

A sermon preached by Bishop Christopher at a service of blessing to celebrate the transition of Harris School to Academy status.

4th March 2014

Readings: Jeremiah 29.11-14; 1 Corinthians 12.12-31

Schools are like bodies

'God himself has put the body together ... [so] that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.' (1 Cor 12.24-6)

Schools are like bodies.

I've been around enough schools to know that when something bad happens to someone, something that wounds and hurts one person, it affects everyone else. When one person suffers, everyone suffers.

And when something goes well for someone, when they perform well in a play, a concert or a match, you rejoice with them.

Schools are living bodies that live on

The school body of which you are a part lives on after you have left and it will live on in your own lives too. Whether you like it or not, you will always be connected to this body. Mr McLeod's presence here is a living testimony of that fact – he was here at Harris' opening in 1954 and was its first deputy-head.

Last Wednesday I met an old school friend. We were very different in those days but we seemed to get on. Our lives went along very different paths and although we hadn't seen each other for about 40 years we are also permanently connected through our shared school experiences.

He told me of his success as a drummer in a band and in his business life, and he showed me photos of his family, including his son who's now at the same school – and I rejoiced.

He told me about some harder times he had been through – and I felt something of his suffering.

The world is also like a body

The world is a body – an interconnected, interdependent ecosystem in which actions of people on the other side of the world affect us all.

Each person needs the other person: '*The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"*' (v 21).

When people try to say that they don't need each other, that's when things go wrong - That's the trouble in Syria where neighbours fight against neighbours and rulers ignore the cries of their citizens. That's the danger in Ukraine at the moment. Because each person has a unique part to play in the world and in everything we do, we depend on others taking their place in the world.

Harris helps you find your unique place in this body

The role of Harris Church of England Academy is to help you find your unique, God-given, only-you-can-fill, place in this world.

God has created you, crafted you, shaped you for a purpose. The body of the world is maimed without you.

The Governing Body, the Diocese of Coventry, the Associate Head, your new Head Mr Stoppard and all the staff of Harris are here to help you discover God's aspirations for you, not just to exist in this world, not just to live, but to flourish in this world and to transform this world for the better – to make your own unique God-given contribution to it that you, *and you alone*, can accomplish.

We are here to make the ancient prophecy true for you. We are here to fulfil God's word for you: '*I alone know the plans I have for you...plans to bring about the future you hope for.*' (*Jeremiah 29.11*)