



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
Diocese of St Edmundsbury
and Ipswich

Living Faith in Suffolk



Living Our Gifts

Images

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Living Our Gifts is one of the Living Faith in Suffolk resources produced by the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and available on www.cofesuffolk.org

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Introduction

Living Our Gifts is a Living Faith in Suffolk course for people who want to explore their gifts, talents, passions and skills and how these can be used in living a full life in the worship of God. It is a five week course for groups, which would fit particularly well during Lent.

- Session 1: Being Church (page 4)
- Session 2: Knowing My Gifts (page 6)
- Session 3: God Calling (page 9)
- Session 4: Hearing God (page 11)
- Session 5: Called To Be Me (page 13)

The material has a rhythm that encourages the basic habits of living faith, through attending to God, to each other and to the world beyond the group.

For facilitators

- Each session should last around 90 minutes overall including the settling down and welcome. The Receiving, Reflecting and Responding sections are the core of each session.
- The room used for the sessions needs to be comfortable enough for people to be able to give attention to what they are doing together. It is also important that people can hear one another.
- Each session follows the same format, explained here:
 - Ritual to mark the beginning of the session, recognising God's presence. It is helpful to use the same opening each time as a way of starting the session.
 - Relating to each other – welcoming the participants and introducing the theme of the session.
 - Receiving from God through the Bible reading. It is suggested that you use the method of "reflective reading": read the Bible passage once, allow a silence of around two minutes, read the passage a second time, allow a silence of around five minutes, read the passage a third time. The periods of silence are for each participant to reflect on the passage, noting what stands out for them.
 - Reflecting on what has been received. This is an opportunity, after the third reading of the passage, for participants to share and discuss what has struck them from the passage. A significant amount of time can be given to this discussion. From the beginning of the session to this point should take around 30 minutes.
 - Responding to God in the light of what has been discussed, by participating in the content-driven part of the session.
 - Returning to God in prayer at the close of the session. It can be helpful, as at the start, to use a consistent way of ending the session.

Session 1: Being Church

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle and matches, or song)
- Bibles
- Appendix 1 (cut up along the lines to make five cards)

“He [Christ] is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18)

You can learn more about the Bible as the story of God’s love in the Living Faith in Suffolk course “Living Word 2”.

Ritual: Begin by marking the start of the session using the chosen ritual (see Introduction): e.g. the lighting of a candle, an opening prayer, the singing of a song.

Relating: Welcome participants; as this is the first session, if people don’t know each other then give an opportunity to hear each other’s names. Introduce the theme of this session.

Receiving: As described in the Introduction, do a reflective reading of 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

Reflecting: (See Introduction) Discuss: What struck you during the time of looking at this passage? What did you notice; what did God seem to be saying to you/us?

Responding: Today’s session aims to encourage reflection around what it means to be Church.

The Church as One Body When we think about being the Body of Christ it is easy to focus on the ‘diversity’ element (we are all different and that’s ok) without really thinking about the ‘unity’ element (we are one). But the image of ‘one body’ is a powerful image which speaks of interconnectedness, of the thoughts/feelings/actions/decisions/relationships/priorities of each one having an impact on all the others.

- Together, look at the five cards in Appendix 1. Discuss what each image of church might look like in practice.
- Individually, reflect on which card best fits your approach to church and why. How is this reflected in your being and doing?

The Church as a Loved People From beginning to end the Bible is the story of God’s love for his people, and his desire to have a loving relationship with them – with us. This love is described in a wide range of images in the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah 49:15 speaks of God’s love as beyond that of a mother for her child. Psalm 91:4 speaks of God providing shelter and protection for his people as a bird for its chicks. The book of Hosea illustrates the relationship between God and his people as that of lovers (see for example 2:16 and 3:1). The letter of 1 John is full of reminders of God’s love (see for example 1 John 3:1 and 4:7-11).

- What might be the impact of seeing each other as people who are loved by God? What might be the impact of seeing ourselves in this way? You might like to

You might like to search the internet to listen to “We being many” (Helen Shapiro) and discuss some of the imagery used in this song.

The term “Christian” came into use to describe disciples who followed Christ, as followers of other teachers were also called disciples (Acts 11:26). So to be a Christian is to be a disciple.

Silent reflection can be very difficult for some people; depending on the make-up of the group it may be that in the first session this needs to be quite short, and can be built up as people become more comfortable with it.

look at some of the verses mentioned above to help you to think about this.

The Church as Community Paul’s letter, from which we read, was written to a group of disciples. The many members who make up the one body, then, are disciples. A disciple is a ‘follower’, a ‘learner’. For the first disciples this entailed learning on-the-job, through observation, experience and practice, rhythms of life alongside Jesus. A good word for people engaging in this kind of learning might be ‘apprentice’. The disciples, of course, were not isolated apprentices, trying to work it out by themselves. They lived, day to day, in relationship with Jesus; and day to day they were a community, learning and practising together. The Church, then, is a community of apprentices – people living out that love relationship together.

- In what ways do we learn our faith?
- What difference might it make to see ourselves as apprentices? As a community of apprentices?

The Church’s Mission Jesus gave clear teaching – both in words and by living it out – about what discipleship entails. It could be summed up in five words: Worship; Ministry; Making Disciples; Learning.

- Matthew 22:36-40 expresses the first two. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (worship). “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (ministry). What do you learn from these verses about the nature of worship and ministry?
- Matthew 28:18-20 expresses the remaining two. “Go therefore and make disciples....” (making disciples). “...teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (learning). What do you learn from these verses about the nature of discipleship?

For reflection: “In the early Church, people were attracted to it not so much by the preaching, but by the fact that they saw Christians as a community, living a new life as if what God had done was important, and had made a difference. They saw a community of those who, whether poor or rich, male or female, free or slave, young or old – all quite unbelievably loved and cared for each other. It was the lifestyle of the Christians that was witnessing.” (Desmond Tutu)

Returning: End the session using the chosen method (see Introduction): e.g. a time of silent reflection, a closing prayer, the sharing of the Grace.

Session 2: Knowing My Gifts

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle and matches, or song)
- Bibles
- Copies of Appendix 2 (one per person)
- Appendix 3 (cut along the lines to make individual cards)

Ritual: Begin by marking the start of the session using the chosen ritual (see Introduction): e.g. the lighting of a candle, an opening prayer, the singing of a song.

Relating: Welcome participants. Introduce the theme of this session.

Receiving: As described in the Introduction, do a reflective reading of 1 Corinthians 12:4-13.

Reflecting: (See Introduction) Discuss: What struck you during the time of looking at this passage? What did you notice; what did God seem to be saying to you/us?

Responding: Today's session aims to assist people in identifying some of their gifts.

Some people are very clear about the gifts they have, while others see themselves as having no gifts at all (although their friends may disagree!). But even those who are clear about their gifts may be focusing on one or two and not realising that they have more.

- When have you been taken by surprise at something people have said you are good at? How easy was it to accept what they said as an identification of one of your gifts?

There are five questions we can ask ourselves to help us to identify our gifts (hand out Appendix 2).

What are you passionate about? What fills you with energy and enthusiasm? What is the thing you would like to devote more time to? It may be your garden, or supporting a particular charity, or caring for hedgehogs, or teaching people a particular skill. Your passions are God-given; they are an important part of your gifts!

- Note down on your sheet the things about which you are passionate. This probably won't take much thinking about!

What are you interested in? What do you like doing? What do you like to learn about? Maybe you like finding out more about the way the world works. Maybe you like to try out new recipes. Maybe you like tinkering with the motorbike in your garage. Your desire to learn is God-given too, and is an

"When I stand before

God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'I used everything you gave me.'" (Erma Bombeck)

important part of who you are.

- Note down on your sheet the things in which you take an interest.

Among Jesus' first disciples were fishermen: Jesus used this skill as a way of attracting their attention (see Luke 5:1-11 and John 21:1-14).

What are your skills? Your skills are the abilities which you have learnt, practised and developed, and in which you have gained some level of expertise (note: that is not to say you are an expert in them!). Some of these skills will have been developed at school or in the workplace – for example learning systems, using particular items of machinery, dealing with people, being organised... Some of these skills will be/have been part of daily life – for example cooking a meal, reading a map, listening to people's concerns, providing personal care for a relative... Some of these skills will be hobbies – for example playing the piano, knitting, refereeing football...

- Spend some time reflecting on the skills which you have developed. It might be useful to talk to each other about this – maybe others will identify skills which you hadn't noticed in yourself! Note your responses on your sheet.

How have your experiences shaped you? In Romans 5:3-5 St Paul describes how experiencing suffering can lead to endurance, character and hope. Of course not everyone who suffers will develop those characteristics – it depends on how we respond to our experiences. In each experience, though, we develop ways of responding which build up positive and/or negative characteristics. Also we may find ourselves developing new skills in response to an experience: learning to play a musical instrument because we have no musician at church, for example; or learning sign language because we have a deaf relative.

You may like to search the internet to watch a clip from the film "Evan Almighty" (search for "Evan Almighty clip Pray for the opportunity") which provokes some thought about how God uses our experiences to help us to grow.

- Spend some time reflecting on some of your significant experiences. What characteristics or skills came about as a result of these? Seemingly insignificant experiences can have a great impact too – there may not be time to look at these now but you might like to think about them later. Note your responses on your sheet.

What are your talents? This may well be the hardest question to answer: we are often not very good at identifying our own talents, or else we don't think that the things we are good at will 'count'.

- As a group, look at the cards which come from Appendix 3. These cover a wide range of talents, some of which we might also recognise as "spiritual gifts" (but they all come from the Bible, and there are others also in the

Bible which are not mentioned here). Help each other to work out who has which talents. Add in any talents which are not listed here.

You should now have listed on your sheet a wide range of gifts, which have come from your passions, your interests, your skills and experiences, and your talents. This has been a very inward-looking session – but now direct your thoughts back towards God: it is God who has made you such an interesting and gifted person! Psalm 139:14 – “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made”.

- As a group, spend some time reflecting on the richness of the gifts in the group. What do these tell you about the nature of God?

People may like to bring their completed sheets to the final session of this courses when they are thinking about “Called To Be Me”.

Returning: End the session using the chosen method (see Introduction): e.g. a time of quiet, a closing prayer, the sharing of the Grace.

Session 3: God Calling

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle and matches, or song)
- Bibles
- Plain paper for each participant

Ritual: Begin by marking the start of the session using the chosen ritual (see Introduction): e.g. the lighting of a candle, an opening prayer, the singing of a song.

Relating: Welcome participants. Introduce the theme of this session.

Receiving: As described in the Introduction, do a reflective reading of Exodus 3:1-6.

Reflecting: (See Introduction) Discuss: What struck you during the time of looking at this passage? What did you notice; what did God seem to be saying to you/us?

Responding: Today's session aims to put the idea of being called by God in the context of discipleship.

People often have mixed responses to the idea of being called. Some see it as applying only to specific people/roles. Some see it as a scary idea.

- What do you understand by the phrase "Being called"?

The idea of calling is both corporate and individual:

- We are all called to be disciples
- We are all called to be the body of Christ
- We are all called to be holy
- We are all called to an individual call – we will look at this in the final session of this course.

Called to be disciples In the gospels we read of Jesus calling people to "Follow me". In our baptismal liturgy the response to this is made formally, either by the person to be baptised or by their parent[s] on their behalf: "I turn to Christ". Thus the whole of our discipleship is in response to our being called.

- How do you react to this idea of being called to be disciples? How might this shape one's perspective on discipleship?

Called to be the body of Christ As we saw in Session 1, being disciples – being Church – means being one body, one loved community with a common mission. In our baptismal liturgy we hear that "In baptism the Lord is adding to our number those whom he is calling". As baptised people we have been called into the body of Christ.

- How do you react to this idea of being called into the

You can read some of these stories in Mark 1:16-20, Mark 2:13-14, Luke 5:1-11 and John 1:35-51.

body of Christ? How might this shape your understanding of baptism?

Another word for

“calling” is “vocation”. Although this has often been understood in a very narrow way (a vocation to ordained ministry, for example) this is not a true reflection of its meaning.

Called to be holy In his first letter St Peter writes of the call to be holy. To be “holy” means to be consecrated, acceptable to God, a space within which God can dwell and move. Our baptismal liturgy expresses this idea: “May almighty God... restore in you the image of his glory...”.

- Together, read 1 Peter 1:13-16.
- What do you understand by the calling to be holy as described in this reading and above? How do you react to this?

Often it is only with hindsight that we notice God’s involvement in our lives, or see ourselves as responding to his call.

- Individually, spend some time reflecting on your journey of discipleship so far. You may find it useful to draw this out as a roadway on a large piece of paper. Reflect on where God has been encountered in different experiences, on where your gifts have been used and/or developed, and on where this journey might be taking you now. You may not have time to finish this during the session and might want to continue this at home. When you have finished drawing out your journey you may also like to look at it with a friend or spiritual director.

Returning: End the session using the chosen method (see Introduction): e.g. a time of quiet, a closing prayer, the sharing of the Grace.

Session 4: Hearing God

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle and matches, or song)
- Bibles
- Copies of Appendix 4 (one per person)
- Remind people to consider bringing their Appendix 2 "Knowing My Gifts" sheet (completed in session 2) to the next session.

Ritual: Begin by marking the start of the session using the chosen ritual (see Introduction): e.g. the lighting of a candle, an opening prayer, the singing of a song.

Relating: Welcome participants. Introduce the theme of this session.

Receiving: As described in the Introduction, do a reflective reading of 1 Samuel 3:1-10.

Reflecting: (See Introduction) Discuss: What struck you during the time of looking at this passage? What did you notice; what did God seem to be saying to you/us?

Responding: Today's session aims to help people to think about the ways in which they best hear God.

Sharing our stories Discuss:

- When would you say you have heard from God? What was happening at the time? – what were the circumstances which enabled you to hear God?

When God speaks in the Bible There are many accounts in the Bible of people hearing messages from God.

- Divide into pairs and each pair take one of the following passages to look at: Numbers 22:21-34; 1 Kings 19:9-13; Isaiah 6:1-8; 2 Samuel 11:27-12:15; Matthew 1:18-25.
- Look at the allocated passage and be ready to feed back to the other pairs your reflections on the way in which God spoke in that passage.
- Once all pairs have spoken, discuss: why do you think God speaks in so many different ways? What other ways / accounts of God speaking in the Bible can you think of?
- Which of these methods of hearing from God most resonates with you? Why do you think that is?

Spiritual Styles David Csinos conducted some research into the ways in which people know and experience God. He concluded that there are four main ways, and we all tend to lean towards one or two of them (although we can all learn to engage with, and benefit from, each of the four). These four "Spiritual Styles" are Word-centred, Emotion-centred, Symbol-centred and Action-centred (see Appendix 4).

- Have a look at each of the four spiritual styles and

An interesting poem

for reflection is Carol Bialock's "House by the sea".

discuss: Which most appeals to you? Is this a way in which you have tried to hear God in the past, or would you not have considered this as a 'valid' way of hearing God? Which most surprises you? Which is least appealing?

- In session 2, you were asked to think about your skills etc, and to reflect on your life journey so far, asking for the input of a friend and/or spiritual director. To what extent had you previously considered the idea that God might speak to you in this way?
- What one change could you make to enable yourself to have opportunity to hear God via your preferred spiritual style?

When God calls Sometimes we hear God even though we had not been listening for him. Sometimes when we hear him (whether or not we had been listening!) we don't like what we hear.

- What might be some of the ways in which you could seek support in order to address what God has said to you?
- What if you decide to ignore what you have heard from God?

Silent reflection can be very difficult for some people; depending on the make-up of the group it may be that in the first session this needs to be quite short, and can be built up as people become more comfortable with it.

Depending on the nature of your group, you might wish to take some time at the end of this session for silent listening, or for reflection around a poem or symbol or piece of music, or a discussion in the group of the ways in which God may be speaking in some of their current activities.

Returning: End the session using the chosen method (see Introduction): e.g. a time of quiet, a closing prayer, the sharing of the Grace.

Session 5: Called To Be Me

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle and matches, or song)
- Bibles
- Copies of Appendix 5 (one per person)
- Completed copies of Appendix 2 "Knowing My Gifts" if people choose to bring them

Ritual: Begin by marking the start of the session using the chosen ritual (see Introduction): e.g. the lighting of a candle, an opening prayer, the singing of a song.

Relating: Welcome participants. Introduce the theme of this session.

Receiving: As described in the Introduction, do a reflective reading of Psalm 139:1-14

Reflecting: (See Introduction) Discuss: What struck you during the time of looking at this passage? What did you notice; what did God seem to be saying to you/us?

Responding: Today's session aims to encourage reflection on our individual calls from God.

A unique call In session 3 we reflected on our corporate calling from God to be disciples, to be the body of Christ, and to be holy. But we all also have an individual call.

- Read the quote by Rowan Williams on Appendix 5 and discuss: What does Williams mean? How do you react to this quote? How does the quote connect with the reading from Psalm 139?

A specific task There are countless examples in the Bible of God calling individuals to a particular role or task.

- Divide into pairs and each pair take one of the following passages to look at: Acts 9:10-19; Jonah 1:1-4 and 3:1-5; Genesis 6:9-22; Luke 1:26-38; 1 Samuel 16:1-13.
- Look at the allocated passage and be ready to feed back to the other pairs your reflections on the example of specific calling it contains.
- How do you react to the idea that God calls people to specific tasks? Are there any occasions when God has called you to do something specific? – if appropriate, spend some time sharing these stories.

Called to be you In our alternative baptismal liturgy it is declared that "God knows each of us by name and we are his". In a similar vein God says, through Isaiah, "I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1). Names are significant in the Bible; they say something about identity of the bearer. God calls you by name, calls you to be the best you that you can be, calls you to know yourself to be loved and valued.

"God of grace and

life, in your love you have given us a place among your people; keep us faithful to our baptism, and prepare us for that glorious day when the whole creation will be made perfect in your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ."

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/christian-initiation/baptism-and-confirmation/holy-baptism.aspx>

You might like to

listen to "Take, O take me as I am" (John Bell) as you reflect on some of the ideas from today's session.

One place in which

to explore calling could be with a Spiritual Director / Accompanist. Information can be found on the diocesan website at <http://www.cofesuffolk.org//prayer-and-spirituality#/>

- How do you react to the idea that God is calling you by name and wanting you to be the best you? What might help you to move towards this? What might help you to know yourself to be loved and valued?
- Think back to (or look at, if you have it with you) your "Knowing My Gifts" sheet completed in session 2. This sheet contains a word-picture of you: your passions, interests, skills, talents, and the fruits of your experiences. How is God using any of these gifts at the moment? Which of these might be developed in order for you to move closer to being the best you that you can be?

This is the final session of this course, Living Our Gifts. It might be helpful, before leaving, to consider whether there is a next step to be taken or support that is needed in order to act on what has been discovered.

Returning: End the session using the chosen method (see Introduction): e.g. a time of quiet, a closing prayer, the sharing of the Grace.

APPENDIX 1

**We have no need of
each other**

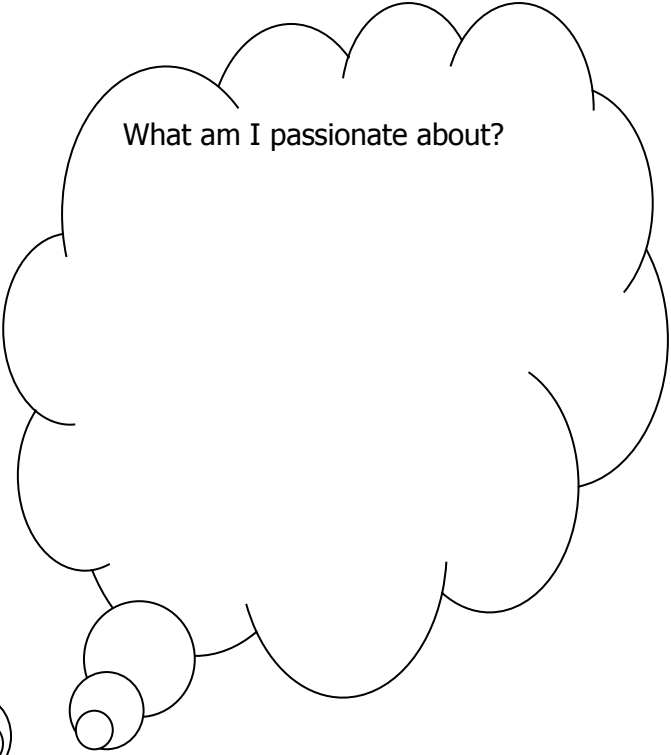
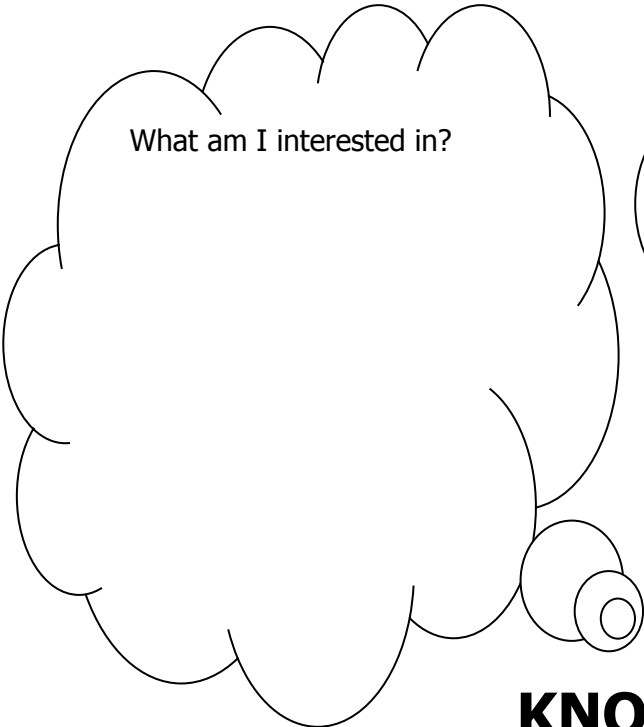
**We try to get what we
want from each other**

**We try to please
each other**

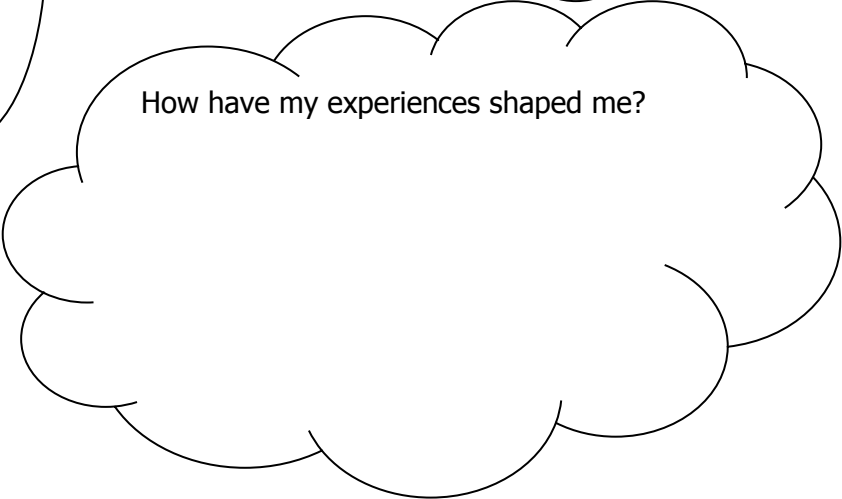
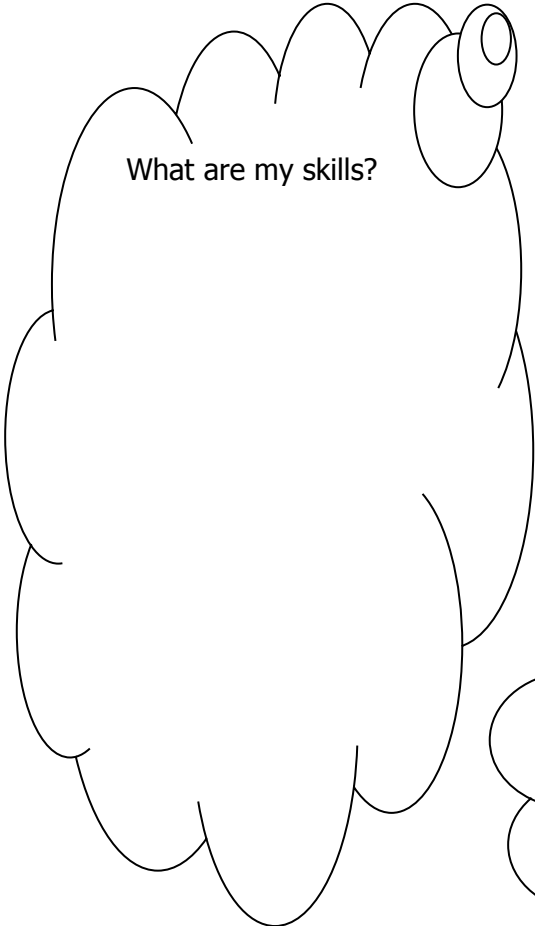
**We all have a
part to play**

We are all one

APPENDIX 2



**KNOWING
MY GIFTS**



APPENDIX 3

<p>Administration e.g. well-organised, an eye for detail, can manage or co-ordinate various roles</p>	<p>Apostleship e.g. sense of vision, a desire to reach out to people and spread a message, pioneering</p>
<p>Creativity e.g. inventive, practical, resourceful, can use various tools, design, make things</p>	<p>Communication e.g. clear, articulate, imaginative, challenging, sensitive, expressive</p>
<p>Discernment e.g. truthful, perceptive, intuitive, listens to God, recognises inconsistencies</p>	<p>Encouragement e.g. supportive, affirming, kind, positive, dependable, motivator, reassuring</p>
<p>Evangelism e.g. speak easily about faith and experience of God, create opportunities to speak</p>	<p>Faith e.g. prayerful, trusting, hopeful, courageous, persevering, confidence in God's ability</p>
<p>Generosity e.g. resourceful, disciplined, practical, identifying and meeting needs, trusting God</p>	<p>Healing e.g. longing for wholeness, compassionate, prayerful, sensitive, listens to God</p>
<p>Helping Others e.g. practical, self-sacrificing, supportive, serving, a team player, willing</p>	<p>Hospitality e.g. friendly, open, practical, generous, welcoming, can put people at ease</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Intercession</p> <p>e.g. concerned, trustworthy, determined, faithful, strong urge to pray, listen to God</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Interpretation of tongues</p> <p>e.g. sensitive, discerning, obedient, enabled by Holy Spirit to understand what you hear</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Knowledge</p> <p>e.g. thoughtful, keen to learn and understand, discerning, listen to God</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Leadership</p> <p>e.g. influential, trustworthy, respected, responsible, listen to God, faithful</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Mercy</p> <p>e.g. kind, compassionate, caring, non-judgemental, sensitive, practical, show God's love</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Miraculous powers</p> <p>e.g. bold, faithful, willing to take risks for God, prayerful, expect God to act in amazing ways</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Pastoring</p> <p>e.g. caring, supportive, protective, dependable, truthful, concerned for people's wellbeing</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Prophecy</p> <p>e.g. discerning, outspoken, prayerful, listen to God, see truths others may miss, humble</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Teaching</p> <p>e.g. knowledgeable, wise, perceptive, clear-thinking, articulate, interesting</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Speaking in tongues</p> <p>e.g. prayerful, discerning, sometimes enabled by God to speak in another language</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Wisdom</p> <p>e.g. experienced, respected, insightful, humble, spend much time listening to God</p>	

APPENDIX 4 - SPIRITUAL STYLES (David Csinos)

<p>Word-centred people value thinking. They learn about God and grow spiritually through spoken and written words. Preaching, Bible study, clearly-articulated beliefs and rational argument are important to them. The words that are used are crucial – they need to be properly thought-out and carefully chosen. These people may like to participate in the reading – or writing – of words used in the service. Learning is important.</p>	<p>Symbol-centred people value images, symbols and metaphors. They see God as the ultimate mystery, beyond all human understanding. They look to nature, art, silence and meditation to open up the reality of God for them. They may like being alone with God. They are likely to be uncomfortable with the use of lots of words.</p>
<p>Emotion-centred people value feelings. They learn about God and grow spiritually by getting in touch with their deepest emotions. The performing arts (music, dance and drama), close personal relationships, the experience of conversion and testimony all feature in their spiritual world. They may like to be actively involved in church worship and to be able to discuss their experiences.</p>	<p>Action-centred people focus on justice, healing and social transformation. Their relationship with God is lived rather than spoken or felt. They express their faith in what they do, both in their involvement in church activities and in their daily life, listening for the cries of the poor and identifying with the needs of the world. They are likely to be uncomfortable with the use of lots of words, and with thinking conceptually as they prefer concrete actions.</p>

http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/saturation_spirituality-creating_environments_that_nurture_all_children_-_csinos.pdf

APPENDIX 5

God does not create human ciphers, a pool of cheap labour to whom jobs can be assigned at will. Each human being called into existence by him exists as a distinct part of a great interlocking web of identities. Each is a unique point in this great net. To be is to be where you are, who you are, and what you are — a person with a certain genetic composition, a certain social status, a certain set of capabilities.

From the moment of birth (even from before that) onwards, you will be at each moment that particular bundle of conditioning and possibilities. And to talk about God as your creator means to recognize at each moment that it is his desire for you to be, and to be the person you are. It means he is calling you by your name, at each and every moment, wanting you to be you.

(Rowan Williams <https://www.trinitywallstreet.org/blogs/news/rowan-williams-your-calling-you>)