

Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost (A/RCL)  
August 21, 2005  
Romans 12.1-8  
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

This is a **big** weekend for Pastor Leitzke! Next to possibly making wedding promises, someday, he will make the biggest vow of his life on Sunday afternoon.

Bishop Riley will say to him:

According to apostolic usage [in other words, as it's been since the earliest days of Christianity] you are now to be set apart to the office of Word and Sacrament in the one holy catholic Church by the laying on of hands and by prayer....

Before almighty God, to whom you must give account, and in the presence of this congregation, I ask: Will you assume this office, believing that the Church's call is God's call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament?

And we trust Pastor Leitzke will respond:

I will, and I ask God to help me.

Pastor Leitzke has been with us at Holy Trinity for a little over a month now, and we already have a good idea of at least **some** of the God-given gifts that make him a great candidate for ordained ministry. Pastor Leitzke loves the Word of God and preaches it with creativity, passion and humor. (I believe we will see him **teach** with the same zeal with which he **preaches**....) Pastor Leitzke cares about people's emotional and physical suffering and is willing to visit them, listen to them, comfort them with his pastoral presence. He likes youth and wants to nurture them in the faith by word and example. Pastor Leitzke sees his own life through the lens of faith and encourages others to do the same. He feels God's hand upon him, guiding, upholding, prodding, blessing. It seems to me that he loves God and God's people. His gifts are **well-tailored** to a

ministry of Word and Sacrament as a pastor in our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

People **expect** pastors to have spiritual gifts, just like they expect surgeons to have manual dexterity and interior decorators to have creativity and teachers to have a love of learning. St. Paul says it's not just pastors who have spiritual gifts, though. He says we **all** do. Put us all together and there is a **startling** array of talents, abilities, potential. "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us" (Rom. 12.6). Some of us have received similar gifts, but no one has exactly the same set as anyone else.

All of our Church Council members filled out the "Opening Your Spiritual Gifts" inventory that I've been mentioning along the Way. There are **twenty** possible spiritual gifts listed on that inventory, and Council is chock-full of them, as is the entire congregation! I was the only one who had the spiritual gift of "**pastoring**" identified as one of my top three strengths, but over half of our Council members had "**faith**" and "**service**" as two of their top three. Interestingly, "service" means not just a willingness to help out, but to do so behind the scenes, where the least recognition is given, and the fewest strokes are received. A big part of **service** is **humility**, and our identified leaders, as well as so many others who are part of our faith family, are humble enough to serve without fanfare, satisfied that they are quietly working to make a difference and that God knows it, even if no one else does.

Five of the folks on Council may or may not have been surprised to learn that they have the gift of "**mercy**," meaning not just **feeling** compassion but **swinging** into action to lighten someone else's burden, to lessen their suffering. Thankfully, a number of our Council members have the gifts of "**leadership**" and "**administration**," which means

they can take a vision, mobilize a team to plan how to make the dream a reality, and then birddog the process so that everyone follows through and the vision is realized. Four people on Council also found out that **“exhortation”** is one of their primary gifts, which means they are willing to speak a prophetic, possibly unpopular word at points, to keep us true to our identity and our mission.

Other spiritual gifts were scattered more sparsely, like zesty seasoning in food, where a little goes a long way. There were just one or two people for whom **“artistry,” “vocal and instrumental music,” “skilled craft”** and **“writing”** come naturally. A more widespread gift was that of **“giving,”** meaning not the gift of time or self but the gift of money, the gift of monetary generosity, the glad, unselfconscious sharing of material blessings as an expression of gratitude to God and as a way to make ministry happen.

I hope as you’ve listened to these various gifts embodied in our Church Council, you’ve recognized some of your own gifts. Had you ever thought before of the willingness to write out a check to the church as a gift of generosity that God has given you, a gift that not everyone comes by easily? Have you ever thought of your ability to knit or to do electrical wiring or to program the computer as a “skilled craft” that God has enabled you to master for the sake of God’s people? The know-how and talent to play the keyboard or guitar, to sing as part of a choir may be an obvious way to serve and glorify God through enhancing worship, but the willingness to come early or stay an hour late to set up the altar beforehand and wash the vessels afterwards counts just as much. That’s the kind of time commitment that reflects the gift of humble service....

Pastor Leitzke becomes a minister of Word and Sacrament through his ordination, but he does not become some kind of “professional Christian.” There **are** no professional Christians, there are only committed Christians, most of whom are in the pews and **not** preaching in the pulpit or presiding at the altar, the blessed people of God who realize that regardless of how they earn a living, Christianity is their most important full-time job. It is you who inspire Pastor Leitzke and me with your continual, loving witness of faith-active-in-love, within this community and far beyond, in your homes, offices, classrooms, hospitals, sports fields, accounting and legal firms, supermarkets and beauty salons.

When the Lord asks you to share the spiritual gifts He has given you, respond like Pastor Leitzke will [tomorrow/today]:

I will, and I ask God to help me.

Amen