

Last year as I was kicking the soccer ball with my grandchildren I tore a calf muscle. The physiotherapist said “silly old fool”. Many of us are of an age where our bodies don't match our mind. We come to realize that we are not as young as we once were.

Communities also can experience a similar disconnect between the reality of their existence and their understanding of who they are. Here at St Paul's Ipswich we have as our patron saint a young tear away.

This morning's readings tell us that Saul was so full of zeal for the “traditions of his ancestors” that he persecuted the church; and that after his conversion he immediately “began to proclaim Jesus”.

The account of Saul asking for “letters to the synagogues at Damascus” suggests that this was his initiative and not that of the high priest or any member or organization within the Jewish

community. It has every appearance of being the work of an enthusiast seeking endorsement for a predetermined course of action.

Likewise the account of Paul's mission to the Gentiles has a similar ring. He made much of not going “up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before (him), but (that he) went away at once into Arabia”.

It reads like an account of a petulant adolescent striking out on his or her own; making every attempt to ensure that there is no opportunity for his or her actions to be challenged or influenced by those who might be older and wiser or have a different perspective.

In describing his encounter with Cephas (Peter) (after three years of ministry) Paul gave no suggestion that he was in any way differential to this more mature disciple. Paul clearly saw that his encounter with the Risen Lord on the road to

Damascus made him the equal of, if not superior to, any other disciple.

He spoke about staying with Cephas for fifteen days in a way that suggests a mutuality of standing in the Christian community and a complete lack of any form of hierarchy or pastoral oversight.

“I did not see any other apostle except the Lord’s brother” suggests that Paul did not need to have contact with any of the disciples in order to carry out his God given commission.

With such a Saint to look to for inspiration St Paul’s could easily take on a radical persona and see itself as answerable only to God, giving it the freedom to push the envelope when it comes to complying with Diocesan governance. In this St Paul’s Ipswich would not be alone.

Many parishes sit uncomfortably with the notion that they lack the freedom to choose whomever they want to be their parish priest, worship in the

way they choose, raise money however they see fit and spend it on whatever they deem appropriate. They disregard the Canons and regulations of the Diocese and directions from Diocesan officials.

The further a parish is from the Diocesan Registry the more likely it is that the clergy and people feel free to assert their independence. Where a parish is subject to frequent episcopal attention it is more likely to comply with diocesan provisions.

Many such parishes have been dynamic communities bustling with life. They have been innovative and creative. Buoyed by vibrant and growing communities they embody the characteristics of Saul the convert.

Having celebrated your 150th year as a parish community, it is perhaps understandable that you are morphing, if you haven’t already morphed, into a more mature member of the body of Christ.

One perhaps where a tear away Patron Saint no longer reflects who you are.

Whereas once you might have thought that St Paul's Ipswich could go it alone and do its own thing you might now see some benefit in membership of the Anglican Church Southern Queensland. It's interesting that today as we celebrate our Patronal Festival and think about who we are, the diocese as a whole is meeting for its annual synod.

The Anglican Communion worldwide operates in geographic areas known as provinces, diocese and parishes. Each diocese is overseen by a bishop. A diocese is a part of the Anglican Communion if its bishop is in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury in England.

Our diocese is governed by a parliament (synod) with representatives of clergy and lay people from each parish. Parishes appoint their representatives for a three year session of synod.

This year's meeting is the second session of the twenty eighth synod.

As a part of the Anglican Church Southern Queensland, St Paul's Ipswich operates numerous church schools with oversight by the Anglican Schools' Office, welfare services overseen by Anglicare Southern Queensland, support services overseen by the Diocesan Services Commission, theological education and ministry formation overseen by the Ministry Education Commission, and support for parishes offered by the Parish and Other Mission Agencies Commission.

St Paul's Ipswich is currently being supported by the regional bishop who has arranged for the appointment of a locum (that's me) to assist you during the time you are without a parish priest. At its annual meeting the parish appointed three people who are responsible for nominating a person to be your next parish priest.

They form part of a committee who will present to the Archbishop the name of the person they believe would be suitable. The Archbishop is able to accept or reject the recommendation of the presentation board.

In an increasingly complex world the Diocesan Services Commission supports St Paul's Ipswich with legal, financial, property and managerial expertise. For example during the past couple of weeks two property officers visited the parish to assess our present buildings and explore future possibilities. The Diocese is assisting with legal advice regarding a licencing arrangement and we will be using the bulk buying power of the Anglican Church to reduce our fuel costs.

The Ministry Education Commission is training present and future clergy and lay people in theology and ministry. Some of whom may well staff St Paul's in the future. Anglicare Southern Queensland operates services for the aged, and

those in need. Many parishioners benefit from the help provided and help to deliver the services offered through Anglicare.

Synod is meeting in Morris Hall at the Anglican Grammar School (Churchie) at East Brisbane one of the many schools the Anglican Church Southern Queensland operates. Through the Anglican Schools Office St Paul's is offering educational opportunities to thousands of young people in southern Queensland.

In preparing to search for a suitable person to be your next rector the parish is required to compile a parish profile. This provides prospective clergy with some idea of who you are and how you hope to develop in the future.

It also assists your parish nominators and the presentation board to assess the skill set you will be looking for in your new parish priest.

Rather than being a tear away group of radicals in the mould of an impetuous Paul prepared to thumb your nose at head office the parish of St Paul Ipswich is perhaps better described as a mature community pleased to participate in the life of the church.

The passages we have before us this morning tell us about Paul's conversion and first flush of ministry. It describes an adolescent period of his faith development; it's a description of an enthusiastic new convert.

We know that Paul endured much suffering and hardship on his missionary journeys and that his writings came to be treasured by the Christian community. With the passage of time he has gained a central role in the life of the church whereas he was initially looked upon with suspicion.

Perhaps that is how St Paul's Ipswich might now think of itself. No longer the tear away radical

prepared to go it alone but now very much a part of the Anglican Church Southern Queensland able to contribute to the life of the diocese and appreciate the support the diocese is able to provide, especially during this vacancy period.

Owen Strong

Locum Priest.