

Varieties of unexpected gifts (Pentecost A; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13)

We might add to Paul's list gifts for offering comfort, or explaining new guidelines, or displaying ease with technology.

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After the governor closed schools across our state, a natural division of duties arose at my house as two parents, one 24-year-old daughter, and one 15-year-old son learned to work, study, and play together full time.

The adults rotated dinner preparation. We all learned to use more direct communication to schedule doing our laundry. We crowdsourced grocery needs. The teenager learned how to vacuum and took on many more pet-care responsibilities than his schedule would typically allow. We came to appreciate each other's gifts for morale boosting, understanding, and organization.

At our church, the associate pastor added ministry of technology to his portfolio, while the senior pastor—my spouse—learned to adapt her ministry of proclamation and presence to phone, Zoom, and live-streaming. Members and friends developed their skills for technology use in ways they would have considered unimaginable or unimportant before. We all became public videographers, contributing to worship with stories and snippets captured on smartphones.

This happened in many, many church communities. Individual gifts came into focus as leaders divided up the list of members and made phone calls to each household, as church councils learned to lead in new ways. Where there were needs, healthy

and able people volunteered to do errands for those whose health demanded a more rigorous form of self-isolation. Where there were losses, gifts of compassion were shared in new forms. Where there was anxiety, friends delivered gifts of memes or handwritten notes or, in our case, a surprise package of toilet paper left on the doorstep by a woman who lifted her finger to her lips and said, “Shh,” when our son peered at her through the storm door.

Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul describes manifestations of the Spirit as capabilities seen in individuals, gifts for leadership and service. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,” he writes.

It is crucial to note that the scripture says “each,” not “some,” and recent months have illustrated how true this is. Paul names wisdom, knowledge, faith, and healing, among others. We might celebrate gifts for offering comfort, or explaining new guidelines and recommendations, or displaying ease with technology alongside the more traditional gifts that enable us to achieve understanding and make meaning.

In the Corinthians’ time and in ours, each one’s gifts are useful for the whole community. However we gather for Pentecost this year, it feels like a fitting time to acknowledge the varieties of surprising gifts we have discovered—especially those capabilities we did not realize we needed in order to flourish as the Body of Christ.