

John Docherty, January 20, 2013

“Just how diverse is MFM?”

1 Cor 12 : 1-11

1. Hallo. Ciamar a tha sibh.
2. Bonjour. Comment ça va?
3. Buenos dias. Como le va?
4. Bom dia. Como voce està hoje?
5. Guten tag. Wie geht es ihnen heute morgen?
6. Bonjour. Koman ou yé, jodi a?
7. Jambo!
8. Vanakkam! (Tamil)
9. Waryáa. Is ka warran!
10. Goede morgen. Hoe makt u het?
11. Mbote.
12. Ni hao.
13. Dobro jutro. Kako ste?
14. Buon giorno. Come stai?
15. Salaam aleikum. Marhaba.
16. Selamat Pagi (Indonesian)
17. Meeng-gah-bou(Ga)
18. How de body? How de pickens? (Sierra Leone)
19. Gin Dobre.
20. Buna Ziua (Romanian)
21. Mwaramutse (Kirundi)
22. Dobri jutro (Russian)
23. In-i-che (Burkina)

24. Teanastelen (Ethiopia)

25. Hello. How are you all this morning?

I've just greeted you in 25 of the mother tongues that are now, or have been, represented in the membership of MFM during the time that I've been a member. Mother tongues. The first language spoken by an individual in his or her home. Fully half of those languages, around a dozen or so, could easily be present on a typical Sunday morning by the people who are currently actively attending MFM.

English	French	Spanish	Portuguese
German	Créole	Swahili	Tamil
Dutch	Somali	Chinese dialects	

The other greetings I used could also be representative of some who might currently attend or who have attended in the past.

Lingala	Italian	Arabic	Indonesian
Kirundi	Romanian	Ga	Serbo-croat
Polish	Russian	Amharic	Krio (SL)
Plaut dietsch			

And I didn't try to include languages that belong to people I know who may have only attended once or twice.

Farsi a variety of African or Asian languages

Nor did I try to include languages that are obvious links to heritage, but may not be currently used by MFMs or people linked to MFM, like M'g Maw or Inuktituk or Mohawk or Cree.

I've focused in on mother tongues because I think they're representative of the various points of origin of this group, and by extension, the various worldviews that we bring to this square-morphed circle. We don't all see the

world in quite the same way. We don't all value quite the same things. We don't all enter into relationships with quite the same expectations.

We're fond of saying, with good reason, that MFM is a very diverse group. We *are* a diverse group and country of origin is only one of the ways that diversity is manifest.

Some of us are children, adolescents, CEGEP or university students, young adults beginning their working lives, people in the middle of their working lives, others approaching retirement, some in full retirement, and some approaching the end of their lives.

Some of us are comfortable financially, others are struggling.

Some of us are single, others are married or in committed relationships.

Some of us are straight, others are gay.

Some of us lean to the right politically, others lean to the left.

Some of us are quite orthodox in our understanding of what it means to be a faithful Christian, others are perhaps a bit more liberal in their theology, still others prefer to identify themselves as seekers, and all of us have our own unique understanding of who, or what, God is.

Like most groups, we have a mixed bag of diversity on any number of spectrums.

How do you even begin to minister to a group like that? How do you put together a coherent way of being in community that is sensitive to and respectful of the many ways that we as individuals need to be acknowledged, supported, valued, and empowered to live our lives as faithfully as possible.

If you've been asked to take on a leadership role in such a group, how do you remain attentive to the sensibilities of individuals, while still moving forward as a group? Having sat on council for a number of years, I know how much discussion, time, energy and prayer has gone into trying to make sure that everyone – everyone – has felt included in decisions that affect all of us. It hasn't been easy, and we've rarely had full consensus on important issues.

The decision to ask me to consider taking on some pastoral duties hasn't been without complications, for example. I take it as a given that not everyone will feel that I'm a good fit for this kind of interim role, and that others might scratch their heads wondering "why not"? At least I hope a couple of people might wonder ... Some people have told me they are quite happy that this invitation has been made. Some people don't know me well enough to know whether they think this would be a good thing or not. Others, I'm sure, *do* know me well enough to wonder whether this would be a good thing or not. My antics at past Arts nights may leave some wondering what the search committee was thinking when they approached me.

My use of the word « spectrums », for example, probably pushed a button or two among those purists who would insist that the proper form for the plural of « spectrum » should be « spectra ». My own inclination would be to hold to the proper form, but I didn't for fear of appearing too pretentious, because I suspect most of us in the room would feel more comfortable with a normal anglicisation of the word and the simple addition of « s » to make it plural. But then I thought, does my avoidance of the use of the word "spectra" in favour of using "spectrums" imply that I'm trying to "dumb down" the English language and will some people be offended, because they don't need it to be "dumbed down".

As a lay member of the fellowship who is sometimes asked to bring a meditation I've always felt free to explore my faith and question our assumptions in ways that most pastors probably don't. I haven't particularly feared being taken to task if I said something that someone disagreed with, or if my thoughts weren't as clear as they could have been. If I take on a role as interim pastor will I have to be more careful about what I say and how I say it? I don't think so. Does anybody care? Absolutely. As interim pastor will I need to take on a measure of responsibility for the well-being of MFM and its members? Absolutely. Will all the weight of responsibility for the well-being of MFM rest on my shoulders? Absolutely not.

And this is the beauty of this kind of community. We are a diverse group. And yet, we're a group. We're all here on Sunday mornings, looking for something. We may not even be looking for the same thing on Sunday morning, but somehow we clearly have the sense that being here matters in that search. And being here *together* is part of what matters.

For some of us, the sense that God is somehow present here among us is enough to make this hour important.

For some, the social connections are perhaps what help us feel less alone.

For some, the singing and music will lift our spirits in ways that this message certainly won't.

For some, the chance to grapple with the large questions of life may provide some of the stimulation we feel during this time.

For some, this may be a time to step off the treadmill of our life and just *be* for an hour or so.

For some, this hour is a chance to rub shoulders with, and draw energy from, like-minded people who share our vision of what this world can be.

For some, being here on Sunday morning is important in ways that I can't even begin to imagine.

Some, of course, may be here because their parents dragged them here, and we can only hope that it ultimately makes a difference for them as well as they sort out who they are and how they fit into the universe.

But all of us are here together. And all of us have a role to play in each other's lives. Not in any intrusive, inappropriate way, but in ways that make it possible for us to feel connected.

And this brings us finally to the 1st Corinthians passage on spiritual gifts. Now I know that the kind of language and images used in this passage are maybe a little awkward in a group like ours. Talk of prophets, healers, miracle workers, speakers in tongues, etc. may feel a little out of step with our usual style. But if you can wade through the trappings that were normative for Paul's day, I think we hit the heart of his promise to the church in verse 7 of the passage : "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good".

In other words, God wants what's best for us, and has equipped us to make this possible. Not by making each of us a superman, but by giving each of us something that complements the gifts and strengths of those around us. Paul is quite clear that none of us is indispensable, any more than any of us is unnecessary.

In the verses following the passage that was read, he uses the image of a body that needs each of its parts to be complete.

Read 1 Cor 12:20 – 25

In pulling together a body of people who are seeking after God, everyone has a part to play in making God's work manifest, and in allowing the body to function in a healthy manner. In acknowledging how God is at work in our own life, each of us provides a part of the picture of how God is at work in MFM and in the world at large.

Granted, *this* body, like most, has its aches and pains. Not in the sense that “if one member suffers, all suffer together” in a positive, supportive sense, but in the sense that we are sometimes a dysfunctional body that limps, or needs glasses, or has a problem with gas.

Some years ago, I was preparing another sermon on this theme of the body of Christ. Now, I don't know how your brain works, but mine is in constant overdrive in the weeks leading up to when I have to present a meditation. Different possible avenues are pursued, material is read, thoughts percolate around a variety of potential lines of attack. Some of my best ideas have crystallised during my sleep as the brain tries to make sense of the various bits and pieces that I've been struggling with.

On this particular occasion, I had a dream on the Saturday night before the meditation in which this image of the different parts of the body kept intruding on my consciousness. I won't relate all that I can remember of the dream, but the punch line (yes, some of my dreams have punchlines) involved a chorus of church members clamoring for attention with calls of “and I am an eye; I am an ear; I am a hand; I am a foot;” etc. with one particularly obnoxious member ending with “and I am a rectum!”, though ‘rectum’ wasn't the term he used.

Yes every body has one, though most are not as self-aware as the one in my dream. (I suspect that most of us would be shocked to learn how many people think *we* fit the bill ...). Every body has one, and happy the body that only has *one*. Paul euphemistically refers to these members as our “... unpresentable parts (which) are treated with greater modesty ...”.

The point is, to put it another way, that it takes all kinds. If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes all the anatomical bits and pieces to make a healthy and complete body, regardless of how unpleasant or draining (no pun intended) some bits are, and equally regardless of how strong and competent other bits are. We all bring something

necessary to this interdependency, and we all have our appropriate place in the picture. We are all enriched when someone new joins the body because the body is now more complete, and we are all diminished when someone leaves, because every amputation leaves a scar.

If I take on the role of interim interim pastor, I'll do my best to put what gifts and strengths I have to good use. But along with my gifts, I bring my own brokenness, my own vulnerabilities, and my own weaknesses. I'm more than willing to listen, learn and grow through this experience, but I won't be trying to be all things to all members of MFM – because that is neither possible nor desirable. Your mother tongue, whatever it is – even if it is Canadian English - is not my mother tongue, but I'm willing to try to learn if that will help me better understand. I will do my best to be who I am, not who everyone thinks I should be, and I hope each of you will continue to be who you are. Because that's the only way any body has any hope of being healthy.