

New in Membership – Renewed in Christ

*“I am the vine; you are the branches.
If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit;
apart from me you can do nothing.”*

John 15:5

LEADER’S COPY

This Bible study was written by Sally Valleskey, a member of Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Houston, TX. It was reviewed by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor-emeritus Armin Panning.

References from “Training Christians for Ministry” (TCM), Paul E. Kelm, © 1993 by Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI.

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Getting Started

Have any of you worked under a mission statement before?

- At work?
- Volunteer organizations?
- In your family (see page 209 in Training Christians for Ministry)

What are the benefits of having a mission statement?

- Helps create an identity
 - Knowing who you are gives strength from your roots/foundation
 - Gives others understanding of who you are – facilitates assimilation
- Helps to create unity
 - All energy going in one direction
 - Gives people opportunity to grow beyond self-interest
- Provides vision
 - Guide for developing short and long-term goals
 - Keeps members in motion – not stagnant/introspective
- Gives clarity of purpose
 - Energy not wasted being scattered
 - Provides boundaries for assessing activities
 - Answers – why are we here?

[Your Congregation's] Mission Statement

Your mission statement.

What's the foundation of this mission statement?

- Jesus Christ

What are the 2 directives?

- Reach out
- Nurture

For whose glory?

- To God all the glory – To me only humble privilege

You've all completed the Bible Information Class. We can see that our foundation is intact. We are united in faith and worship as our mission statement says. The Holy Spirit has worked that faith in our hearts through the gracious means he provides – his Word and the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

What a blessed union we share with our Savior and each other!

Getting Into the Word

So the fruit of the faith is our service, our good works (take turns reading verses).

John 15:5: ⁵ *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

Ephesians 2:8-10: ⁸ *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God –* ⁹ *not by works, so that no one can boast.* ¹⁰ *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

James 2:17: ¹⁷ *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

When do we use that fruit?

- At home, work, school, running errands...in the congregation (but not just there!)

It's evident everywhere, isn't it?

- In our relations – with husband, children, boss, co-workers

And, we will add, it's a process – we get to grow!

2 Peter 3:18: ¹⁸ *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

This is the picture – you know how you can adjust the focus on a camera – sharpen things in front with a shorter depth of field, blur out the background? So it is with our lives...gradually, I'm more and more out of the way and Jesus is more and more visible, in focus. Another way to look at it is that we become more like direction signs rather than road blocks!

John 3:30: ³⁰ *He must become greater; I must become less.*

Who is speaking in this verse? And who was he speaking about?

For our purposes this evening, it seems fitting to see how best we can use our gifts here in the congregation as the body of Christ. Let's go back to the Mission Statement. Whatever we do as a congregation, we want to make sure it is in line with our mission.

There are many practical aspects of assimilation into a congregation. Already, each of you has had various opportunities to become familiar with some things. We'll talk about specifics in just a few minutes – what you've learned, questions you may have and how we can best help each other – it's always a two-way experience **We're** very much learners as much as you are!

First, let's see how intimately our Savior is working with us to equip us. The process is a journey – a true adventure. Just think, our God who is creator of the whole universe comes looking for each of us individually. He wants to restore what we broke. He pronounces us forgiven, reconciled and made an heir of all he has for eternity. We're given a whole new identity in Christ which now is our source and strength for living a God-pleasing life. We are made part of Christ's church (the church is often referred to as the bridegroom of Christ in Scripture), and we're invested with gifts to be used for the common good. If someone gave you all that, it would be a pretty intimate relationship, wouldn't it? That is exactly what we have with our Savior Jesus. (summary from TCM, p. 268)

When we ask now, 'How can I thank my God by using these gifts?' he gives us some guidelines. There are many great Scripture references written especially for our life of sanctification – what happens after the Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts. I've underlined some major points that keep repeating themselves in a wonderful way. Let's read through these, taking turns (according to time – may skip some).

1 Corinthians 12:4-11: ⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. ⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

1 Corinthians 12:12: ¹² The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:24b: ^{24b} ...But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it,

1 Corinthians 12:27-28: ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

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

Romans 12:1-13: Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. ³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. ⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

1 Peter 4:8-11: ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

From Scripture we can see that we are **all** equipped. I've thought sometimes, what if we got a note from God saying..."I'm sorry, you have not received one single gift." How that would hurt! That's not the case is it? Instead we hear that we have been **richly** gifted. The Holy Spirit moves us to live confidently—that we **do** have gifts. Look at the words again...

1. Which of those words underlined speaks most to you at this time?

- | | |
|--|--|
| Each one is gifted | In the measure/grace given |
| By God himself—the same Spirit | All are different |
| As he determines | Each is a part of all the others (we belong) |
| By his strength | For the common good / build up the church |
| Do this cheerfully, faithfully, generously, lovingly | |

On your sheet you'll see a few other questions. Let's look at those.

2. Where do you place yourself with the use of spiritual gifts? Share if you like, otherwise just use this for your personal pondering. (TCM, page 268)

- I pretty well know my spiritual gifts, have developed and am using them.
- I pretty well know my gifts but need to develop and employ them better.
- I'm just beginning to understand my spiritual gifts and how to use them.
- I'm pretty much unaware of the subject of spiritual gifts and would like to learn more.

3. When you look at the church, what challenges and opportunities is it facing today (TCM, page 268)?

4. What gifts do you think the church needs to carry out its mission (TCM, page 268)?
5. What is the proper motivation in the use of spiritual gifts? *The gospel – what Christ has done for me prompts a humble heart and willing spirit.* What is the difference between motivating by the law, and motivating by the gospel? *Law shows us our sin; cannot reform the old man.* (see Scripture above – John 15:5, Ephesians 2:8-10, find others as well)

Properly motivated we also establish proper goals. (nurture and outreach)

We are especially interested in getting to know you. Here are some questions that will help direct our open discussion now.

6. How can the LORD use me here at (your church)?
7. What are my interests, experiences? What is my personal goal/mission as a part of the congregation?
8. How can we best support each other in using our gifts? (What help do I need? What help do others need?)
9. Is there anything hindering me at this time? How can I remove that barrier?

Prayer (read together)

Hebrews 13:20-21: ²⁰ *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,* ²¹ *equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*