

Gifted by God  
I Corinthians 12:14-20  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
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Here at First Christian, as with at other churches, there are so many different roles and tasks and opportunities for people to participate in congregational life and offer various types of leadership.

We only need to look as far as worship to see an example. We have different people reading scripture, sharing music, praying at the table, and participating in other ways. Even those of you who regularly worship with us from a distance have sometimes been invited to share in worship leadership by recording or writing something, to add your name to the dove tree during Advent or contribute your prayers and ideas when we do interactive offerings during worship. Many of our ministries take place in a hybrid fashion so that you can participate in Bible Study and small groups. Sometimes we have people who lead from a distance.

We could continue making lists of all the roles and tasks and opportunities that are part of just doing the little piece of ministry in this world that we here at First Christian Church are called to take responsibility for. There are a lot!

And sometimes it may feel like too much. Or sometimes it may feel like all the church wants is to make sure that every job has a name assigned to it, to make sure that every role is filled, to make sure that there is enough money to support all that we do.

But, these asks and invitations are not just about that. They are not just about the continuation of our church or of our ministry. The ways that you and I participate and lead, *yes*, they *do* help the church, but they are about so much more than that.

And this has always been true. Paul's letter to the church at Corinth reminds us of that. Today we read a section from chapter 12 - although I would encourage you to take a minute sometime and go ahead and read the entire chapter, to see the larger conversation this fits into.

Here, Paul is writing to the church at Corinth. This was a church he had established, but from which he was now separated. This was, we read in these letters - and remember, in the Bible we have two letters to this same church - this was a church that had some internal conflict as people from different backgrounds and experiences were learning how to be Christians in one community together.

And we can imagine the conversations happening that caused this chapter to be written.

Perhaps there were people who felt like others weren't pulling their own weight, weren't doing enough.

Perhaps there were people who felt like some were doing too much.

Perhaps there were people who treated certain gifts as if they were more valuable, heaping praise on the talented singer while the one who cleaned up after worship rarely got a thank you.

Perhaps there were people who were jealous of what others were asked to do or had the gifts to do.

We can imagine a lot of possibilities as we think about what Paul was responding to. We can imagine these, at least partially, because we still experience them.

The modern church is not immune to the perceptions that some do too much and some too little. We are not immune to a sense of competition between people - yes, even in the church - or to a desire to rank gifts as somehow better or worse. I suspect that for all of us, there is some gift that we are jealous of. For me, it is music...if I got to pick my gift, I would be able to carry a tune, or to write new music like Laura can. But, that isn't my gift.

And in the face of this, Paul reminds us that *all* are important. Whether they are up front and center, gifts that everyone can see, or whether they are gifts that move people to work in the background, things that just keep our ministry moving like a well-oiled machine...*all* are important.

And at some level this can be said of every organization, every family, every community. But, as people of faith, there is something special that we talk about. This isn't just about abilities and talents, but as people of faith, we understand that all of us have been given gifts and all of those gifts are meant to be shared for the common good.

Yes, Paul reminds us that we are called to use our gifts not for our own purposes or our own successes, not to draw attention to ourselves or to receive accolades, but that we have gifts to share for the greater whole, to help the community, gifts that are designed not to stand on their own, but to work in concert with those of others.

And what that means is that we are not only *invited* to do things in the church, but that we all have a *responsibility* to use our gifts. Whether we are part of the church because it is our vocation, our professional calling like Laura, Kara, and I...or whether our professional life is lived out elsewhere but we are part of the church because we know that our faith is better practiced in the community...whether we are clergy or lay people... not only does the church need all of us to be most fully who we are called to be, but we need the church as we strive to live out of our gifts and to give back to the mission of being the hands and feet of Jesus.

And, while being part of a group means that none of us have to do everything, what it doesn't do is minimize our gifts. Even the seemingly "little" things we do matter and matter even more when we do them with and for and in community.

In Eugene Peterson's Bible translation *The Message* we hear these verses from I Corinthians this way, "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. If Foot said, "I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body," would that make it so? If Ear said, "I'm not beautiful like Eye, transparent and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would you want to

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remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

“But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a *part of*. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster (*The Message*, I Corinthians 12:14-21).

We are called to be the *body* of Christ.

And there is one more thing it serves us well as Disciples to remember. As we explore the core values of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we cannot help but talk about the priesthood of all believers. This is a term that so many churches use - after all, we have all read I Corinthians 12.

But Disciples have lived it out in ways that I think are unique and wonderful.

You remember our beginning? On the American frontier? You remember our commitment to coming together at the communion table when we worship? Well put those together and that alone gives us a great example of how we are all so important.

If we were going to have communion each time we worship. And as a church born on the American frontier where settled pastors were a luxury and more often just not a reality. Then we had to be people who embraced the priesthood of all believers in a different way than many.

While other denominations saved presiding at the table as a job only for ordained clergy, and often only had communion occasionally, we embraced that the table was a place where others could lead. In fact, there have been many Disciples congregations, even into modern day, where pastors are not the primary ones leading at the table.

This is only one example, but the joy of it is that it is visible. And that openness and commitment to the priesthood of all believers has meant that earlier than many other churches we not only had lay people presiding at the table, but women, and even children. What more open table is there than this?

So, friends, yes - we need your gifts and your time and your energy in order to do the ministry that we are called to do in our community and our world. But inviting you to serve is about so much more.

It is an affirmation of the giftedness of each and every person.

It is an affirmation of that ministry of First Christian does not belong to the staff. It is not mine or Kara's or Laura's, but is all of ours together.

And it is not just about the church needing you. It is about you needing to serve, to use your gifts, to be fully who God created you to be in and for this world. Amen.

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