

For 28 years, my definition of the church's organizing principle has been "to discover and release, in congregation and world, the gifts God has distributed among his people." I was therefore delighted to run across this very wise, and very well written, statement of Betty O'Connor, Gordon Cosby's secretary through all the years at Church of the Savior (EIGHTH DAY OF CREATION: GIFTS AND CREATIVITY [Word/71/74], :pp.32f):

As Daniel had asked his prayer group to pray with him, our group member asked us to pray with her so that she could discover the gift that she was to use on behalf of the mission. In the closing session of the retreat she told us that in her imagination she had role-played all the gifts we had suggested, but that none of them had felt right. Out of her praying, however, had come the feeling that she had a gift for intercessory prayer. She knew that it mattered to her that other people were praying for her that weekend, and she began to know that she would enjoy praying for others. She had the conviction that her prayers would count and even began to think that she might have something to say to those who were deeply questioning the value of intercessory prayer.

2 The group had no difficulty in confirming her as an intercessor. Confirmation of her gift did not mean that the rest of us would give up our prayers of intercession for each other and the group and its mission, but it did mean that we now had a person who would spend more time at the work of intercession. Perhaps hers would always be a hidden work; on the other hand she might become a teacher. In any case, if the parable of the talents is true, her capacity for intercession would grow.

3 Confirmation of a gift also carries a responsibility to others. Part of this is to hold the person accountable for his gift. Again this is in the parable. How does another person know that we have taken what he has said with any seriousness if we do not ask what he has done with his gift? The reason

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5 our groups go through the process of naming our gifts and making explicit our covenant is so that we can grow in responsibility and move toward authentic freedom. The person who is seriously interested in investing his life does not perceive the time of accounting as something to be anticipated with dread, but as a caring which supports and encourages him in what he wants to do.

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7 Gifts that are accepted with difficulty into awareness can very easily slip out of consciousness. They need to be remembered and tended. Confirmation of a gift by the members of a mission group means a willingness to be obedient to the person at the point of his gift. This is the basis of the lines of authority in a group. If a person names his gift and is willing to be responsible in the area of his gift, those who confirm him recognize his authority. They have listened to him and heard his gift as an articulation of his life.

In our hearing lies our obedience. Just as the person's hearing of his own gift brings him under its authority—obedient to what it will ask of him—so the community's hearing of that gift brings its members under obedience. The gift is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit calls it forth and the power of the Spirit becomes visible in its exercising. The Spirit-filled community is a community where each person is exercising his gift or gifts on behalf of the whole.

One of the first gifts that we name in a group is the gift of prior or moderator.