

*The Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others.
1 Cor. 12:7*

While we work together in congregational dialogues about a mission statement in October and November, we will also encourage everyone to reflect in small groups about our passion, spiritual gift, personal style and calling.

Our sermons through Nov. 20, will take us through the book of Acts, in a series called “The Spread of the Gospel.” A clear mission and reliance on the gifts of the Holy Spirit will be noted throughout Acts. You are invited to read assigned chapters in advance each week, noted in the bulletin, and at the end of each milepost.

Q. Didn’t the church get spiritual gifts figured out in the 1980s?

A. Spiritual gifts were big in the 1980s, as charismatic renewal swept through most denominations. Millions of books and assessment tools have been sold since then. While nominating committees were renamed Spiritual Gift Discernment, about the only change I noticed was the survey inviting members to volunteer or suggest others. When the dust settled, the focus remained filling positions once a year, not helping *every* believer discover his/her unique 365 days a year call.

Q. I recall abuses of spiritual gifts back then. Can this be avoided?

A. It is the responsibility of each believer to *find out what the Lord wants you to do* (Eph. 5:17). But we cannot do this by ourselves. Our gift and calling need to be tested and confirmed by other Christians who are willing to speak the truth in love in relationships.

Q. This is too mechanical. The realm of the Spirit is not about assessment tools and lists.

A. Spiritual gift assessments are only the first step. If there is no intention of going beyond this first step, don’t waste time on assessments. Practically all congregations have used a spiritual gift assessment tool. Individuals go home with 3 or 4 spiritual gifts, and a year later very few can recall the results. *The missing essential second step*

is having small groups characterized by vulnerability in relationships, where refinement of spiritual gift and call is ongoing. I believe this is the only way for spiritual gift discernment to become an integral part of congregational cultural.

Q. Getting everyone to participate is impossible.

A. Correct! We introduce as many as possible to the basics, knowing that a few will go deeper and experience transformation as their call is clarified. Their excitement will be contagious. It’s an organic process, not a program.

Q. So what’s the process at Shalom?

I will meet with each small group once in the next five weeks, to introduce discernment resources, answer questions, and encourage additional conversation. We will build on this beginning, in small groups at the Nov. 5 retreat. As those share who have clarity regarding spiritual gift and call, others are helped to find clarity for themselves. Additional sessions will be available for those not in a small group, and for small group members who miss their own group meeting when I visit.

Q. Sounds like a big time commitment!

A. Not for those in small groups who plan on attending the retreat! Taking additional time is only for those who want to go deeper: complete an assessment, read, and participate in additional discernment sessions.

Q. Is this replacing the work of the Gifts Discernment Ministry?

A. Not at all. The focus is about helping everyone clarify Jesus’ unique call on their life. It’s not about filling positions at Shalom.

-Gary Martin

Looking Ahead: “The Spread of the Gospel” Sept. 25-Nov. 20

Sept. 25 9:30 a.m. *Disciples under the Influence of the Holy Spirit*

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-21 Gary Martin

Oct. 2 9:30 a.m. *Community* Acts 1:1-2:47 Frank Kandel

Oct. 9 9:30 a.m. *The Virtue of Boldness* Acts 3:1-7:60 Brian Bither

11:00 a.m. Congregational Dialogue: *Mission Statement*

Nov. 5 Retreat: *spiritual gift discernment*

Gary’s projected in town schedule: Sept. 25-28; Oct. 9-10