

I'm sure by now you may be re feeling slightly overwhelmed, Liz, by all these welcomes, lovely as they are - so I'll try not to overwhelm you too much more. I was kind - I did ask Stewart to end the reading at verse nine. We could have gone one to some more advice from St. Paul...

‘work hard, and do not be lazy’

‘share your belongings with your needy fellow Christians’
- that's us...

‘do not be proud but accept humble duties’
and ‘do not think of yourself as wise’.

I'm sure that we didn't need to include those, actually, because from the time I've spent already with Liz I can see that she is conscientious, generous hearted, and without any sense of being more important or wise than anyone else. But there will be a journey of discovery for you and for us as discover your other gifts, and you learn about ours - and as you discover the areas in which can you especially help us, and we discover those areas where we can especially help you.

That's what Paul's picture of the body is all about - we all have things to offer in the service of Christ, and we all also need each other in this.

I met up with a some fellow curates who were friends a few months after our ordination, and one told us how it

had all been much harder than he had expected. His church seemed to be content to sit back like passengers on the bus, expecting the Vicar to be the driver and him to be the conductor - conductor! - that tells you how long ago that was. Actually he said, it was worse than that. It felt like the bus had broken down, the passengers were still stalling in it, but he and the Vicar were behind, pushing it up a hill.

Well, I do hope it won't be like that for you, Liz. That certainly doesn't fit with Paul's description. His image of the body means that every part is important and playing a role - there aren't any passengers. Taking the transport picture further, I thought about a boat - maybe a square rigger - with all the members of the crew having their different roles.

But the important thing about the church is that we are not just here for ourselves - we are here to bring God's love to others. So a better picture might be the sort of ship our friend Fiona from New Zealand went on. It was with an organisation called Mercy Ships, and it sailed from her home in North Island up into the Pacific to visit remote and poor island communities and bring them practical help as well as the message of God's love. Their ships are equipped as floating hospitals, so they do eye operations like removing cataracts, operations to correct facial disfigurements and other surgery, dental work and various

other procedures - all of which make a huge difference to the lives of many people.

Fiona was inspired by her time on the boat. She's an experience speech therapist, but on her first voyage she just signed up as a member of the crew - swabbing the decks as she said.

Alongside her were many others in different roles - and you might think of the church equivalents - the maintenance crew, the engine room staff, the cleaners, the nurses and medical specialists, those responsible for navigation - and those whose main job was not on board ship at all, but making contact with people on the islands, reaching out with practical and spiritual help.

What Fiona loved was the sense of being on a shared mission to which everyone was wholly committed - so there were no passengers. And they were all united in prayer for each other - as well as having a lot of fun together.

That's a great vision for a church - and for the sort of church we want to be. This service is an illustration of all the different ways that we are committed to God's work here, in us and through us. And we are beginning to look forward to ways in which we can each focus a little more

on the way we can share what we have been given with others. We don't want to be a cruise ship - we want to be a Mercy Ship.

I'm sure it will take time for you to find your place in all of this, Liz - but we will all try to help you. We will gladly welcome you to come and share in different areas of church life, but we will try not to expect you just to stay in our area - that's a hint, Ok folks! We want to allow you to explore your particular ministry and your particular gifts. Part of being a curate is having experience of a wide range of things and developing the skills you need in a whole range of areas, but also beginning to discern what may be the particular shape which your ministry will take, which is different for each of us.

And it isn't just about the jobs we do. Paul also talks about our giftedness being the people we are and the way we do things. 'If our gift is to encourage others, we should do so... whoever shares with others should do it generously, whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully'.

Each of us does not just bring certain gifts to the church - each of us is a gift to the church just by being ourselves. So we don't just welcome Liz to do her new job - we welcome Liz, and Paul and Sam and Jon as gifts to us, as they people we are. We rejoice whenever anyone comes to

be with us - because each person is a gift, and we are all gifts to each other.

We are also gifts to God. We have received his grace and love and acceptance, and now we offer ourselves back to him. And he delights in our gift of ourselves, and when we allow him to transform and renew us in his life, and help others to discover that life.

The gifts that have been given in this service are lovely pictures of the gifts that God wants to give to us all - the chance to learn from him - that's the school welcome booklet, times to celebrate his love - that's the Prosecco, times to enjoy his goodness - that's the cake, times to share deeply - the Community of Saint Chad booklet, times to grow in faith - the plant, times to enjoy fellowship - the BBQ invite, and times to come close to him in praise and in prayer.

Liz and Paul, Sam & Jon, as you move into your new home and become part of our church life here, we pray that we may share together in these gifts from God, and we pray that God will richly bless you all in your life and ministry here, and that God will bless us all, as we live out his love for the world.