

Women's Ministry—A Gift!

It's always fun to get a gift isn't it? [Leader can give a little gift such as a chocolate bar to someone in the group]. It's fun for both those giving and those receiving. This morning we'd like to take a few minutes to talk about gifts.

Have you ever thought of women's ministry as a gift? Think of it this way: *the service God provides his church and the world through us* is a gift, and *the privilege of using the individual gifts he gives each one of us* is also a gift! God blesses his church when he calls his people into service to carry out his purpose—it's everything we do to bring Christ to the world. And what a blessing it is to be a part of it.

The idea of service being a gift is not new. It was established way back in the Old Testament. Here's what the Lord spoke to Aaron and his sons. This is from Numbers 18:7b: "I am giving you the service of the priesthood as a gift." God said this when establishing the priesthood in the Old Testament.

The verses before this state the *responsibility* of the kind of service Aaron was called to do (to bear offenses, to perform the duties, to care for the whole Tent of Meeting) but *all of it was a gift from God*—the bearing, the performing, the caring—it was God's grace at work for his people, and it was the only hope of deliverance for them. We also want to note that this was the LORD, the Covenant Savior/God who was speaking here.

God made a significant change in the New Testament. The priesthood was no longer limited to a special group, Aaron and his descendants, as in the Old Testament. It was given to *all* God's people. The Bible calls this the priesthood of all believers. Women's ministry is an integral part of this gift of God to his church—God serving his people through his representatives.

The Bible study *Heirs Together of God's Gracious Gift of Life* by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor Rich Gurgel and Kathie Wendland, a WELS publication, talks about it in this way: "God has given us grace upon grace to set before us the eternally important work of being his priests, his representatives, in this world. Our calling is to let his light shine, in all that we do, wherever we are. God's grace gives meaning and purpose to every activity of life." (p. 22)

In 1 Peter 2:4-5 we read: "As you come to him [Jesus], the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

We also read: "So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church." (1 Corinthians 14:12)

When gifts are given, they oftentimes need to be unwrapped. That's what we're doing here today. We're initiating and unwrapping a women's ministry effort to discover how we might serve and offer

ourselves in whatever way the Lord determines, in a God-pleasing way according to the callings and order established for us in Scripture.

As we unwrap, we discover that there are many responsibilities involved as noted in the verses we read, but even when it's heavy and we get tangled up, it's still a gift! It's a gift when the church is built up, providing a way for individuals to respond to God's gracious gift of a Savior, affirming that our faith is living, and giving unbelievers an opportunity to see the love of Christ at work among our own, and also in the world.

The Lord has equipped our women with gifts to serve in many ways here at [congregation]. We are eager to have all gifts put to use, and pray for even more to be discovered, unwrapped and used. The Lord gives us great assurance that each one of us is included!

Let us read two more sections from Scripture. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10) "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:4, 11-12, 27)

We thank God for each one of us gathered here today and for the many ways so many have served already in the past. What a gift to the church you are! Let's close with prayer on this special occasion.

Prayer:

Dear Father in heaven, Creator of all things and Savior of all mankind, with this gathering of women, we ask you especially to open our eyes and hearts to know your Word of life. Through this Word, you show us our sin and comfort us with the gospel promise of forgiveness and salvation. And then you also equip us to see that you have gifted all your people, and you give us specific callings and opportunities so that these gifts are not wasted. You want others to know the joy of being part of the body of Christ and you use us, unworthy servants that we are, to welcome and nurture them. Dear God, bless our efforts in the name of Jesus, your Son, our Savior and Friend. Amen.

Written by Sally Valleskey and adapted from her presentation, "Reaching Women in the Church," 2010 WELS Women's Ministry Conference, Mequon, WI, Revised 2013.