

Discover. Use. Grow (2024-The Year of Talents)

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 (New American Standard Bible) (Underline v. 12, 14, 18, 27, 28).

One Body, Many Parts

¹² For just as **the body is one and yet has many parts**, and all the parts of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ For **the body is not one part, but many**. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ **But now God has arranged the parts, each one of them in the body, just as He desired.** ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again, the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, it is much truer that the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³ and those parts of the body which we consider less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor, and our less presentable parts become much more presentable, ²⁴ whereas our more presentable parts have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that part which lacked, ²⁵ so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if a part is honored, all the parts rejoice with it.

²⁷ **Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.** ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church, first **apostles**, second **prophets**, third **teachers**, then **miracles**, then **gifts of healings, helps, administrations, and various kinds of tongues**. ²⁹ All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? ³⁰ All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? ³¹ But earnestly desire the greater gifts.

And yet, I am going to show you a far better way.

Introduction

As pastor of this congregation, I designate this year 2024 to be 'The Year of Talents.' Throughout the year we will focus on the talents God has given us. We will also encourage one another to utilize their gifts for the ministry in God's Church.

Why is this year's focus on God-given talents? For two reasons:

- 1) *For a healthier congregation:* If you evaluate the spiritual health of our congregation, what grade would you give? Some of you may give an “A”, while I would give a “B minus.” Here’s why. Although our congregation we know is vital and healthy, it can be healthier than now. There’s always room to grow. In my humble opinion, as a congregation, we have been missing out on a greater potential we can reach in ministries. In order to bring Manahawkin to its full potential as God’s arm for ministry in the world, we need to utilize more God-given talents among us.
- 2) *For a lay-centered ministry church:* We need to reshape our congregation from a clergy-centered ministry church to a lay-centered ministry church. The church you look at now shows how much/how little one pastor can do. The Manahawkin you look at today is the maximum Kyewoon Choi can do by himself. Manahawkin can never be any stronger than its core of lay servants, not clergy, who carry out various ministries of the church.

What’s going to happen to us this year?

- 1) All members and friends, old and young, male and female, will be invited to discover their God-given talents through prayers and discernments.
- 2) All members and friends will be encouraged to be involved in ministry at least one by freely experimenting with their talents so as to find their ministry niche.
- 3) All members and friends will experience spiritual growth and will contribute to the health of our congregation as they continue serving God’s people and the people in the world with their gifts and talents.

In order for us to stay on the same page, we need to begin with the understanding of God’s purpose and His expectations for His Church on earth.

What’s God’s plan for the Church and what does He expect from them?

Christ’s Church is God’s Kingdom ministry agent on earth. God works with the Body of Christ. He ministers to the world through the Church. What is the primary responsibility of the Church? To bring the good news of Jesus Christ to all nations and make them the disciples of Jesus Christ. Since its inception 2000 years ago, the Church has been the active agent of God on earth fulfilling God’s will for humanity. Of course, the Bible calls the Church “Body of Christ” that is made up of many parts and members. Church is not an organization. Church is not a building. It is not brick and mortar. It is people. It is flesh and blood. It is a living organism that has many members and organs. You are a member. So am I. 😊

Now the great news is this: To fulfill the task, God equips all the members of this living Church with spiritual gifts and talents. Let me repeat. “God equips **each and every one** of us.” And each one’s talent and gift are unique. E.g., Imagine your own body with

hundreds of members and organs. All are different and each member has unique, one and the only one function to contribute to the whole body. Such as eyes, nose, ears, hands, feet, heart,... That's the Body of Christ. Each function we call a gift from God.

When God grants His gifts and talents to us, He has a clear purpose in His mind. He also has expectations for every one of us. He wants us to use the gifts, not bury them, to serve people both in the Church and outside the Church. God's gift is not just for you. It is to be shared with others. As members of Christ's Church, your job and mine is to exercise and share our own unique gifts to bring glory to God's name through ministries. When every member functions properly and shares their talents for ministry, the Church will experience a healthy growth and the society will benefit from our services. Of course, the opposite is true too.

Why is the Church today in general, Manahawkin in particular, not up to its full potential?

Because of the lack of member participation in ministry. Imagine a body where a couple of internal organs stop functioning (E.g., heart and liver). The entire body would suffer and show signs of a serious ailment. Same goes with the Body of Christ. When many members are not involved in ministries, Church becomes sick or weak. The more serious problem is this: we forgot what God's expectations for us are and actually we even brought them down to a lower level. Today, in many a congregation, Manahawkin included, besides the church attendance and financial support, not much is expected from a member. E.g., Did I tell you that the average attendance in Methodist Church is once a month? Although all members, when they joined the church, made a vow to support MUMC with their *prayers, presence, gifts, and service* (Hymnal, p. 38). Such commitment is practically forgotten or virtually not practiced by many members.

Remember: God's expectations for us are far greater than church attendance and financial support. He expects us to use our gifts and talents in ministry to edify Christ's Body. Imagine our congregation will grow exponentially when **all** members are involved in ministries both in the church and in the world.

What's one of the greatest challenge and need in the Church today?

The mobilization of all God's people for ministry. The unleashing of members for ministry. A Gallup survey: only 10% of American church members are active in any kind of personal ministry and that 50% of all church members have no interest in serving in any ministry (no matter how much a congregation promotes involvement in lay ministry, half of its members will remain spectators!). The encouraging news is that 40% of all members have expressed an interest in having a ministry, but they have never been asked or they don't know! So, my goal, as pastor of this church, is to tap into and to mobilize this 40% of

members and add them to the current 10% already serving, then, Manahawkin will have 50% of its members active in ministry!

What has lacked in my leadership at Manahawkin (since 2013) in terms of lay ministry?

Two things: **No systematic initiative and low expectations.** When it comes down to a low participation of lay ministry at Manahawkin, I can easily excuse myself by saying that Manahawkin is no different from a typical congregation that suffers from this universal epidemic of indifference among members. But, on my part, there has not been a significant initiative to cultivate members' giftedness/expertise. Don't get me wrong. I have been encouraging the folks to be involved in ministry through my preaching and personal invitations. As often as I could. However, those efforts have been insufficient and carried out in a sporadic and un-organized way that the result of lay involvement at our church was never greater than the national average-10%. In other words, while the 10% of members were so exhausted with many hats they are wearing, so many other talents have been sitting in the pews every weekend, untapped and wasted. The talents that are sitting on the shelf are going to rot from disuse, like a muscle: if you don't use it, you'll lose it. Sadly, for most of you, I still have little idea what you are capable of doing. Neither have I provided any means to encourage you to use your talents. I am going to change that from now on.

My second mistake was to fail to hold the members to a higher expectation. Many a time, I was just happy to see any member at worship services and if he/she financially supports the church. That too needs to change.

No initiative and low expectations are equal to talents wasted. It also is equal to poor health of the congregation. This spiritual lethargic pattern must be stopped.

Implications: An intentional, well-planned system for discovering, mobilizing, and supporting the giftedness of members is necessary. Preaching / teaching are not enough, for most members still do nothing but attending and giving even after they have been challenged to a more involvement. Don't get me wrong. I understand some of our members who are physically limited to do anything beyond what they have been doing. I am not asking them to do more than what they can. However, there are 90 % of the congregation who are perfectly capable to be present at worship in person. With God's help we will set up a process to lead people to deep commitment and greater service for Christ in the months to come.

The catch phrase this year: Discover, Use, and Grow.

Here are my personal commitments to you:

1. Through preaching and teaching, I will remind you from time to time that God expects us to use God-given talents for ministry.
2. I will pray for you, help you, and work with you to discover what your God-given talents are. Remember everyone has received one.
3. Once you have discovered your talents, unless you are already using them in ministry, I will encourage you to be involved in ministries through experiments.
4. I will support you and keep appreciating your contribution to Christ's body: that your ministry brings health and growth to Manahawkin to its full potential.
5. Scroll for you: I have prayerfully chosen some verses in the Bible all related to talents and gifts God has given us. Before you go home, please take one for you. If you have a family, one scroll for each member of your household. Place them in a visible place so that you can look and remind yourself throughout the year.

Closing Remarks: It took me over ten years to attain your trust in this congregation. Now, if you trust me as your pastor and spiritual leader, would you accept my invitation to work with me to bring good health to our church and enrich the ministries at Manahawkin this year? Would you join me in this endeavor as we put our heads, hearts, and hands together to discover our talents and use them to the glory of God and to serve people in Christ's love? Amen?

Update on "Joyful Commitment Card 2024". Only about 30 cards were submitted out of 150 cards mailed to you. If you haven't turned your card in, please do so today. If you misplaced it and don't have it with you, grab one in the pew. Prayerfully fill it out and put it in the offering plates today.

Thank you.

Let us pray.