that membership. One thing that lots of people do is to undertake to exercise regularly once or twice a week throughout the year. Just as many in a month or two's time have decided that perhaps a visit once a quarter is regularly enough, but they will keep up the membership because it sounds good when talking to friends. To be fair others carry on and do get great benefit, I'm told, from the exercise.

Becoming a member, or in NCF's case a Partner, of the church is not dissimilar in many ways. For a few it may be something good to have on the CV, but hopefully for the vast majority, and I'm sure this is true of those already in Partnership in NCF, it is an outward expression of a desire to be a part of God's family serving God, each other and those around us in this place where god has placed us.

When NCF was started we deliberately chose the word "partner" rather than "member" for those who are a part of NCF's membership as it implies a "joining together with" rather than just joining something.

Let me say right here that I know that there are some of you who have not signed up to become partners for very good personal reasons and that does not make you any less a partner than those who have signed a piece of paper. We can see your dedication and commitment to the principles of partnership in the way in which you serve and support the church, its leaders, finances and its activities, so what follows is as pertinent to you as anyone else.

Some of you may not have seen our partnership form although hopefully over the last few weeks I have given one to each of you. But should I by some oversight have missed you then here one is.

(Talk through it.)

Today I want to concentrate on the passage from Ephesians 4 referred to and look at what that means to us as a church:

So let's read the passage:

Ephesians 4: 11-16. (NIV)

"It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the full measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

It is clear from this and other passages that the Christian church came about not through any human wisdom or human will, nor is it ruled by any human authority. God brought about the Christian Church and is its head and indeed we are told in the Bible (Matt 16:18) that Jesus stated "I will build MY church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it." That is why when we are looking for vision and direction for the church we first above everything else pray and seek to hear God's will for us to follow.

Having established the headship of the church God did not leave it there, He, as this passage in Ephesians tells us, called and gifted people in to specific roles to help to equip God's people for works of service:

Apostles: Who were sent out by Jesus to proclaim His message and establish His church under His authority and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Prophets: Prophecy has been defined as the proclamation of the divine word both orally and sometimes in written form as an expression of God's perspective on right and wrong . His displeasure with sin, his pleas for repentance and his promise of future salvation. Paul tells us in Corinthians that prophecy should be strengthening, encouraging and comforting to the saints. He also warns that there will be false prophets so all prophecy should be weighed carefully by others to establish that it is God's word.

Evangelists: People who publically proclaim the Good News. We are all called to evangelise (Math 28:18-20) but some are given the specific gift of evangelism. Only the Holy Spirit can bring about the forgiveness of sins but evangelists are called to make sure non believers hear the good news in order that they can make a choice.

Pastors and teachers: Are to shepherd/serve God's people and look after both their spiritual and physical well being as well as feeding them on the truth of God's word and also to model that truth in how they live out their lives. It needs to be both

informative, and a lifestyle modelling the truths we are teaching, to be effective. Whilst there are those given this specific calling we all have a responsibility to model our faith to our families and friends so that they can see Christ in us.

Why did God create these offices? We are told " to prepare God's people " or as another translation puts it "*the equipping* of the saints" the Greek word used here is "katartismos" It is used in surgery for setting a broken limb or putting a joint back into place. Mark uses it in Mark 1:19 referring to men mending their nets and in Gal 6:1 it is used of restoring a fallen brother.

The idea then is of putting something, in this case God's people, into the best condition it or they can be in.

**What are we preparing God's people for?
"works of service" or "for the work of the ministry"**

We are clearly told that we all have work to do (Eph2: 10) and as with all jobs we are much better prepared for it and do it much better if we have been properly trained in the first place. No job is greater than any other and it may well be that some of us are needed to meet the physical needs of others and some the spiritual needs and some both. But what is important is not the "job" but the servant heart and willingness to follow God's leading that we do it with. In this way we will honour and please God.

As we see the fulfilment of these verses in the life of the church and the individuals that comprise it then we will see, not only a growth in individuals in the church, which is great, but also a maturity in the life of the church as each person plays their part. We will see the truth spoken out in love both through words and actions as people live out their faith for others to see.

As we live in the holy fear of the Lord and live out our lives in service to each other and those around us, demonstrating God's love and unity at every opportunity then there is a verse in Acts 9:31 that I think we can take encouragement from.

" Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord."

If you know that God has placed you in this place for a purpose then please, if you haven't already, sign and return your partnership forms to me as an indication of your commitment to God's plans and purposes for NCF and your willingness to play whatever part God has for you to bring glory to his name in this place.

I just want to finish by emphasising that there may be those of you who, for whatever reason, do not want to sign a partnership form at this time but do feel very much part of what NCF is and what it is doing. Signing a form of commitment or

not is not the issue here. It is your heart for God and for God's work in this place that is the most important. You are just as much a part of God's family here as anyone else and we love you all dearly as sons and daughters of God so please do not feel any pressure to sign a form just to conform.

Let's pray:

Father as we renew our partnership with You, by whatever means whether it be by signing a partnership form or renewing our commitment verbally, in this church, help us to deepen our faith in you, our relationships with each other and with those around us so that we may live out our lives for Your glory and see Your name raised high on this estate.

In Jesus' precious name.

AMEN