

## Dismembership

By [Debbie Blue](#)

January 18, 2010

The [church I serve](#) is 15 years old, and we've never had members. Most of the people who come are uncomfortable with traditional church culture, so although in some ways we have a very traditional service—word and sacrament, old hymns, liturgical art—the vibe is not "churchy." We don't have VBS; we have art camp. We don't have donuts at a coffee hour.

But we recently became a part of the ELCA, which requires that we have some form of membership. We struggled with how to do this. People repeatedly tell us they aren't interested in a formal membership—anything that defines who's in or out.

Finally we arrived at what seemed like a great idea: *dismembership*. We believe the community gathered around the gospel is always dismantling devotion to culturally constructed practices of power. We are *disciples* of another way. We are *dis*senters—disrupting, disturbing, disarming. People will become cooperative dismembers, like a co-op: when agribusiness, housing developments and banks are about serving power and money, people form cooperatives to better serve the community.

The graphic for our dismemberships campaign is a body that is, well, sort of dismembered. Although it is not intended to be a disturbing image, after reading 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 I began to feel disturbed. What are we doing? We're supposed to be *remembering*, not *dismembering*.

I like to think of how a God who gets a body overturns our idea of "God," exploding our notions of the sacred and power and purity. I love to think of God being hungry, tired and needy, of the outrageous idea that God incarnate had a thyroid gland.

It's more confounding for me to believe that the church is now the body of Christ—that's a hard one for me. The church, with its sordid history and its present-day offenses. That God is manifest in a physical entity made up of human *members*

—a chosen people, a living breathing body, a church—is essential to the Judeo-Christian faith. But it's also a little offensive.

Reading Paul while launching our dismemberment campaign, I had to confront my Gnostic tendencies. I like God embodied in Jesus Christ. I'm far less comfortable with the idea of God embodied in the church. It's just so often so *bad* (homophobes, misogynists, churches like mine *dis*-ing all over the place).

I like parts of the body of Christ. I like the brain and the ears and the eyes and the breasts. But do we really need the testosterone? The loudmouths? The aggressive superegos? If I want to believe in the radical implications of the incarnation, if I want to resist my Gnostic impulses, I'm going to need some of that love Paul [talks about](#). It's tempting to see God in certain parts of the body of Christ more than others, but this excludes so much of life. The incarnation is a beautiful and ceaselessly scandalous revelation of the lush and excessive love and grace of God. I know I need it.

*Additional lectionary columns by Blue appear in the January 12 issue of the Century* —click [here](#) to subscribe.