

Discerning and Using Gifts

“Do not ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman

God has created each of us with particular strengths and particular gifts—and each person’s are different. Central to the Christian understanding of vocation is a recognition that our gifts were not given just for our own use, but that God has given them to us for the sake of others—indeed for the whole creation. Discerning vocation is a process of discovering those God-given gifts that make you “come alive” and then finding way a way to use those gifts for the sake of those who need them. When we do this, we participate in the living Body of Christ. As St. Paul wrote to the Christian community in Corinth: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord... For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

In the practice of Discerning and Using Gifts we will bring together the practices we have learned thus far--Holy Listening, Testimony, Self Awakening Questions, and Reflect and Connect—as we seek to discover the next steps in using our gifts for God’s purposes.

Practice: Discerning and Using Gifts

Gifts Assessment: Before beginning this practice, take a “Spiritual Gifts Assessment” (a Google search will give you many to choose from). Review the results and think critically about whether they reflect your gifts or not—be open to being surprised by unexpected gifts! Pray over the list, and notice if God is drawing your attention to any gift in particular. Ask God in prayer what this might mean for you.

Holy Listening/Testimony/Self Awakening Questions: Find a partner and decide who will share first, and who will share second. You will have 2 minutes in silence to think, and then 2 minutes to share your story. The listener will then have 2 minutes to form and ask a Self Awakening Question (and listen to the response).

Tell a story about a time when you used one of your gifts in service of someone else

*2 min silence, 2 min person A tell story, 2 min ask a question (and response) then
2 min person B story, 2 min ask a question (and response)*

Self-Awakening Questions for Deeper Discernment: Sit in silence for several minutes reflecting on the story you have just heard. Pray silently for your story partner, and give thanks to God for their gifts. As you pray, listen for God stirring up a self-awakening question that might draw the person deeper into how they might be being called to use their gifts in new ways. The question may simply be: “How is God calling you to use your gifts in new ways.” Ask them whatever question emerges, and listen closely to their response. Then switch.

Reflect and Connect/Theological Reflection: As you were listening to your story partner, did you find points of connection to your own story? To your own gifts? Share those connections with them. Were there any songs/poems/artworks/scriptures that came to mind during this process? Did you notice the presence of God during this time? Share those connections with your story partner too.

For Further Reflection

When in your life have you made decisions that have impacted where your life would head from that moment on? What values influenced those decisions? Were those your values or someone else's?

At what points in your journey has God felt present? When has God felt absent? Looking back on your life now, do you have a new perspective on how God has been at work?

How has God revealed to you your gifts? Who has been part of naming those gifts for you? What else helped you discover what your gifts are and to put them to use?

Where do you find your deep gladness meeting the world's deep hunger? How does it feel when you use your gifts in a way that serves others?

What challenges present themselves as you reflect on your gifts and what you are called to do with your life? Who or what helps you get clearer? Who or what gets in the way?

What are the next steps for you in discovering your gifts and discerning your vocation?