

## **Session F: Using All of the Gifts of the Body of Christ**

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, *Sustain and help our leaders, both lay and clergy.* Teach us to broaden opportunities and involve each person in the body of Christ according to his or her gifts and desires. Grant that we may encourage, support, motivate and mentor one another in our unique and special gifts and callings, so each of us may fruitfully answer your call. Let us always show forth the joy of our awareness of your presence and of our discovery of spiritual gifts in building up the church. Amen.

### **Scripture Reflection: I Corinthians 12:1, 4-31**

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

### *Discussion Questions*

What did you hear?

### **Why is it important to for each of us to discover our vocation and participate in the body of Christ?**

St. Paul here and elsewhere emphasizes that we are not all the same. We are like the body and we need all of the parts of the body to function.

All of our gifts come from God and we are each given something to do to glorify God, to show forth God's presence in our lives.

Vocation is the same thing as our most genuine self. Because God has made us, God knows us better than we know ourselves and we are at our most authentic when we are responding to whom God calls us to be. Who God calls me to be will be consistent with who God made me to be. The discernment process is directly related to issues of identity and involves *becoming* what I am *called* to be.

What I'm called to be is between God and me. It is not a "should," an ethical standard. It is not measuring myself against some third party objective standard of what I should be or do. We need to be careful not to think that there is a single Way for anyone to serve God. We need to be aware of our unique individual circumstances and personality and recognize that God has a particular call for each of us. And that part of God's call is leaving up to us the possibilities of choosing what we are gifted at or enjoy doing.

So that's the challenge. There is a subjective aspect to this. You can't say, everyone should do this. I can't even say, "Everyone should read the Bible." Because you may not be called to do that right now.

To follow God's call, you need to know yourself. Santa Theresa of Avila, the great Spanish mystic, said there is nothing so crucial to the spiritual life as humility. ("Humility" comes from humus or soil and has to do with being rooted.) Humility is to know oneself in truth and to accept oneself in truth. To be rooted. Now it's important to note that a mystic, a person primarily focused on going to God says that you first must know yourself. So, true mystics are not disengaged from the world but know themselves because they know God. John Calvin says in the first line of his Institutes of Christian Religion that wisdom is found in the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves.

Through baptism, we became part of Christ's resurrection body. Eugene Peterson paraphrases Paul in *The Message*:

By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. . . Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink . . . I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. . . What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own . . . The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part . . . the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this.

Christianity requires our involvement. And the body of Christ is incomplete unless each of us is involved. The blessing of our church community is that we find God through it and in it. And the opposite is also true: if we respond by serving in our church community, we discover the joy of God's presence with us. "So with yourselves, because you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church" (1 Corinthians 14:12).

Paul goes into 1 Corinthians 13 directly. Love is needed to hold the body together.

### **What spiritual gifts has God given me and how do I open them? What am I being called to be and to do?**

In the body of Christ, it is a mistake to ask people to volunteer for various activities without first identifying their gifts or desires for those particular ministries. We are often not very effective in identifying, developing, using and supporting spiritual gifts and calling people into mutual ministry.

A recent survey found that eighty percent of Christians do not know what their spiritual gifts are. This is a catastrophe for church development because we all depend on the gifts of others to complement our own gifts and to build up the body of Christ (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4). As the human body has a variety of members, so the body of Christ has a variety of Christians, each with his or her own special function. When each of us discovers and exercises our gifts, the church body thrives. St. Paul says we grow up *in every way into Christ*, joined together so that each of us promotes the growth of the body in love.

Identifying gifts and implementing a fully shared ministry in a congregation takes time and focus. Some congregations are beginning gifts discovery courses. A gifts discovery course explores the direction, purpose and meaning of one's life, identifying individual gifts and focusing primarily on ministry in daily life and secondarily on ministry within the congregation. The challenge beyond these courses is responding to individuals' gifts discoveries with opportunities, training, coaching and leadership.

The body of Christ is incomplete unless each of us is involved. We each also have a personal need to understand how God has uniquely made us and who God is calling us to be. Because God has made me, God knows me better than I know myself; I am most authentic when I use the gifts God gives me to become the person God calls me to be. To find my true identity, it is helpful to pray and to regularly ask five questions.

1. *What brings me joy?* What are the desires of my heart? What am I passionate about? What motivates, energizes, animates me? What do I long for? Jesus said, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). We respond to God by becoming joyful in our own unique ways; the desires of our hearts are not something to be denied or deferred to another. Another way to ask this, is would I grieve if I didn't do this?
2. *What are the talents and abilities that God has given me?* What can I do well and in a way that pleases God? What are talents, competencies and capacities might I make available to God and nurture by education and practice?
3. *What is my unique situation and what are the opportunities that I have?* Where am I in the world? Where can I go from here? What are my background and experiences? What are the limitations, responsibilities and possibilities I have? God will grant me a sense of who I am in response to the particularities of my time and place.
4. *What is my personality?* What is my way of acting and responding to others, to my world and to myself? The Myers Briggs Temperament Inventory is one way to consider and accept my unique temperament, perspectives and contributions in my relationships with others.
5. *What are my spiritual gifts?* God gives us spiritual gifts to support our ministries. Gordon T. Smith has suggested that we can identify our gifts by understanding how we feel the need to respond to the brokenness of the world. Perhaps I feel that what the world needs most is prayer or hope or teaching or prophecy or faith or giving or encouragement or leadership or service. Of course, the world needs all of these gifts but I have been given a particular gift to add.

Romans 12 identifies 7 diverse expressions of competency or giftedness or calling: prophecy, teaching, service, encouragement, giving, leading, compassion. These are really 7 ways of responding to the world and each of them has an implicit perspective on the world. Smith, the dean of a Presbyterian seminary in Canada, explains that each gift sees the world and feels the world differently and each gift responds to the brokenness of the world differently.

He uses an example of how these different gifts might be used to respond to problems in a hospital emergency room. In this extended metaphor, you are entering into the emergency room of a hospital and you immediately become conscious of the fact that this place is a mess. There are hurting people laying around and nobody's attending to them. There's no medical staff anywhere. The nursing staff are outside smoking. The place is a discouraging, dark and unhealing place. Imagine this situation and think about how you might be inclined to respond to it. One way to respond to how do I see the brokenness of the world is to ask the

question, what do you think is the problem? What went wrong and what needs to happen to make it go right.

Different gifts will respond differently to this situation:

1. Prophet: instinct is not so much to foretell the future but to call people back to God. A prophet says the problem with this world is that people know better but they're not doing what they know they should be doing. So a prophet calls people back to that which they know is true. "You know this is true, but look at your behavior: it's not consistent with what you believe." You can see why prophets are not the most popular people; they say things we would not like to hear.

The prophet's response to the emergency room situation is to say the medical staff know what they should do and we need to call them back to that. And that's a gift.

2. Teacher: problem is not that people understand and don't function that way, the problem is that people do not understand. The problem in this world is a lack of understanding of truth. Therefore, the way to save the world is through education, learning and teaching.

The teacher's response to the emergency room situation is to say the medical staff doesn't understand what needs to happen. We need a workshop or a seminar. And that's a gift.

3. Servants: people who think they will save the world through words are crazy. Practical things need to be done! Their response to the world is what needs to be done, I will do it. They believe that through practical tangible helps we'll be able to respond to the deep needs of this world.

The service-oriented people's response to the emergency room situation is to say you can't just go talk to or teach the medical staff; there's work that needs to be done. They'd immediately start cleaning up and fixing things, doing the practical things that need to be done to make this hospital work. And that's a gift.

4. Encouragers: problem with this world isn't that people don't know what's wrong with this world (or this emergency room) or aren't responding to it, the problem is that they've lost hope. The only way this is going to be turned around is through the restoration of courage or the restoration of hope. So some people will want to find words or actions of encouragement.

Encouragers might support what people are doing in the hospital or brighten the space up and make it more cheery. They use the right words or actions to animate others, to bring them hope in the midst of the darkness. And that's a gift.

5. Givers: people who generously contribute to the needs of others. God gives people the gift to make or raise money and to generously give it away in a way that makes it possible for crucial institutions to survive, to thrive and to make a difference.

Inclination of givers is to say the only way this hospital will work is with more and better resources. And I know where to get money and how to improve this place. I know how to make money and I know how to raise it. And that's a gift. But it's a gift that we don't often

equate with the other gifts. We see these people leaving the hospital and we say, hey where are they going? Well they're responding to the situation in their own and a very necessary way. And that's a gift.

6. Administrators: Good management will solve the problems of this world (and this hospital). These people know how to coordinate activities so the work of various people contributes to a common goal.

The good manager walks into this hospital and says I know where to find superb doctors and nurses and supervisors. I can get people to make this space an enlivening, animating, healthy space. I can find people to help fund all this. And that's a gift.

7. Merciful: respond to the people who are actually hurting by showing mercy and compassion. These are the pastors who demonstrate the redemptive power of being present with people and empathetically identifying with them, bearing their burdens with them.

This is the role of the chaplain in the emergency room. And we know and it's been scientifically proven that praying with people, pastoring to people helps them heal. Showing mercy is an essential part of God's redemptive power in this world. And that's a gift.

In looking at these seven ways of feeling and responding to the needs of the world, which is most crucial? Which of these matters the most? Which of these makes the greatest difference? These are flawed questions. We need them all to complete the body of Christ. Together we represent Christ to our world, so it's imperative that we spend some time identifying our particular gift or gifts and that we not ask the question, "How should I respond to the brokenness of the world?" but "How do I?" Why? Because we need your response; we need you to be who you are called to be. God's calling on your life is congruent with where you see and feel the brokenness of the world and where you will find joy in responding.

There are many tools for discovering gifts/discernment. Be careful with these tools. You can't fill out a survey and look at the back of the book and determine what you're supposed to be. Vocational discernment is not a scientific test. It is the product of times of discernment in the presence of God, in solitude and with others in good conversation. God will grant us a sense of who we are in response to the particularities of this time and this place.

Some writers identify as many as 38 different spiritual gifts and God may give others. Prayer, experimentation, survey tools, opinions of others and a gifts discernment course can help in discovering your spiritual gifts.

Healthy churches adopt discernment processes to help people identify their gifts and passions, and then provide affirmation, training, coaching and resources for people to live into their ministries.

## **How do I help others discover their special gifts and encourage them to use them?**

This congregation has all of the gifts it needs to become the body of Christ. Often the greatest challenge is that those gifts aren't being opened – they aren't being unwrapped – and used. Often lay people don't see the spiritual life of the church as their responsibility. They leave it up to the clergy. The Bible, and most Christian church governing instruments, place responsibility for spiritual development on the laity in partnership with the clergy and according to their unique gifts. Ministry in a congregation is collaborative, not hierarchical (based more often on individual gifts than general authority).

It is only by involvement in spiritual development that people become stronger disciples and help Jesus make new and stronger disciples. "So with yourselves, because you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church." (I Corinthians 14:12) You discover your spiritual gifts by using them in building up the church! How will we get people involved in formation and ministry?

### **Relationship Exercise**

*Give each person a small note pad. Ask them to write the name of each person at the top of a page and a couple of positive words or comments that describe that person. Collect the sheets and sort them by name. Have the persons on each side of the person alternate slowly reading the comments about that person. Let others add more comments and let the person comment. After all of the comments, ask again about whether this group has all of the gifts it needs to become the body of Christ.*

*From Romans 12, The Message:*

God brings all goodness to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.

In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.

If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.

## Goal Starters

The church governing board needs to set detailed goals for the congregation. Some goals will come from fully answering the following questions:

How do we identify and use people's special gifts? (Consider Romans 12 and Ephesians 4)

How do we want our ministry and mission to happen?

Have you started to fall into some of the traps of the clergy dominance paradigm?

How do we empower others to ministry and mission?

What do we need to do differently to empower all members of the body of Christ?

Can we look at each of our congregation's goals as mutual ministry opportunities?

Notice that clergy are not the only leaders or necessarily the primary leaders of the community. This is and has to be a shared ministry in which much of the leadership is collaborative. That means that communication must be good and expectations must be clear. Every congregation should have a covenant with their clergy setting forth the mutual expectations for the congregation and every ordained leader and congregation should mutually review that ministry on a regular basis (in terms of mutual ministry and not just in terms of how the clergy is doing).

What does God seem to be calling the congregation to do at this time? (It may be that the ministry of the past few years is affirmed and continued. It is also possible that while the former direction of ministry is affirmed, the congregation will recognize that new challenges call for new resources.)

What resources do we bring to the mission of the church in discerning and developing spiritual gifts and what resources do we need to bring?

What outside resources do we need (skills, networks for sharing, consultants, workshops, training, funding, support)?

What are the main goals of the church?

When will they be accomplished?

Who is responsible for accomplishing these goals?

Goals might look like this:

Goals and strategies	When	Whom	Benchmarks
<b>We will worship God by becoming disciples who help Jesus make new and stronger disciples</b>			
<b>Leadership Goal: Create an environment that supports and sustains current lay leadership and encourages and empowers emerging leadership.</b>			
Governing Board and clergy focus on identifying lay ministers and encouraging involvement		Governing Board/ Clergy	

Vestry and clergy focus on identifying, inviting and mentoring new leaders to become part of the Apostolic Core		Governing Board/ Clergy	Quarterly review of who is being introduced to leadership; begin with smaller projects, time expectations and help them be successful
Develop expectations for leaders		Governing Board	Especially with regard to participation in formation and small groups and stewardship
Support development of Ministry Teams		Governing Board	

### Resources for Further Study

Block, Peter. Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self Interest. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1993.

Kinghorn, Kenneth Cain. Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts: A Personal Inventory Method. Zondervan, 1981.

Schwarz, Christian A. The Three Colors of Ministry: A trinitarian approach to identifying and developing your spiritual gifts. ChurchSmart Resources, 2001.

Wagner, C. Peter. Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow. Regal Books, 1994.

Network Kit : The Right People, in the Right Places, for the Right Reasons, at the Right Time by Bruce L. Bugbee, Don Cousins and Wendy Seidman