

A United Church
January 12, 2014
I Corinthians 12:1, 4-12, 25-27 (The Message)

Everyone has something to offer; we all have spiritual gifts that can help strengthen the United Church. The 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians speaks to just this topic. Rather than following along in the pew Bibles, I invite you to listen as I read from *The Message*, which is a modern paraphrase.

What I want to talk about now is the various ways God's Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often misunderstood, but I want you to be informed and knowledgeable.

God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all.

Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful: wise counsel clear understanding simple trust healing the sick miraculous acts proclamation distinguishing between spirits tongues interpretation of tongues.

All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.

You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts - limbs, organs, cells - but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ.

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. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything . . . May God bless the reading and hearing of these words.

Let us pray . . . Giver of all good gifts, we know that you have given each of us spiritual gifts not for us to hold onto but rather for us to share freely with others. Take and use the words that Janet, David and I will speak to empower our imaginations, awaken us to new possibilities, and embolden us in our actions. Amen.

Our culture teaches us the importance of starting well each New Year. People tend to take New Year's resolutions very seriously – at first.

If you need confirmation, simply visit the gym of your choice sometime this month.

Those crowded gyms never last long. While most resolutions are truly good ideas, often our motivation is inadequate to sustain our efforts.

One study found that after just one week, only 75% of those making resolutions were still committed to achieving them. By the time January ends, the number will drop to 64%. Amazingly, when the year ends, only 8% will actually achieve their New Year's resolutions.¹

I won't ask you to publically share whatever resolutions you have made for 2014 or just how successful you have been with keeping prior resolutions. I will, however, assume most of you have significant experience in this area.

I also suspect most of you are accustomed to making annual stewardship pledges to your church. And, many of the snowbirds among us, have faithfully pledged to multiple churches each year.

Stewardship pledges are a lot like New Year's Resolutions.

- They begin around the same time of year.
- They are – at least ideally – made after careful consideration.
- They require real commitment and genuine focus.

Stewardship pledges are also nothing like New Year's resolutions.

- They are about building God's realm on earth rather than improving something about ourselves.
- They require us to use gifts we already have rather than create something we don't yet have or no longer possess.
- They are designed to be made in Christian community and before God rather than on our own with casual mention to a few friends.

¹ Dan Diamond. "Just 8% of People Achieve Their New Year's Resolutions. Here's How They Do It."
<<http://www.forbes.com/sites/dandiamond/2013/01/01/just-8-of-people-achieve-their-new-years-resolutions-heres-how-they-did-it/>>

Stewardship is a whole life experience. It means caring for all that we are and all that we have with a recognition that everything entrusted to our oversight ultimately belongs to God.

This Sunday our stewardship focus is on time and talent. Each of us has spiritual gifts that are needed here within this community of faith, a body we call United Church.

This morning, two members of our congregation have agreed to share reflections about their experiences of giving of their time and talent. As you listen to their stories, I encourage you to consider your own.

(Janet Watson's testimonial)

(David Abercrombie's testimonial)

Thank you, Janet. Thank you, David. I appreciate not only that you said yes when presented an opportunity to speak, but also the many ways you have given generously of your time and talent.

Every time I turn around, I see people contributing. There are many rather obvious ways people give of themselves including

- helping at the Bargain Basket,
- serving on boards and committees, and
- assisting with worship and fellowship.

There are also many ways people help ensure we celebrate God's presence and serve all people that often go unnoticed. Important acts including

- praying for those on our prayer list,
- transporting folks to worship, and
- writing encouraging and uplifting notes.

In your worship bulletin this morning is a pledge card. It contains the same information as the ones that you received by mail. Take a moment to look at one now.

The top half begins with critically important words: "being a part of a church means sharing your time and talent with others." It then provides several broad categories of possibilities for your involvement this year. These include

- education,
- administration, and
- publicity.

There is no limit to the number you can select. You can also write in any special skills you have that may prove helpful, like

- calligraphy,
- photography, or
- carpentry.

And, then, just below that you can indicate the types of opportunities you are likely to attend. Finally, be sure to print your name and contact information so that we can follow up with you.

The opportunity to share of time and talent is for everyone. Seasonal or annual, young or old, member or guest, all are invited to offer of yourselves for the coming year.

As you begin filling in your pledge card or review the one you brought, I conclude my sermon with the story of a song.

Just over a decade ago, a youth pastor in Alabama did something he was accustomed to doing: he wrote a song for his youth group to support a lesson he was preparing to teach. In the years since, the words Mark Hall penned have been heard by millions.

The song, "If We Are the Body," features several verses about real life situations teens and people of all ages might experience. The chorus, however, is what immediately captured my attention.

It suggests that the body of Christ, when every member plays a role, can do incredible things. Sadly, it recognizes that we often fail to live up to that ideal because we fail to share our spiritual gifts. Some of us are called to be Jesus' hands and feet, others to be knees or elbows, and yet others to be eyes or ears.

The chorus reads:

But if we are the body
Why aren't His arms reaching?
Why aren't His hands healing?
Why aren't His words teaching?
And if we are the body
Why aren't His feet going
Why is His love not showing them
There is a way?²

² Mark Hall. "If We Are the Body." <<https://castingcrowns.com/node/641>>

As I look around the sanctuary, I see a wealth of spiritual gifts. As I scan our sacred space, I recognize many body parts.

Remember our Scripture reading?

You are Christ's body - that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything.

In 2014, we need what you have to offer. It is my hope and prayer that you will make a pledge to share generously of your time and talent.

As you do, you help us live into and up to our name. Serving together as one body, those within these walls and many beyond them, will know we are truly a United Church. Amen.