

A Week in the Life of PPC
1 Corinthians 12:1-12
Sermon preached by Charles C. Williamson

Philadelphia Presbyterian Church

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Sometimes, if you just open your eyes, you can see the scriptures being lived out; you can see the teachings of the Bible being put into action.

I have just read the familiar passage from I Corinthians where Paul talks about the various spiritual gifts that we have been given by the Holy Spirit. Paul says, “To each [person] is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” That is to say, every person has been given some gift that can be used for the good of God’s kingdom, for the good of the people of God. God has given to every person a gift that can be used to strengthen the Body of Christ.

And with that thought in mind, I started thinking about our church and the wonderful variety of gifts that God has given to us which people willingly use for the higher good. What I want you to do is to take a walk with me through this past week, and let’s see how this scripture was brought to life.

When you came to church last Sunday, the doors were unlocked, the lights were on, the heat had been turned on. You may not have given that any thought, but it happened because last Sunday Tim Rosmon got here while most of us were still sleeping, walked all over our church campus in the 17 degree cold, just to make sure that you would find everything welcoming and in order when you arrived. This morning it was Dick Lamb who rolled out of bed and braved the cold for us.

Then when you came into the sanctuary, you were welcomed by ushers and greeters who have the special gift of hospitality and welcome.

When you took your seat, you found the hymnals in their place, all of them pointing in the same direction. You found our sanctuary neat and in order because every week Amelia Ford comes over here, and without any fanfare, goes through the sanctuary to make sure things are straight and in order for you when you come to church.

When you came into worship, you picked up your bulletin, your children took one of the children’s worship bags and you went to your favorite pew. Do you ever give any thought to what has to happen to have the bulletins available and to have the children’s worship bags useable? Probably not, but behind the scenes people are working to make it happen. Every Friday, Pete Kastner comes over to the church office and stuffs the bulletins, and makes sure they are ready for you when you arrive. Also, every couple of weeks Debbe King comes to the church to check the children’s worship bags to make sure they have all the items they need and any out of date papers have been removed.

I’m not exactly sure what you call the spiritual gift that each of these people is putting to work—maybe it’s the gift of willingness. They see something that needs to be done, and they willingly step forward to do it. It’s a servanthood gift.

When you came into the sanctuary, you saw a beautiful arrangement of flowers, which Tina Ross had prepared, using some of the bright and colorful flowers from Melissa Hoffner Johnson’s wedding. That’s an artistic gift that I don’t have even a smidgen of.

Last week in both worship services, we celebrated the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. On the Communion Table were a loaf of bread, a pitcher of juice, plates with pieces of bread and trays with little cups of juice. That didn't just happen. Every time we celebrate the sacrament, Ellen Street, Diane Campbell Beard and Frances Middleton prepare the elements so that you and I may be blessed by the holy sacrament. Again it's a gift of servanthood that is being put into practice.

Many of came to Sunday School, where someone with a gift for teaching had prepared a lesson to help you to understand God's word more fully. Most of the Sunday School teachers I know don't take that responsibility lightly, but they understand that it is a way to communicate the faith in a meaningful way. And so they give it their best effort. I'm certainly grateful for those people in my life who have willingly used the gift of teaching to make the scriptures come alive for me.

If you had come back to church last Sunday night, you would have seen and heard our choir practicing. We are certainly blessed to have people like Gary and Sheila and Leslie who have been given a very special musical gift that they so willingly use. And we also have others who willingly give practice time to learn the anthems so that the music will help to enrich our worship.

And this next week our children's and youth choirs will get back to work. Under the direction of Melinda and Alice and Marnie...well, you know what a joy the children add to our worship.

And then there's ministry with youth. Matt certainly has that gift of relating to youth, but he has also pulled in others with that gift—Walt Leaver, Clint Lawrence, Melissa Tamez generously give their time week after week to build relationships with our youth and to help guide them as they grow in faith. Parents take turns providing food for the youth; they support youth programs as chaperones and sponsors. It takes a special kind of heart to work effectively with youth, and we are blessed to have so many people who do it faithfully.

When the work week began on Monday, a couple of volunteers, giving several hours of their time, came to count and record the previous day's offerings. And there's Bill Tilley, our volunteer church treasurer, who puts in more hours than we could begin to pay him for. These people all have been blessed with a particular set of gifts, and they willingly use those gifts for the good of our church.

On Monday...and every morning...Dot Bartlett and others with the gift of caring for children helped to nurture the children in our Weekday Preschool.

Also on Monday, down in Bigham Hall, Mary was getting ready for the daily Hot Meals program for people, not just from our church, but also from our community. It's an opportunity to grow friendships and enjoy a meal at the same time.

Later on, Monday afternoon, a group of people with the gift of compassion and caring continued their extensive training so that they can become Stephen Ministers. A Stephen Minister is one who is willing to devote time and love to give encouragement and help to someone who is experiencing some kind of need. And I'm sure that some of you can attest to the value of having a caring relationship with a Stephen Minister. We are blessed that we have people in our congregation who have been given that gift of compassion by the Holy Spirit, and they are willing to use that gift for the good of the people of God.

Monday evening our campus was bursting at the seams with scouts—Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and their leaders, who have been given the gift of instilling those particular skills and values that can shape a boy for life. Similarly, our Girl Scout troops are effective because of gifted and dedicated leaders.

Tuesday was circle day for a couple of the Presbyterian Women's circles. The Bible moderator had prepared the Bible Study; the circle moderator conducted the meeting; women gathered to share prayer concerns and to be drawn closer together. That too is a valuable and important gift we have been given.

And that night there was a meeting of those who are planning our upcoming congregational retreat to Montreat, called "Around the Water Cooler." To make that event work takes people with a gift for planning and creativity. Susan Griffin and Marc McClure give their special artistic gift to help make the retreat meaningful and memorable.

On Wednesday you would have gotten a wonderful picture of the gift of hospitality at work. Working behind the scenes, people like Ann Whaley, Dave and Karen O'Brien, Sheila Cloaninger and Linda Davenport made things ready to welcome our Room in the Inn neighbors. And when the neighbors arrived, they were warmly greeted by the members of the Disciples Class and their children. As we sat down for the meal—which those with that particular gift had prepared—I asked if anyone would like to offer the blessing for the meal. One hand shot up—Mason Jeager, age 6. And our food was genuinely blessed...as were we. Thank you, God, for the gift of prayer.

Also on Wednesday, many of our church leaders with a gift for planning and administration continued to work on our new Ministry Model for organizing the way we go about doing the things we believe God is calling us to do. It's been a long process that has required many man...and woman...hours, and the goal is to give every person an opportunity to use the gifts God has given them. We'll talk more about that in a moment.

Wednesday evening, gathered around a fire outside the old Scout Hut, the Alcoholics Anonymous group met. They brought together their gifts of caring and understanding to support each other as they deal with that challenging life issue.

And then there's service to the larger church: Gary McCrimmon giving up a day to meet with Charlotte Presbytery's Church Development Committee, and yesterday Sonia and her team of volunteers scurrying all over our church campus to do whatever was needed to host the large group of Presbyterians who had come to Philadelphia to learn about being an effective church.

If you had gone over to the Habitat House yesterday morning, you would have seen people with different sets of gifts—carpentry, painting, skills I can't begin to describe. People willingly used those gifts to help to make a new home for the Lual family. Does everyone have those gifts? No, but thankfully those who do have them have been willing to use them for the good of God's kingdom.

Going on throughout the week visits were being made, cards were being mailed, phone calls made, prayers being offered as people reached out in love to others of our church family. We are blessed with many, many people who have the gift of compassion and love.

You can see how in just this one week many people, using a wide variety of gifts, have done their part to make our church work. Now I'm well aware that I've gone down a dangerous path by mentioning some names and failing to mention others. But I gave the

names so that you would know who to talk to if you want to learn more about how you can become involved in that aspect of our church's ministry. To those whose names I did not mention, please forgive me, and know that your service and dedication are noted and definitely appreciated.

This Ministry Model that I referred to earlier is built on the idea that it takes a variety of gifts to make a church effective. I've included in your bulletin an insert that outlines the Ministry Teams and the various responsibilities that are assigned to each team. This is where you come in. We want every person in our church to have the opportunity to use the spiritual gifts that you have been given by God. Certainly not every person has every gift, but every person has some gift, and that gift can be used to bless and enrich our congregation and to help us do what we believe God is calling us to do.

So where do you plug in? Study this list and see where you think God might be calling you to serve, then contact the moderator of that Ministry Team and let him or her know you want to help.

And if you have a particular gift that you are not sure where it can be used, speak to Lee or Sonia or Matt or me and tell us about it. We'll try to find a place where you can use your gift to help enrich and grow God's kingdom.

Thank you, God, for the gifts you have given us through your Holy Spirit. Give us the grace to use them to your glory. Amen. ✠