

Honoring the Giver by Honoring the Gift

Dan R. Dick

I once purchased a beautiful candle holder for a friend. That friend gushed gratitude for the gift. Months later, while visiting my friend, I saw the candle holder tossed into a carton for Goodwill. I still remember how I felt — a sense of loss and hurt — a rejection of a gift of the heart.

How does God feel about the way we treat the gifts we are given? Not material gifts, or the gifts of our bodies and minds, but our spiritual gifts? For years, I have led spiritual gifts workshops; and although interest is growing, many people are ignorant about the gifts they possess.

Take a moment to read three passages of Scripture that reveal important teachings about spiritual gifts:

1 Corinthians 12

Romans 12:1-8

Ephesians 4:1-16

Everyone is specially gifted by God. The question is never, "Am I gifted?" Rather, the question should be, "What are my gifts?"

When people discover their gifts, they are empowered to fulfill God's purpose for their lives.

The church does not define the gifts; rather, the church is defined by the gifts. The Scriptures noted above indicate that congregations are as uniquely gifted as individuals. The church doesn't define its work, then "plug people in" to positions or offices. Form always follows function, and the structure of the church organization is rooted in the gifts of the people.

Spiritual gifts discovery is a corporate journey toward understanding the will of God. No spiritual gift is given solely for the benefit of the individual. Gifts are given for the common good — to build the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are synergistic — the linked result is greater than the sum of the parts. Knowledge may be impressive; but until it is linked with the gift of teaching, tested by the gift of discernment, and supported by the gift of wisdom, it lacks the power to transform.

The gift of healing — linked with gifts of compassion, leadership, servanthood, and evangelism — moves us into the world to save lives. Healing linked with helping, exhortation, administration, and shepherding focuses us inward to care for one another. Our gifts in combination reveal the character and identity of our congregation.

It is not enough to simply identify our spiritual gifts. Through the improvement and development of spiritual gifts, we increase our effectiveness and efficiency. Until we discover and develop our gifts, we may waste valuable resources attempting to do things for which we are not equipped.

Our world is filled with incredible need. God gives us both the opportunity and the gifts necessary to meet every need. God waits anxiously to see what we will do with these gifts.

Class Helps Parents Find Children's Gifts

A UMNS Report

By Joey Butler*

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Imagine a religious education class that focuses on children's gifts, rather than their sins.

It is a class that helps parents recognize what their kids are doing right, and calls on them to nurture those gifts.

When those children become teenagers, and face temptations from alcohol to sex, they will have the spiritual talents and readiness to make good decisions.

That is the hope of Ken Seidel and the Rev. Ray Crawford, who teach an intergenerational class at Claremore (Okla.) First United Methodist Church

Letting children focus on those gifts gives them a greater sense of self-worth, which helps them combat bad habits.

"Our youth are distracted by overstimulation in our society," Seidel says. "So many are going in directions harmful to themselves – drugs, alcohol, violence, sex. It seems to be escalating."

Seidel, a Claremore First member and teacher at an alternative-education center, said that parents, frustrated by running out of answers trying things that did not work, often ask him for advice. After 10 years of listening to students, he realized the most troubled teens were adopting self-destructive lifestyles modeled after what they saw in popular culture.

"It interests me how many children end up being the 'parent' in the family," Seidel said. "The parents in our society are so confused. They fall into wanting to please their child and keep them happy. 'Happiness' is available in our society through all kinds of diversions and too many children choose that route."

After taking an adult spiritual gifts inventory class, Seidel approached Crawford, Claremore First's senior pastor, about designing a similar class for children and their parents.

"We wanted a gifts inventory for children where they could get feedback from parents, grandparents and others in their lives who love them," Crawford said. "If you have people who love you, who have been reinforcing that you have some wonderful gifts that God has given you, you're more likely to believe it."

The result was a five-week intergenerational course that helps parents focus on their children more closely. Through weekly lessons and homework, parents are taught to observe their children, identify their spiritual gifts, and then talk to the children about their gifts and how to

Pastor emphasizes spiritual gifts of older people

2/14/2001 **News media contact: Linda Bloom**

*A UMNS News Feature By Linda Green**

An 84-year-old United Methodist pastor says a nudge from God prompted her to pursue a doctorate in spirituality in the aging process.

In May, the Rev. Catherine Salisbury of Pulaski, N.Y., will receive a doctor of ministry degree for exploring a new spiritual vision of aging. She will receive the degree from Colgate Rochester (N.Y.) Divinity School, and she plans to use her research findings to assist United Methodists in helping senior citizens fully participate in church life.

Ageism and negative stereotypes of aging have diminished the church's ministry, she says. Her goal in pursuing a doctorate was to explore the spirituality and the positive aspects of aging.

"Growing older is a gift from God, and we old people need to be involved in the church," Salisbury says. "We need to stop saying, 'We've done it, now let the young people do it.' "

Salisbury was ordained a deacon in the United Methodist Church in 1982 and became an ordained elder in 1985. Before pursuing a doctorate, she was the pastor of three churches in Northern New York: Fernwood, Dugway and Altmar. Throughout her 20 years of active ministry, she served as pastor or associate pastor in 18 churches. She is not currently serving a church, but she occasionally preaches at Park United Methodist Church in Pulaski and in other pulpits as needed.

Salisbury's college work began relatively late in life.

"I was a grandma when I began college," she says. She was a farmer's wife and had raised seven children before deciding that she needed a college education. She enrolled in the State University of New York (SUNY) and received an undergraduate degree in education. She taught elementary school for 16 years and retired following the death of her husband in 1978. The grandmother of 12 and great-grandmother of 19 enrolled in The Theological School at Drew University, in Madison, N.J., and received a master of divinity degree in 1982.

In her ministry, she became affectionately known as "Reverend Grandma." While she was active in church life, she observed her peers dropping out of congregational life, she says. She saw "a need for the church and our congregations to recognize and benefit from the presence of the rapidly growing number of older persons in our midst."

As a result, she began researching spirituality in the aging process. "At the age of 78, I felt a call from God to undertake the pursuit of a doctor of ministry program and continue my research ... explor(ing) a new vision of God's purposes in blessing so many with a healthy and meaningful longevity." She began the doctoral candidacy process and enrolled at Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

God's grace and advanced medical science enabled her to reach the age of 84, and she hopes to live even longer, she says. "I envision many of my generation accompanying me on this lifetime journey into their 80s and 90s and beyond."

In her quest for information to help churches benefit from older members, she discovered that aside from a few published authors, information about aging and spirituality was limited. "At the time I started this, there did not seem to be very many books out there. Most were about older adult ministry and how we can take care of them," she says.

She wanted to explore how faith and trust in God's promises can influence positive attitudes toward aging. "Faith and trust in God is something that helps us age well, and I would like the people in our churches, including the pastors, to realize that."

Aging well means addressing spiritual, as well as mental, emotional and physical, well-being, she says.

A new spiritual vision of aging for the church involves changing the mindset of people from "taking care of these old folks ... to allowing older people to put more dependence on faith and trust in God to have a meaningful and abundant life, as Jesus said we should have," she says.

Salisbury believes senior citizens need to be less dependent on materialism and secular gods to give them an edge. This is not to say older adults need not rely on medicine and other types of health care, she says, but they also must trust God to help them with their needs.

Research shows that people are living longer, and the church and each older person must find ways to make the added years meaningful, she says.

Salisbury's spiritual vision is focused on church and community leaders who are invoking God's guidance in order to include people of all ages, races and genders in planning and carrying out Christian ministries, especially in the area of faith development.

Pastors, congregations and people of all ages should be aware that "generational inclusivity" is needed in the ministries of all United Methodist churches, Salisbury says. An older-adults ministry means more than providing care, she says. It means including older adults in the entire ministry of the church.

"Too many old people have said, 'I've done my part and it is up to the younger folk.' That is wrong. We need to live fully until the last day we have."

use them. At the end of the class, parents and children collaborate to make a poster that illustrates each child's gifts. This allows each child to see how their gifts make them unique.

"When we take the time to focus, we see things that were right in front of our eyes that we'd never seen before. Once we see that, it's a surprise, and it seems to hit home more," Seidel said.

Crawford said the class differs from an adult spiritual gifts inventory, in that "these aren't necessarily the spiritual gifts from the New Testament.

"For instance, we had one father who said, 'My kids just love Jesus. They love to come to church; they want to pray for people.' We said that is definitely something to be affirmed. We didn't limit parents to the classical spiritual gifts definition," he said.

The class was designed for parents of children ages 5-11.

"Our approach is telling parents, 'You're missing these years, when you're running around and getting them involved in soccer and keeping the activity level high. You've kept them busy, but you haven't given them the moral compass to rely on when all the temptations come their way.' We're trying to offer parents more preventative measures," Seidel said.