

Identifying and Utilizing Our Spiritual Gifts
March 17–May 12, 2019
(Eight Weeks)

SMALL GROUP PACKET
Into the Deep Water with Christ

HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS

(Please review the following regularly together as a group)

GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR “DEEP WATER” SMALL GROUPS

- Try to keep your group size from two to six people. The larger the group, the more time it will take at each meeting for everyone to participate and share actively.
- Try to meet together once a week, on average.
- Meet in a place that is conducive to listening and speaking. Loud, crowded restaurants, for example, will probably not work too well.
- Everyone should bring a bible, a pen, and this packet to each of their small group meetings.
- This packet, focusing on **Spiritual Gifts**, has enough material to cover eight weeks’ worth of meetings. On May 12, a new packet of materials will become available for the next part of our “deeper water” journey.
- If you have to skip a small group meeting, do your best as a team to backtrack or work ahead.
- While it is not a requirement, we recommend that men partner with men, and women partner with women.
- You do not need to designate any particular person in your group to be a facilitator or leader. Just follow the materials together and agree on a time limit to your meetings.
- Allow extended silences to happen during your small group discussions. The bible is a challenging book and the Word can sometimes shake our thoughts up at first before bringing them around towards Christ. Silence allows time for the Spirit to give us speech.
- While you are discussing with your group, always jot down thoughts that the group shares.
- It is likely that you will encounter different Bible translations within your group. If the group feels this is an obstacle to understanding or discussion, discuss the possibility of procuring bibles of the same translation for everyone. The New Revised Standard Version, which St. John’s uses at worship, is an example of a well-balanced, readable and accurate translation. Call Pastor Seth (217.255.2118) or Pastor Patti (614.875.2314) if you need any help or guidance regarding Bible translations.
- Try your best to participate as a group (or as individuals) in the “Come Back to Shore” meeting on Sunday, May 5th, **either** at 9:30 a.m. (during the Sunday school hour) **or** at 6:30 p.m.
- On May 12th, we will start a new topic in our Deep Water journey: *Raising Up the Next Generation for Christ*. Every time we begin a new topic (about every two months), small groups and partnerships can reconfigure themselves as necessary. As you approach the end of your first eight-week period together, please talk intentionally about how and whether your group will continue into the next topic together intact, or what changes you need to make based on your personal schedules, etc. While we encourage everyone to plug in to as much of our deep water journey as possible through the next few years, we

also understand that some of us will need to drop out and rejoin at various points in the journey.

THE MOST IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE TO FOLLOW IN YOUR SMALL GROUP: CONFIDENTIALITY

- Keeping things confidential is vital to establishing trust and open communication with your partner or small group. Be sure to acknowledge this rule clearly with each other at the beginning of your journey together, and regularly over the course of the following weeks. What is said in your small group should stay in your small group!

REMEMBER: PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS OF ST. JOHN’S ARE WELCOME TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS JOURNEY!

We encourage you to invite non-members to participate. Think of a friend with whom you’d like to take this journey, and invite them to jump in.

IF YOU LOSE YOUR PACKET, OR NEED MORE PACKETS

Hard copies are always available in the church office, in the display in the Link (breezeway) at church, or from one of the pastors. If you have a printer, you can request an electronic copy of the packet by email:

SJersild@stjohnsgc.org

IF YOUR SMALL GROUP IS STRUGGLING OR DISSOLVES

Call Pastor Seth at 217.255.2118 if you need help or have special concerns. Remember that Pastor Seth and Pastor Patti will be meeting with two separate Deep Water small groups **every Sunday morning during the Sunday school hour**. If you are not part of a regular small group, just come to their Sunday meetings. They are open to all and you can plug into them at any time.

SMALL GROUP INFORMATION

(Names, phone, email etc.)

Into the Deep Water with Christ
IDENTIFYING AND UTILIZING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

WEEK #1 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: March 17-23

1. During your first 2-3 meetings, it will be a good idea to keep close track of time. Confirm as a group what your time limit is going to be. Over time, each group will develop a natural feel for what kind of pace they need to maintain in order to fit everyone's schedules.
2. Please review the material under the heading "Healthy Small Groups" together, above.
3. Emphasize together the extreme importance of keeping what you share in this group confidential. Also, make sure you have each others' phone numbers, emails addresses, and etc. for communication purposes.
4. Spend about 5 minutes having everyone share high points and low points from the last several days.
5. OPENING PRAYER (1 minute)
 - Designate someone to pray the prayer in italics, below. Always feel free to improvise as the Spirit moves you. You can use the written prayer loosely, as a model. Special intercessions can be added.

Heavenly Father, thank you for bringing us together to study your word, and to talk about ways that we can use our spiritual gifts to glorify and serve you. Thank you for sending Jesus into our lives for our salvation, and for the new life and power that you pour into us through the Holy Spirit. Protect, heal, and uphold all those for whom we have special concerns today. Give us courage to go into deeper water in order to be more effective witnesses to Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.

6. Today's meeting will be an opportunity to get to know each other, talk in general about some of our church experiences, and get a feel for where we are in our faith journey at this point in our lives. We'll just go a little way out from shore today. Please discuss the following:
 - If you could take a two-week vacation right now anywhere in the world, where would it be, and why?

- What were your parents' attitudes towards church and the Christian faith? Did they attend worship regularly? Were they vocal about their faith? Did they talk to you directly about matters of faith as you were growing up?
- Who were some of the most powerful early influences in your life, when it came to your understanding and experiencing the good news of Jesus in a personal way? What do you think made their witness to Jesus special to you?
- What would you say is motivating you, at this point in your life, to become involved in this journey into deeper water with Christ?
- Describe your general experience with Bible study. For instance, has it been a big part of your life, or will this be your first time referring to scripture openly with other people outside of worship?
- On a scale of 1-10, rate your current comfort level in talking to other people about matters of faith. (1=not comfortable; 10=I do it all the time)
- On a scale of 1-10, how restless or worried do you tend to be on a day to day basis right now? (1=I'm totally at peace and filled with joy all the time; 10=I'm feeling helpless almost all the time right now.)
- Describe the ways in which you would like to *go deeper* in your personal relationship with God right now.
- In what ways would you like to go deeper in your relationships/friendships/ ministry with other people at church right now?

7. Please open your Bibles and have someone read 1 Peter 4:8-11 aloud. After reading, please discuss the following:

- In turn, each of you say what immediately struck you from the Bible passage. You can simply repeat the phrase or verse itself that struck you, or express thoughts that the Bible passage calls forth from you.
- What are some ways this passage can help shape your understanding of what you are doing together in your small group? Write down some thoughts that arise from your conversation, below.

8. In turn, without going into too much depth about each situation, share one or two specific issues that you would like your partner(s) to pray about for you this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.

9. Together, briefly review the homework, below, that you will be doing before your next meeting. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

10. Close with prayer. Today, have one person volunteer to pray for the group. Try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer. Include a prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit to guide your group and fill you with confidence and determination as you get started on this journey together.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (2nd) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer aloud; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.

Almighty God, I thank you for sending Jesus into this world and into my life, so that I can know you and love you, through him, as my Heavenly Father. Speak to me now as I study your holy Word. Give me courage and faith to go deeper in my discipleship for you, that I may glorify you in all that I do. Use me as an instrument of your Holy Spirit to draw the people around me into your loving presence. Amen.

2. Please read the following.

Going into the Deep Water with Christ is about stretching ourselves, in the context of a supportive, loving small-group environment, into deeper and more fulfilling discipleship for Jesus which goes beyond mere “head knowledge” of scripture.

Disciples of Jesus not only listen to his divine teaching, but follow him and model their lives after him. Scripture shapes our knowledge of God (our theology) and provides the “bones”—the supporting structure—of our relationship with him.

However, **faith** involves more than just the “bones” of theology. It’s more like a verb than a noun. Faith describes the confident act of letting go of our lives and placing ourselves in God’s trustworthy hands. Faith is happening when we actually follow Jesus and do what he tells us to do (as does Simon Peter when he puts out into the deep water). Faith is the act of “putting flesh on the bones” of our theology.

There is almost always an element of fear-conquering when it comes to faith. For example, think of how Abraham must have felt when God called him to leave all of his roots behind and go to a land he had never seen before (Genesis 12:1-3). In a sense, God is always calling us to go into the deep water with Christ. He’s calling us to faith. He actually wants us to *participate in his saving acts towards other people!* He doesn’t *need* us to do what he’s going to do (God has all the power), but he *wants* us to be part of it, and *invites* us to be part of it!

Faith is the only way we human beings can participate in the acts of God in the world. Without Spirit-given faith, we can use our theology as a way to remain mere spectators to what God is doing through other people.

When we become participants by faith in God’s actions in the world, we stop being spectators. We leave our tendency to become “church critics” behind, and we start to make surprising

catches in our life as God's people. The "fish" God puts in our nets come in many forms: new friendships, a greater sense of connection with God's people, confidence in our ministry, a renewed sense of mission and purpose in life, joy, peace, and yes, growth of the Church.

God never retracts his promises: Jesus died on the cross for our sins and we have been given eternal life and salvation through him. The future belongs to us, and now we can build on it. Now we can go out as confident "people catchers," transformed by his Word into people who follow his ways.

3. Think about the statement above: "He [God] actually wants us to *participate in his saving acts towards other people!* He doesn't *need* us to do what he's going to do (God has all the power), but he *wants* us to be part of it, and *invites* us to be part of it!"

To flesh out that statement, please read Luke 1:26-38 and respond to the following questions (please write down your responses):

- What is God intending to do, according to the angel Gabriel?
- Who is God intending to use as his "vessel," here, to make the future that Gabriel describes happen?
- God can and will do what he wants to do. Nothing can stand in the way of his saving will. So, why do you think God takes the trouble of sending Gabriel to Mary to let her know his intentions? Why does he wait for her response to the proposition?
- Could not God have "zapped" the baby Jesus into existence without bringing him into the world through a human, Mary? If so, why do you think he wants her—a human being—to participate *willingly* in the incarnation of the Savior of the world?
- How is *faith in a God she finds trustworthy* the only way Mary can participate in this act?
- How do you see yourself as a bearer of Christ, today?

4. *Please Read the Following:*

We are starting our Deep Water journey with an effort to identify our spiritual gifts and talk about different ways we can use them to build up the body of Christ, the Church. By necessity, this first "expedition" (Spiritual Gifts) will involve focusing a lot of attention on ourselves—our talents, gifts, personalities, and personal experiences. At points, you might wonder, "what does this naval-gazing have to do with my faith in Christ or with my life in the church?" You can be sure, however, that the following exercises and discussions will all work together with God's Word, step by step, to bring us to a clearer understanding of how God is calling us to use our gifts to build up his Church right now.

Trying to see ourselves objectively is, after a certain point, like a camera trying to take a picture of itself. Sharing these discussions and exercises with your small group partner(s) will help us come to a clearer picture of ourselves. The more we can objectify our strengths and growth areas, the more effectively we can *put ourselves aside* and use our spiritual gifts to build other people up in their faith. Self-knowledge also helps us avoid dwelling on unfocused fears and doubts about our own abilities. Bouncing ideas and perceptions off each other in a loving and supportive way can encourage us to grow in huge ways towards confident, joyful witness for Christ.

5. *Listening to Your Partner(s)*

Practicing good listening skills with your partner(s) will have a big impact in how deep you can go in discipling each other as we go *into the deep water* with Christ.

Please go over the following list of good and bad listening habits, and place check marks by the statements (both good and bad) that you feel are true of you when it comes to listening.

- I don't give others time to speak, because I tend to go "on a roll" and end up monopolizing the conversation.
- I give people my undivided attention when I'm listening.
- I interrupt people when I talk.
- I ask questions after listening to someone, rather than immediately providing answers.
- I tend to look away from people when I'm talking with them (I lose eye contact)
- I make repeated and sympathetic eye contact with people when they are speaking to me.
- I tend to fidget with pencils, papers and etc. while in conversation.
- I think I use facial expressions well in order to communicate that I'm listening.
- I don't smile during conversations, making people somewhat afraid to talk to me.
- I smile often, inviting people to talk further.
- I go off the subject often, with my questions and comments.
- I ask questions which invite people to further explain themselves and put things in their own words.
- I tend to throw cold water on others' suggestions, so they quit making suggestions after a while.
- I often affirm what others are saying and am good at encouraging them to let go and open up.
- I tend to communicate that I am rushed for time, making comments about how busy my day is.
- People know that they have my full attention almost all the time.

6. Looking at the above list, summarize in a sentence or two what you think your positive strengths are, when it comes to communicating with others.

7. Looking at the items you checked, above, which are some of your more *unhelpful* habits of communication? Which unhelpful habit(s) can you make an intentional effort to modify over the next few weeks with your partner(s)? Write it below in terms of an "I will try..." statement.

8. Open your bible to Luke 5:1-11. Read the passage aloud, then respond to the following material. Write down your thoughts after each bullet point.

- Simon (Peter) has been fishing his whole life. Usually, fishermen plied their trade only at night. They typically kept closer to the shore where the water was shallow and underwater structures attracted fish. When Jesus tells him to “put out into the deep water” in daylight, Simon is reluctant at first. Think of as many reasons as you can why Simon hesitates, including the obvious fact that he’s tired.
- Why do you think Jesus intentionally made his first deep connection with Simon in terms of “fishing?” What did fishing mean to Simon?
- One of the most obvious, so perhaps overlooked, things in this episode is how Jesus is *in the boat* with Simon. Jesus is sharing intimately in the action, and addressing Simon in a very personal, one-to-one, manner. The Bible is filled with this “one person at a time” approach taken by God (and his people) to reach others with salvation and new life. Talk about why you think God takes this person-to-person, intimate approach. Why do you think it might or might not be important in today’s world for the Church to take this “one person at a time” approach with people?
- After hauling in what we can presume is the biggest catch of their lives (v.7), the fishermen leave their catch behind on the shore and become Jesus’ disciples. The disciples move out from their former life (fishing for a living) into deep water, following Jesus and “catching people.” Obviously a huge transformation has taken place here. What has happened? Do you experience a similar kind of transformation in your life, through Christ?
- Think more about Jesus’ “fishing for people” analogy. How might the disciples’ skills from their former life (fishing for a living) translate into their new life as disciples, fishing for people?

9. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns from your first group meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John’s as we follow Jesus’

call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective “fishers of people.”

Into the Deep Water with Christ
IDENTIFYING AND UTILIZING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

WEEK #2 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: March 24-30

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):
Heavenly Father, we thank you for bringing us together today to study your Word and to support each other in our walk of faith. Help us to listen to each other with open hearts and minds. We thank you for the new life and forgiveness you have given us in Christ, and we pray that you will remove all fear from our hearts as we follow your call to let go of our old lives, that we may live for you alone. In Jesus' name, Amen.
3. First, look at items 5-7 from your homework, concerning good communication with your partner(s). Share your summary of what you feel are your stronger communication traits, from #6. Below, write down what your partner(s) share in response to #6.
4. With your partner(s), identify the communication skill that you want to work on in the next few weeks in the context of your group, based on your “I will try...” response to #7. Write down what your partner(s) share.
5. Now, backtrack to the material in items #2 and #3 from your homework, relating to *going into the deep water*. Turn in your bibles to Luke 1:26-38 (Gabriel visits Mary) and have someone read the passage aloud (or break it into segments and have different people read it “tag team” style).
6. Share your responses to the bullet points under homework item #3. Write down any thoughts that strike you from your conversation with your partner(s), below.
7. Go to the material in item #8 from your homework. Someone, please read Luke 5:1-11 aloud.
8. Share your responses to the bullet points under item #8 from your homework. As always, write down thoughts that strike you from your conversation with your partner(s)

9. In the third bullet point under homework item #8, you considered how God seems to prefer a “person to person” approach in scripture and how this approach might be especially important in today’s world. How does this help you understand what God wants to do in your small group meetings?

10. In turn, without going into too much depth about each situation, share one or two specific issues that you would like your partner(s) to pray about for you this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.

11. Together, briefly review the homework, below, that you will be doing before your next meeting. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

12. Close with prayer. Today, have one person volunteer to pray for the group. Try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer. Include a prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit to guide your group and fill you with confidence and determination as you continue this journey together.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (3rd) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer aloud; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free spirit. Make me an agent of your love towards all. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

2. This week we will begin make connections between the gifts we have been using in our main vocations in life, and Jesus’ call for us become “fishers of people.” Again, please read Luke 5:1-11 aloud.

3. Recall your discussion with your partner(s) about the first disciples transferring their skills as fishermen to their work as disciples, catching people for Jesus. Through our various vocations (callings) throughout our lives, we have all built up skills and experiences that can translate into our work as fishers of people. In the space below, write down what you would identify as the **particular vocation which has shaped your identity, more than any other** (besides “Christian,” for now). Some examples: Student, elementary school teacher, car salesman, father, retiree, plumber, etc.

4. Besides perhaps being a source of income for yourself and your dependents, what kind of human needs does (or did) your main vocation fulfill for other people? For example, a shoemaker provides protection and warmth for people's feet. A doctor provides healing for the injured and sick. A homemaker creates a safe and nurturing environment for family life. Give time to this and write down all the different ways your main vocation serves (or served) other people.

5. In your main vocation, how would you describe your daily interactions with other people (customers, co-workers, bosses etc.)? For example, were your contacts intermittent because you worked more "behind the scenes" (e.g. in a laboratory), or were you flooded with human contact all day? Were your work relationships intensely personal, or impersonal? Would you say you were more focused on tasks and systems, or people and relationships? Describe the nature of your interactions.

6. What types of activity/interaction in your main vocation give (or gave) you the most joy and fulfillment, and why?

7. What aspects of your vocation do you like least, and why?

8. Which of your natural skills and personality traits would you say contribute most to your success and fulfillment in your vocation?

9. Which skills and personal attitudes/habits have you had to work on the most in order to function effectively in your vocation?

For the following questions, think about your history of participation in God's Church, at St. John's and/or elsewhere.

10. The first disciples were fishermen; Jesus spoke to them in terms of their profession, telling them to "Follow me. Don't be afraid. From now on you will be catching people." What are some of your vocational skills (and personality traits that you've had to hone for your vocation) that you think Jesus could directly translate into ministry skills for his purposes, in the context of His Church?

11. Think of your history as a member of St. John's, or another congregation. When it comes to plugging yourself into church activities and ministries, what kinds of *external* factors might have sometimes stood in the way? For example:

- People already involved in those ministries are nice, but they naturally have a kind of “clique” that I would have to break into and I’d feel like an outsider.
- Sometimes it’s seemed like nothing at church is “calling my name.”
- My calendar is so filled up all the time.
- There are already people doing those things and I don’t think they need newcomers.
- I have tended to assume that the active work of Christian ministry belongs to professional church staff, while laypeople are more like passive receivers of ministry.
- I’m afraid I’ll become too committed because other people will lay everything on me.
- I don’t feel there’s going to be enough support or training from pastors, staff, or other lay leaders for what I want to do.
- I have no clue where to begin.
- Until now, I’ve never really thought of getting involved beyond coming to worship.
- Other...

Think about this and try to narrow in on what you have perceived as those external factors which might have sometimes kept you from going into deeper water with Christ through the Church.

12. How would you generally characterize your relationships with other *people* in your congregation(s) over the years? Think of some particular deep and lasting love relationships, rewarding activities, inspiring witness, experiences of deep mutual support, hurts, controversies, ...all the significant interpersonal dynamics that have shaped your level of involvement in Christ’s Church. Write a few sentences below which generally characterize your relationships with others at church.

13. How have you tended to deal with any negative things that may have occurred in your relationships with other people at church? Do you think your faith in Christ has influenced your responses and actions? Are you finding it hard to let go of particular hurts? Do you tend to suffer silently? Would you say you are still being influenced by negative things that have happened to you in the context of Church life? Think about it and write down how these factors might still be influencing your attitudes to church life and ministry.

14. Think about what you could really do, with God’s help, in order to overcome some of your reluctance, or some of the “external” barriers you might be facing, to go deeper in your faith and ministry in the context of your congregation right now. For example:

- Would you need to talk to someone directly who intimidates you in some way?

- Would you need to “put yourself out there” in order to become part of a group?
- Would you need to ask for help from a pastor or church staff?
- Would you need to change your routine in order to make time for ministry?
- Would you need to commit to more prayer, more scripture study, and a more regular worship life in order to be fed for ministry?
- Would you need to have special training to do a ministry that attracts you?
- Would you need to ask for forgiveness from somebody at church?
- Would you need to show someone openly that you forgive them and want to renew a relationship?
- Would you need to ask for help with starting a completely new ministry?
- Would you need to take steps to start changing your attitude from “how can the church serve me” to “how can I serve God through my involvement in His Church?”

Take time to really think about this, and then respond in the form of “I need to…” statements.

15. When you imagine getting involved at Church right now beyond worship, do church ministries attract you more right now as a way of “getting away” from what you normally do; or are you attracted to a ministry that is a natural outgrowth of what you’re doing every day?

16. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John’s as we follow Jesus’ call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective “fishers of people.”

Into the Deep Water with Christ
IDENTIFYING AND UTILIZING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

WEEK #3 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: March 31—April 6

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):
Lord God, we give you thanks for all the gifts you have given us in this life: our family, friendships, and the beauty of your creation. Most of all, we thank you for sending Jesus into the world to save us from the powers that seek to enslave us. Lift us up, Lord God, and set us free by the blood of Christ to live our lives in joy and confidence as your sons and daughters. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen

3. Each of you, in turn, please share your responses to item #3 of your homework, regarding what you identified as your main (non-church-related) vocation so far in your life. Write down what your partner(s) share.

4. Take time to discuss item #5 from your homework together, regarding the general character of your interactions with other people in your vocation. Take notes on what your partner(s) share.

5. *Briefly* share your responses to items 6-9 from your homework, regarding what gives you most joy, and most frustration, in your vocation. Also talk about the skills that have come most natural to you in terms of your job, and those skills you had to work hardest to develop.

6. *Briefly* share your responses to #10, from your homework. Write down your partner(s) responses, below.

7. Take time to discuss your responses to #11, from your homework. This question begins to touch upon the various barriers (both within us and from without) that can keep us from pouring out our gifts for others in God's Church. As always, jot down any thoughts that strike you in your conversation with your partner(s).

8. Take time to discuss your responses to items #12 and #13, from your homework. These items touch upon our history of personal relationships in the church that might be affecting our desire to "jump in" and discover how God is currently calling us to use our gifts to build up his church.

9. Open your Bibles and follow along while someone reads **Romans 12:1-3** out loud.

10. First, *briefly* talk about how this passage is a call for us to go deeper in our discipleship with Christ, beyond territory that might be currently safe and familiar to us. Jot down ideas that strike you from your discussion.

11. What do you think Paul means when he says "do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind?" Where and how as believers do we experience a constant renewal of our minds so that we can follow a different pattern from the world?

12. Discuss how you think the passage from Romans speaks to what you discussed regarding the barriers we've identified, which can keep us from diving into Church life and ministry with confidence.

13. Discuss your response to homework item #14 with your partner(s). Write down what your partner(s) share.

14. With your partner(s), talk about ways you can support each other, resources you might consult, church staff you might talk to, things you can do, etc., to overcome any factors that might be standing in the way of a more deep and fulfilling walk with God in the context of your congregation.

15. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week, for you. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.

16. Together, briefly review the homework, below, that you will be doing before your next meeting. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be "doubling up" on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

17. Close with prayer. Today, have one person volunteer to pray for the group. Try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (4th) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish:

Heavenly Father, I thank you for you for the gifts, talents and abilities that you have given me, and I pray for a spirit of discernment, that I might continue to find ways that I can best serve you and build up your holy Church on earth. Bless the work of your people throughout the world, and make us strong in our witness to you, so that people may be drawn to Christ and find eternal life in him. In Jesus' name. Amen.

2. In your Bible, please read Romans 12:1-8

3. *Read the following:* A sacrifice is a costly offering to God. We typically think of sacrifice as an expensive offering going up to God from human beings. Israel held a different view of sacrifice than other ancient religions: other religions saw sacrifice as a way human beings could make God happy by “paying him off” through a vicarious gift of extremely expensive livestock blood. In the Bible, however, God makes it clear that human beings can never influence his will through such a “payoff.” Only God himself can restore the balance between himself and sinful humanity.

The practice of ritual animal sacrifice in the Old Testament was a gift from God; it was a way that human beings could freely and obediently participate in God’s saving act to restore balance between a broken world and himself. (Remember our discussion of how Mary participated willingly and obediently in God’s salvific action). Sacrifice is always meant to bring peace and reconciliation back into the relationship between humans and God, which has become hostile because of human sin. Yet another way of putting it: sacrifice is a bloody and costly “adjustment” which restores broken rhythms between God and man to harmony.

Paul, by chapter 12 in Romans, has spent most of the letter talking about the amazing **once-for-all** sacrifice that God has made in Jesus Christ, in order to restore the relationship between himself and human beings. No further sacrifice from either side of the relationship is necessary for the complete salvation of human beings. There is nothing that you and I can add to what Jesus has done for us on the cross. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news!

Now, in chapter 12, Paul introduces the idea of offering our bodies as a “living sacrifice to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

4. In Christ, our whole life becomes an act of worship. What do you think it means that Paul speaks in terms of a costly action (sacrifice) when it comes to our daily relationship with God, when we already know that nothing further needs to be paid in order to enjoy that relationship? Below, write down your understanding of our ongoing “sacrifices to God,” from the standpoint of what Jesus has already done for us, for all time.

5. When Paul speaks of “offering our bodies,” he means “direct everything we are and everything we have towards God.” He doesn’t want us to think of religion and faith as being just one part of our life, separated from others, as in “my spiritual side belongs to Jesus and has nothing to do with how I schedule my time or spend my money.” As disciples, we acknowledge that it all belongs to God—including the time we have—and in Christ it’s all transformed and re-directed towards him. Write your thoughts, below, on what happens to God’s Church in the world when we “spiritualize” our Christianity too much and forget that it’s about the totality of who we are, including everything we do with our bodies and our schedules.

6. If sacrifice refers to a costly act, how is Paul’s idea of offering our bodies as a living sacrifice to God another way that God is constantly calling us to “put out into the deep water,” and not stay put where we are at in our religion? If we are not “putting out into deep water,” repeatedly in faith, what can happen in our everyday relationship with God?

7. To what extent, at this point in your life, do you feel you are finding concrete ways of serving Christ joyfully?

8. Which specific “bodily sacrifices” for God are you making right now in the context of church which give you the most joy and fulfillment, and which you would gladly continue and even expand on?

9. Sometimes sacrifices in the context of church can feel like a negative burden...like we have to make them in order to keep the boat from sinking. Other times, our sacrifices in the context of church truly lead to a joyful exhaustion beyond words, where we have emptied ourselves out in praise and thanksgiving. Describe some of your experiences in this regard.

10. *Please look again at Romans 12:3-5 in particular, and then read the following.*

Since we are saved by God’s grace and not by anything we can do, we are “not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought.” Our position in God’s Church (our “status”) has been won for us by Jesus. So, we should not think of our place in the Church as a reward for our faithfulness, or as a reflection on our past contributions to ministry. We count our participation in a congregation an undeserved privilege, because our congregation offers us so many ways to be fed with the word, to build other people up, and to pour ourselves out for each other in concrete ways, in thanks to Jesus.

Paul is saying that when we think that our membership in a church is a reward for our past faithfulness, for our historical connections to the congregation, or for our contributions, we are, quite frankly, “thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.”

This leads perfectly to his next point: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”

Instead of thinking that our position in the church is based on personal merit, we are to trust our “merit” to God and think of ourselves in terms of our **unique individual function** within the whole congregation. Each of us has a unique “niche” right now to fill in the organic body of the Church, where we can do a lot of good for others and contribute to building people up in faith. How do we find our current “niche” in the church that gives us joy? To start with...by doing what we are doing right now! By going deeper, trying something new, opening doors for others, talking to others and sharing insights with them, supporting each other, encouraging each other in the faith.

Here's the thing to understand about our unique spiritual gifts: we find them by doing what God wants us to do, which is simply to empty ourselves out for the people around us in love. It is not really a matter of determining through some kind of test that "I have this spiritual gift" and then acting on it as if we are pre-programmed to function in that particular way in the Church.

Rather, we can start with what Jesus has done for us, and become people whose main goal each day is to build someone else up in the faith, hope, and love of Christ. When we live in that holy desire, we *will* discover our spiritual gifts, and we will be able to build on them. The desire and the willingness to go deeper in our journey of faith in Christ comes first; self-discovery comes as a result.

With the above in mind, please respond to the following:

11. What factors make it a constant challenge to see our participation in a congregation in terms of what we can *give* to God and others rather than in terms of building up personal merit in front of God and others?

12. If you can think of one, describe a particular church situation—do not use people's names—in which people (including maybe yourself 😊) got bogged down in a sense of defending their personal merit, and it hurt the ministry of God's Church. Examples:

- Jealousy between people who want recognition or power.
- Holding a ministry leadership position more through a need to control and be recognized than out of desire to give and create more and more opportunities for others to give.
- A reluctance to invite and welcome new people and strangers into church or into particular ministries (perhaps because we are defending the "merit" of a familiar friendship circle).
- An assumption that we have more say in the life of a congregation based on our personal history and connections, rather than submitting ourselves with others to a process of scriptural discernment..
- Making money concerns (the ultimate symbol of "accumulated worldly merit") the key factor driving ministry in a church, rather than Christ-like love inspiring joyful giving.
- Other...

If you can think of any church situation you've seen, where "human merit" became more important than "emptying ourselves out" for each other, please describe the dynamics. Please also describe how the situation came to a resolution (if it did). This is not pleasant stuff, but God wants us to learn from it.

13. Regarding the situation you just described, how do you think Paul's words speak to it? How do you think things would have panned out in **real terms** if people followed his Spirit-filled wisdom?

14. At the end of this packet, there is a section called “Ministries at St. John’s” where you can find a lengthy list of our current ministries with brief descriptions of each. We will be referring to this list a number of times. For now, please take time to go through the entire list of ministries, carefully considering each. Place a number (1-10) in the left margin next to each ministry (just write your numbers in the left margin beside each item). A “1” indicates you currently have little interest in becoming personally involved in that ministry. A “10” would indicate a strong desire to get involved in the ministry immediately (or that you are currently enthusiastically participating in it).

15. In the spirit of going deeper: At your next small group meeting, you and your partner(s) will be challenged to make a commitment to get involved (even if just on a one-time “trial basis”) in at least one ministry at church *that you have never been involved in before*, as soon as you can get it on your calendar. Please start thinking about which of St. John’s ministries you would like to try! You could write down a few contenders, below, if it might help you narrow things down.

16. Look back at your partners’ prayer concerns from your last meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John’s as we follow Jesus’ call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective “fishers of people.”

Into the Deep Water with Christ
IDENTIFYING AND UTILIZING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

WEEK #4 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: April 7-13

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).
Holy Spirit, direct us in all we do towards our Savior, Jesus Christ. Keep us deeply rooted and grounded in him, that we will serve him faithfully and give our lives generously to the work of his Church. Help us to love each other as the Father loves us, and guide us to new insights today as we study your Word together. In Jesus’ name. Amen.
3. Discuss your responses to item #4 from your homework. Write down any thoughts that strike you from your conversation with your partner(s).

4. Discuss your responses to item #5 from your homework, regarding what can happen to God's Church when we "spiritualize" our Christianity too much and forget it's about "the totality of who we are, including everything we do with our bodies and our schedule." Write down thoughts that strike you from your conversation with your partner(s).

5. If we are not putting out into deep water with Jesus repeatedly in faith, what can happen in our everyday relationship with God? (Refer to your response to #6 in your homework.)

6. Briefly discuss your responses to item #8 in your homework, regarding current "bodily sacrifices" that you are making at church which give you a lot of joy and fulfillment.

7. Discuss item #9 from your homework with your partner(s). What are some factors (inside us and external to us) that make us sometimes experience church ministry as a "negative burden" on the one hand, and a "joyful exhaustion" on the other? Share any experiences or wisdom with your partner(s) that have helped you come to a more positive place in your church life. Write down anything from your conversation that strikes you.

8. Discuss your responses to item #11 from your homework. Refer to the paragraphs of item #10 as necessary to fill out your discussion. Why is an attitude of humility, based on our experience of undeserved and overflowing grace from God in Christ, so crucial to life in God's Church? Summarize your partner(s) thoughts.

9. Look at your answers to items 12 and 13 from your homework. Without naming names or dwelling on the particulars of negative situations, talk about how Paul's wisdom—"you should not think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think"—would have been a great help in some congregational situations you've witnessed or been part of. Have you ever caught yourself "thinking more highly of yourself" than you ought in a church situation? How did it pan out and how do you think you were brought back on track? Like it says in the homework, these things are not exactly pleasant to talk about, but God wants us to learn from them!

10. Refer back to the paragraphs from item #10 in the homework. Discovering and defining our unique spiritual gifts is not a pre-requisite to being a servant of Jesus. In fact, the discovery of our spiritual gifts comes out of "going deeper" in our desire to love each other with the love of Christ. Sometimes we think we need to identify our gifts before we start ministering to other people, when in fact the opposite is true. As we pour ourselves out for our neighbors in gratitude to God, we discover our gifts and then, over time, we are able to build on them and become more confident in them. Have you experienced this truth in your life of faith? If so, please discuss particular experiences with your partner(s).

11. With your partner(s), talk about the current St. John's ministries that you identified as interesting to you (see items 14 and 15 in the homework). In the spirit of going deeper into unfamiliar waters, make a pact with your partner(s) that you will participate in ONE of the many St. John's ministries as soon as you can, at least on a one-time trial basis.

- You can do it together with your partner(s), or pick separate ministries.
- Pick something *you have never done before* from the list.
- Keep in mind that some of the ministries and events are seasonal, and so might not be available until after this first eight-week "expedition" is over.
- Try to get involved in a ministry event that happens before May 12th, if possible.
- Try to set the date/time right now if you know when these ministries happen (e.g., Bed Brigade is active almost every Saturday morning, Faith Mission happens once a month, youth events are constant, etc.)
- Your homework for the coming week will remind you to make any necessary phone calls, check the website, ask church staff or lay leaders, etc., to determine the schedule and plug yourself in.
- At your next small group meetings, there will be reminders about this. Please encourage your partner(s) to follow through on this exercise.

12. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.

13. Together, briefly review the homework, below, that you will be doing before your next meeting. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be "doubling up" on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

14. Close with prayer. Today, have one person volunteer to pray for the group. Try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (5th) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish:

Lord God, lift me up, heal me, and renew me. Help me to give my life completely into your hands and to trust in your will for me. Be with (my small group partner[s]), help them to know your constant love for them. I thank you for all that we have been able to share in our meetings. Help us to continue to lovingly uphold and support each other in this journey, and make us faithful to you in all that we do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

2. Please make every effort to follow through on the “pact” you made with your partner(s) to jump into an unfamiliar St. John’s ministry in the near future. Here are some numbers/email addresses to use if you need help or referrals finding basic information for any of the ministry events:

- Pastor Seth (217.255.2118). Email: sjersild@stjohnsgc.org
- Pastor Patti at church (614.875.2314). Email: pmorlock@stjohnsgc.org
- Elaine Bennett: ebennett@stjohnsgc.org
- Gary Pecuch: gpecuch@stjohnsgc.org
- Laurie Pecuch: lpecuch@stjohnsgc.org
- Diana Imbrock: dimbrock@stjohnsgc.org
- Jan Miller: secretary@stjohnsgc.org

3. Take time now to think about the listening skills that you have been practicing with your small group partner(s). Go back to the list of listening skills on pages 7-8 of this packet. What do you think has improved and what still needs working on? Write down those items, below. Make a commitment to keep working on your listening skills in the next few weeks in your small group meetings.

4. This week, we will begin helping each other define and narrow in on some “inborn” and spiritual gifts that God has given us as individuals. The New Testament identifies different spiritual gifts in several passages, and we will be working from a compilation of all of them in a moment. For now, please read *1 Corinthians 12:4-13*.

5. Here, as in several passages in his letters, Paul envisions the Church as a body with many different parts. All the parts are working in harmonious unison, and all are necessary, for the body to function towards its goal—to glorify God and proclaim to the world that Jesus is Lord. Please write down your responses to the following bullet points.

- What might be significant about the simple fact that Paul pictures the Church as a living organism? What are some things that make living organisms a lot different than man-made structures, blueprints, or pre-programmed computers? How does this help us understand the nature of the Church?
- Paul goes into how no one part of the body should compare itself to others in terms of its *ultimate* value. Instead, each part should, in a sense, forget about itself and work with the whole to serve the head of the body (Christ). How does this “forgetting about self” echo what Paul said in Romans 12 about “not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought,” which we discussed last week?
- One of the great mysteries of our faith is that, in losing our lives, we find our lives (Matthew 10:39). For example, as Jesus empties himself out, submits himself to the

Father, and becomes “nothing” on the cross, he shows himself to be fully God (John 12:49ff.; Philippians 2:5-11). We are not God, but we are made in his image, so we are built to do what God does: empty ourselves out in love.

With this great mystery in mind, how can we understand our “emptying of ourselves” through our participation in the Body of Christ (the Church) as a way of truly showing who God has made us in our individual uniqueness? Another way of putting it: how does my unique individuality shine forth only as I stop trying to be “individual” and empty myself out in love for other people (as Jesus did)?

- Can you point to a particular experience where through “losing your life,” you came to a deeper faith in Christ and also to a more confident (and humble) understanding of yourself? Please describe your experience, below.
- For fun: which “body part” might best characterize your role/ministry in the body of Christ at this time.

6. Below is a compilation of spiritual gifts identified in the New Testament. Please go through the list, reading the description of each. Place a number, 1-5, in the margin by each description. “1” would indicate you don’t think it’s one of your gifts; “5” would indicate that it’s a gift you have in abundance.

LIST OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS, COMPILED FROM SCRIPTURE

Administration

The gift of administration allows a person to organize people and resources for greater efficiency, effectiveness, and success. Administrators have the natural ability to apply resources where they will do the greatest good. Administrators are good with details and are deeply aware of how all the parts of a group or organization work together to achieve their goals.

Apostleship

The gift of apostleship compels people to reach out to new and unfamiliar groups and individuals to invite them into relationship with God and community. Apostles share the story of faith in other lands, cultures, and traditions, as well as welcoming the stranger in their own land. Apostles extend the hand of friendship to those of other generations, nations, and languages. Many apostles desire to be missionaries.

Compassion

The gift of compassion moves people to action on behalf of those in need. Compassion is not a simple caring about others, but such a radical caring that we have no choice but to make

sacrifices for others. Those with the gift of compassion rarely ask “Should I help,” but instead focus on how to help. Compassion makes us fundamentally aware of the Christ in others and springs from our desire to care for all of God’s creatures and creation.

Discernment

Discernment is a gift of deep intuition and insight. Discerning people can separate truth from fiction and know at a visceral level when people are being honest. Deeply sensitive and “tuned in,” those with the gift of discernment are open to feelings, new ideas, and intuition as valid and credible information. Discernment is not irrational, but trans-rational—beyond empirical—knowledge.

Evangelism

The gift of evangelism is the gift of faith-sharing and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to those we meet. Evangelism is primarily a one-to-one or small group experience, grounded in building relationships with others and inviting them to make a decision for Christ. Gifted evangelists do not force their faith on others, but offer relationship with God as a gift, and are ready to tell the story of God and Christ in their own lives.

Exhortation

The gift of exhortation is manifest in people who offer encouragement, wise counsel, unflagging support, and empowerment. Those who exhort stay focused on helping people maximize their own potential and live from their own gifts and skills. Exhorters help people feel good about themselves, build confidence, and not grow discouraged. Often, those with the gift of exhortation make others feel good just by being present.

Faith

The gift of faith is more than belief in Jesus Christ, but an abiding foundation of confidence that God works all things together for good, and that the people of God can rise above any obstacle. Faith is the bedrock upon which we build lives, congregations, and communities. People with the gift of faith hold fast to the deep conviction that no matter what we see with our eyes, we can trust the promises and plan of God.

Giving

The gift of giving is the deep commitment to provide whatever resources are needed to support God’s will and plan. In addition to radical generosity, those who possess the gift of giving have the uncanny ability to discover and channel new sources of money, time, and energy to needs. Money management skills, grant writing abilities, and the easy knack of asking for donations and cultivating donors are among common skills of gifted givers.

Healing

The gift of healing is not about transferring spiritual power to eliminate suffering and disease, but the ability to channel God’s grace and healing love to those who suffer physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. Healers are moved to be present with those who suffer. Healers pray for those

who suffer, visit those who are ill, and are usually moved to extend a hand of comfort and touch to those who are afflicted. Healers give their time and energy to offering aid and comfort to others.

Helping

Helping is a gift of support and behind-the-scenes effort that make groups, families, and congregations more effective. Not everyone is gifted to lead, but many are gifted to follow and handle the tasks that are so essential, but less glamorous. Helpers love to serve others, support others, and assist others in the important work of ministry and mission. Tireless in their willingness to serve, helpers are less interested in receiving thanks and recognition than in doing good, valuable work.

Interpretation of Tongues

Those who are gifted to interpret tongues help build bridges across cultural, generational, and language divides. People who possess this gift have an innate ability to learn new languages and cultural practices, and can help others understand them as well. Foreign speaking people are attracted to those with this gift, and feel intuitively that they will be better understood and received by interpreters. Interpretation breaks down barriers.

Knowledge

The gift of knowledge allows people to automatically convert facts, data, and information into useful and important knowledge. People possessing this gift can learn in a variety of ways, retain what they learn, and understand how learning can be applied in meaningful and productive ways. Those gifted with knowledge have a voracious and insatiable desire to learn more, and they seek multiple avenues for deepening their understanding of God's world, God's will, and God's people.

Leadership

The gift of leadership is a visionary, and forward looking gift that enables people to stay focused on where God might be leading us as individuals, congregations, and communities at any given time. Leaders look more to where we are going rather than where we currently are, or where we have been. Leaders motivate others to work together in ways that help them achieve more together than any could on their own. Leaders provide examples of how we should order our lives to honor and glorify God.

Miracles

The gift of miracles is not about performing miracles, but about living in the miraculous reality of God's creation. Those gifted with miracles never doubt the power and presence of God in creation, and are able to help others see and believe in God's power. The gift of miracles does not focus on the extraordinary, but sees the miraculous in the mundane and normal. Living in the spirit of the miraculous, people see God in nature, in relationships, in kind acts, and in the power of love.

Prophecy

The gift of prophecy is the ability to speak God’s word to others, or more appropriately to be open for God to speak God’s word through us. Prophets do not predict the future, but offer insight and perspective on current conditions and how things might turn out if changes aren’t made. Prophets are incisive, clear, and often controversial, communicators. Prophets see things that others often don’t, and they have the courage to “tell it like it ought to be.”

Servanthood

Servanthood is the gift of doing for others, sometimes to the exclusion of meeting personal needs. Servants look for ways to do for others both within and beyond the congregation and community. Servants do not choose to serve, but serve from a sense of identity and call. Gifted servants never feel put-upon or taken advantage of, but see each opportunity to do for others as a way to be true to self.

Shepherding

The gift of shepherding is the gift of mentoring and providing spiritual guidance to others to help them develop in the discipleship and faith formation. Shepherds take an active and individualized interest in the life of faith of others. Shepherds share from their own faith journey to make the way easier for others. Shepherds are good at asking provocative questions, recommending appropriate resources and experiences, and helping people find their own way to the next level of their development.

Teaching

The gift of teaching allows people to transform data and information into life changing knowledge. Teachers do not have to stand in front of a class to teach. Often gifted teachers communicate best in informal, one-on-one settings. Teachers have the uncanny knack of helping people learn effortlessly. People internalize and retain the knowledge and learning they receive from gifted teachers. Good teachers transform more than they inform.

Tongues

The gift of tongues is a communication gift that allows people to speak foreign languages and convey concepts they never formally studied. People with this gift “pick up” the ability to communicate across barriers of language, culture, age, or physical limitation (some people with the gift of tongues work with the deaf or blind). The identification of the gift of tongues as a “secret” prayer language is often misunderstood. An individual manifesting the gift in this way must always be paired with someone who has the gift of interpretation of tongues. These gifts are given for the upbuilding of the body of Christ.

Wisdom

The gift of wisdom allows people to understand deeper meaning and apply knowledge, beliefs, and experience to every day situations. Wise, gifted individuals make connections and help other make them as well—to understand the implications of our beliefs and actions. Those gifted with wisdom often understand root causes of disagreements, conflict, and barriers to growth and

development. People with wisdom help others understand and clarify options to make good decisions.

7. Now, for **each** of the gifts by which you put a “5,” answer the questions below (if you have no 5s, then use the 4s):

- How do you live this gift at home? At work? In relationships with friends?

- What other gifts best complement this gift, and enable you to increase the value and impact of this gift?

- In what ways can you develop and grow this gift in your life?

- Where do other people see evidence of this gift in your life?

8. Now, write down the name(s) of your small group partner(s) in the space below. Hold each in your mind as you read again through the list of spiritual gifts, above. For each of your partners, list THREE of the spiritual gifts that you see working in them most clearly. If possible, describe why and how you see this gift at work in them.

9. Think of one person at church who is not in your small group, whom you want to thank for the service that they’ve given to St. John’s. You’ll have more opportunities to thank more people in the future. For now, think of one, and jot down some things you want to say to them, below. For this, please do not think in terms of what they have done for you personally, but for the congregation in general.

10. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other prayers, ask for God’s continued guidance and blessing on your small group and on our congregation as we continue into deeper water with

Christ. May the Holy Spirit fill us with life and power so that we can become more confident and effective “fishers of people.”

Into the Deep Water with Christ
IDENTIFYING AND UTILIZING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

WEEK #5 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: April 14-20, 2019

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).
Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for all your gifts to us. Help us each day to grow more fully into the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When we stumble and make mistakes, lift us up and fill us with a sense of your forgiveness. When our hearts are cold and we are filled with frustrations, give us your peace. Keep us focused on you in all that we do. In Jesus' name. Amen.
3. Talk with each other about setting a date when each of you will plug yourself in to an unfamiliar ministry at St. John's. Encourage each other to nail down a time. If you need to pick another ministry event, let your partner(s) know what it is, and when you're planning to do it.
4. Talk with your partner(s) about how things are going in your group (or pair). Is everything good or do we need to make any changes? Talk about the active listening skills that you identified as your “growing points” in item #3 of your homework. Make a commitment together to work on these particular listening skills.
5. Open your Bibles and have someone read **1 Corinthians 12:4-13**.
6. Spend about 25 minutes talking about your responses to the five bullet points under item #5 in your homework. Below, for each bullet point, write down some ideas that strike you from your discussion.
7. Share what you identified as your spiritual gifts in item #7 from your homework, and share what you wrote for each of the bullet-point questions under that item. In the space below, jot down the spiritual gifts that your partner(s) identified in themselves.

8. Now, share the three spiritual gifts that you identified in each of your partner(s) in homework item #8. Go into how you see these gifts working in your partner(s), as well as you can. This can be very meaningful for your partner(s), so take your time.

9. **Take special note** of any gifts that your partners see in at work in you that you did not see in yourself. Be sure to write those down, below!

10. Share with your partner(s) who you identified as someone you want to thank for their service at St. John's. Remember, this should be someone outside your small group. Tell your partner(s) what you plan to say to that person. Then, make a pact with each other, that you will personally thank that person for their service/ministry *this week*. In the spirit of going deeper, let's try to do this verbally, either face-to-face or on the phone.

11. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.

12. Together, briefly review the homework, below, that you will be doing before your next meeting. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be "doubling up" on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

13. Close with prayer. Today, have one person volunteer to pray for the group. Try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (6th) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish:

Lord, please give me your wisdom now as I approach your word. Help me to discern your will for me, and open my heart to hear your voice speaking to me through the scriptures. Help me not rely on my own understanding. Thank you God for the clarity, encouragement and hope your Word brings. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

2. Have you participated in a St. John's ministry that is unfamiliar to you?

3. Have you verbally thanked a member of St. John's for their ministry?

4. This week, we'll be having some fun talking about our personality traits and how they factor in to our life and ministry as disciples of Jesus. First of all, we should be clear that the subject of

“personality” or “temperament” is pretty ambiguous. Each individual is a lot more complex and variable than any verbal pens we try to build around them. The point with this exercise is not to lump ourselves into fixed personality slots and then dwell on how we are unique from other people. Our temptation with “personality type” inventories is to use them to build up a sense of self without seeing the results in light of who God is *calling* us to be. For example, if a survey tells me that my “type” will tend to be less generous with my money than other types, my sinful self might blame my lack of generosity on my personality type, rather than see it as a challenge to become more generous.

In short, our goal in talking about our personalities is to think more objectively about how certain consistent patterns in our behavior *interact* with God’s call in Jesus Christ to be his representatives. The more “distance” we get on our behavior patterns and reactions (the more clearly we see ourselves), the more we tend to be free from habits and behaviors that get in the way of us joyfully pouring out our gifts for the sake of others in God’s Church.

5. First, let’s look at a biblical example of how personality shapes Christian ministry. Please read the following bible passages about Paul, summarizing briefly the impression you get about his personality after reading each:

- Acts 8:2-3 (try to see this one in terms of Paul’s underlying personality, not just the emotions he’s showing)
- Acts 9:28-29
- Acts 15:1-2
- Acts 15:37-41
- Acts 18:5-6
- Acts 21:12-14
- Acts 26:24-29
- Galatians 2:11-13
- Philippians 3:4-8

6. Notice how certain aspects of Paul’s personality did not change after his conversion to Christ. With this in mind, summarize how you think our personality traits—both positive and negative—can be used by God to his glory.

7. *Take the HEXACO personality survey online.* Please keep in mind that there is nothing religious about the Hexaco personality survey. We are simply using it as a tool to come to some helpful insights about ourselves, with the goal of becoming more faithful and confident in our discipleship.

The Hexaco inventory is unique in that it presents itself as a purely *comparative* personality survey. We will see our answers only *relative to others*. It does not tell us we have an inborn, fixed personality “type.” Rather, it simply compares our answers to the answers of a large initial pool of Canadian college students, and everyone else who has participated since. So, all we can really say afterwards is that “I answered this way in comparison with a bunch of other people,” and take it for what it’s worth. *Nevertheless*, the results can definitely help us to hold ourselves up to a kind of mirror and see ourselves more objectively, in relation to many other people. This, in turn, can help us become more aware of how our unique traits and behavior patterns interact with God’s call to us in Jesus Christ to pour ourselves out in love for others.

To take the test: go to the following website:

www.hexaco.org

OR: Google “Hexaco personality test” and click the links to get to the test. **Make sure you’ve gone directly to the hexaco.org page**, and not to another site that merely uses the Hexaco test in order to get your personal information and plague you with emails.

NOTE: One of the good things about this inventory is that you don’t have to give any personal information, and you won’t be hassled with emails afterwards.

Once you get to the web page, take the test and get the results. You can print the results out in a .pdf form if you’d like, or you can stay online and explore the results by clicking the explanation tabs by each line of comparative results.

8. Once you have gone over the results of your Hexaco personality survey, please respond to the following:

- What were your most extreme personality traits, in relation to the median response?
- Did anything surprise you about your results?
- What aspects of your personality, as reflected in this *comparative test*, do you count as positive?
- What aspects of your personality, as reflected in this *comparative test*, do you hope you could change with effort?

9. Read the following bible passages:

- 1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

- Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

10. Clearly, from the above passages, God has high hopes and a very high regard for us. Think about what the two bible passages say about you, then put that together with what the Hexaco results might say about you. Write a statement, below, about how you put the two together. Remember God's complete love and for you in Christ as you do this!

11. Have you ever experienced a time when God worked through your *weakness* or *mistakes* to reveal his forgiveness and love? If so, describe the experience below.

12. What aspects of your personality and behavior patterns, as you perceive them, would you like to change? Do you think it will be possible to change them? In the left-hand side of the space below, make a list of attitudes and behaviors that you wish you could change. Next to them, on the right hand side, list positive behaviors and attitudes that you could actually cultivate in order to steer away from negative or harmful behaviors, and make those changes happen.

13. Here is this week's challenge to go deeper: This week at church, approach a person you don't know and introduce yourself to them. Without being pushy, ask them some "I'd like to know you" questions.

14. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other prayers, ask for God's continued guidance and blessing on your small group and on our congregation as we continue into deeper water with Christ. May the Holy Spirit fill us with life and power so that we can become more confident and effective "fishers of people."

Into the Deep Water with Christ
IDENTIFYING AND UTILIZING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

WEEK #6 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: April 21-27, 2019

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).
We gather together to learn, to grow and to change. Help us to move into a deeper understanding of your truth. We lay our lives down before you and ask that you would move among us. May we all feel safe with each other. Safe to think and question. Safe to ask for help. And safe to share our lives with you, our loving heavenly Father. In Jesus' name. Amen.
3. Have you participated in an unfamiliar St. John's ministry yet?
4. Have you verbally thanked a member of St. John's for their service to our congregation?
5. In your homework, you were challenged to introduce yourself to a person at church whom you do not know. Have you been able to do this yet, or will you do it this weekend?
6. Together, briefly review the material under item #4 in your homework, and briefly discuss your understanding of it. The main point is that the personality test is merely a tool to help us understand ourselves better, *so that we can be more effective witnesses for Christ.*
7. Discuss with your partner(s) your general impressions of Paul's personality from the bible passages you read in item #5 of your homework. How do you think certain aspects of Paul's personality made him the right person at the right time to be an amazing and effective missionary among gentiles?
8. Discuss item #8 from your homework, regarding your personal results from the Hexaco personality test. First, discuss how you felt about the test in general, and then discuss the bullet points. Give this some time.

9. Take some time to share some encouragement with your partner(s). Tell them what about their personality you appreciate the most, and thank them for it. When your partner encourages you, write down the aspect of your personality they appreciate, below.

10. Someone read aloud both bible passages from item #9 in your homework.

11. Share the statement that you wrote under item #10, in your homework. This is a good exercise in “crossing” God’s Word with the reality of our personal situation.

12. Share your response to item #11 in your homework.

13. Share your responses to item #12 in your homework. Share any wisdom you might have for each other on these issues.

14. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.

15. Together, briefly review the homework, below, that you will be doing before your next meeting. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

16. Close with prayer. Have one person volunteer to pray for the group. Try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (7th) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish.
Loving Father, I will lean in, retreat from the pressures I face, and move closer and deeper into your love. I will breathe out, refrain from the distractions I seek, and become open and receptive to your grace. Help me, Lord, to be honest and real in your presence. Help me to listen, and to be fed with your life-giving Word. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

2. Have you participated in a St. John’s ministry that was unfamiliar to you?

3. Have you verbally thanked a member of St. John’s for their ministry?

4. Have you introduced yourself to someone at church whom you didn't know before?

5. In one of the inside pockets of your small group packet, you will find "A Spiritual Gifts Inventory" (subtitled "a process developed by the Youth and Family Ministry Program at Midland Lutheran College"). Please **print your name clearly on the top of the front page of the booklet.**

6. Please follow the instructions and complete the inventory. You'll be recording your answers on the answer sheet at the back of the booklet. Note the **three gifts** to which your three highest scores correspond. Write down the three "top" gifts in the space below. Then go back and read the descriptions of your three top gifts. Behind each of the three gifts you've noted below, write the descriptions in your own words. Use personal "I" language, as in "I have the gift of __, which means I can...."

7. How do your results from the inventory booklet compare with the results you identified for yourself a few weeks ago in item #7 on page 26 of this packet? (Some of the terms for the gifts on that list are different from the ones in this booklet, but overlaps will be obvious. **Take special note** of any new "top gifts" that arise from the inventory you just took.

8. In the "Spiritual Gifts Inventory" booklet, at the bottom of the description page for each spiritual gift (pages 7-30), there is a slot that says "People I know who have the gift of...." Please take time now to go through each gift, reading the descriptions again. As you read each gift, think of people you know in our congregation (including your small group partners) whose gifts fit the description. The number of slots you fill will obviously probably depend on how many people you know pretty well at St. John's. Only put their names in the slots if they *quickly* come to mind.

9. Keep the booklet secure in your small group packet for now, as you will be using it at your next (7th) small group meeting. After your next small group meeting, you will turn this booklet in to Elaine Bennett, our Director of Lay Ministries at St. John's.

10. Please read **Ephesians 4:1-32** (the whole chapter), and respond to the following bullet points.
 - The passage is talking about a new unity that has come into the broken world through Jesus. Jesus, after all, is the One through whom all creation came into being. Through him, the original (and final) unity and harmony between all creatures and God *has been*

and *is being* restored. Based on this chapter from Ephesians, describe in your own words the vision of this new unity, harmony, and peace in Christ that God has given the author. Go ahead and let the poet in you come out for this one.

- Based on your reading of this chapter, how do you understand the place of *individuals* in the new unity that God has brought into being through Jesus?
- Notice how when Paul talks about “gifts,” he again starts using the image of body parts working in harmony. What is the ultimate purpose of God giving us spiritual gifts?
- Do you get the impression that we need to use our spiritual gifts to keep on re-establishing our relationship with God?
- Remember back to the idea that God wants us to participate in his saving acts towards other people. He doesn't *need* us to do what he's going to do (God has all the power), but he *wants* us to be part of it, and *invites* us to be part of it. How do you relate this truth to your everyday use of the gifts God has given you?
- How can this insight (from the bullet point above) help us have a new and refreshed attitude towards giving ourselves away in service in God's Church?
- Paul talks about the “gentiles” in this passage, using the term in the general sense of non-believers. Notice how “greed” is the ultimate word he uses to describe a life separated from God. J.R.R. Tolkien pictured greed as a giant bloated spider, eating everything in its sight. What is greed, and why will it ultimately characterize *all* our actions if we are broken off from God?
- Paul seems to be saying that through Jesus, we have a new option or “choice” open to us that we did not have while we were trapped in sin and death. Describe in your own words what Paul means when he says “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

11. Think of two more laypeople you want to thank for their ministry at St. John's. This time, you are encouraged to write cards to them. Try to think of some people who are working more

quietly “behind the scenes,” who might not always get much recognition for what they do. After thinking about it, write their names in the space below.

12. Think about the OUTCOME-BASED MINISTRY SKILLS coaching that Gary and Laurie Pecuch offer to **anyone in our congregation**—adult or youth—who wants to become more confident in their faith and ministry for Jesus. St. John’s is truly blessed to have church staff who have years of experience with this practical training. They want to share it with you.

As you think about the gifts that God has given you to *give away*, please consider what a powerful resource you have right here with our staff members, who can help you break through the typical fears we Lutherans often have when it comes to being “out there” with our faith and witness.

Below is an extensive list of faith/ministry skills that Gary and Laurie can help you with:

1. Understand the message of the Good News.
2. Know your purpose in life and pray through it daily.
3. Understand your God-given job description and how to process your day through the lens of faith in Christ.
4. Develop a meaningful prayer life and an everyday prayer sheet.
5. Learn a personal Bible study method.
6. Understand the Acts 1:8 service philosophy.
7. Understand the Christian View of Finances.
8. Develop a discipline of fasting (not necessarily food).
9. Intentional relationship building skills
10. Faith webbing: how to develop a “faith web” of relationships
11. Create an “I believe” statement.
12. Develop written personal standards to live by.
13. Develop a personal mission statement/direction.
14. Develop a personal ministry plan.
15. Develop an attitude of appreciation and understand its benefits.
16. Cultivate an ability to be visionary in your thinking.
17. How to spend time with people the way Jesus did.
18. Understand that concept of love languages and become aware of your primary love language.
19. Understand the basics of personality temperaments and identify your temperament.
20. Develop a biblical self-esteem.
21. Be able to introduce yourself.
22. Be trained to give faith-based talks
23. Give and receive compliments.
24. Find your million dollar mate
25. Develop Bible usage skills
26. Learn how to facilitate a Bible study.

27. Learn how to create and give a devotion.
28. Develop a prayer journal/notebook.
29. Learn how to read scripture out loud.
30. Learn how to open/close a meeting in prayer.
31. Learn how to say or lead a table grace.
32. Recognizing God sightings
33. Learn how to lead a service project.
34. Learn how to put together a social event.
35. How to put together a vesper/campfire
36. Learn how to verbalize your faith.
37. Learn delegation skills
38. Develop “Go” thinking
39. Learn a decision making method
40. Learn how to lead songs, create faith-based skits, lead games.

13. Looking at the above list of skills that Gary and Laurie are willing to help St. John’s members develop, place a check-mark next to all of those which you think might be of special benefit to you.

14. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other prayers, ask for God’s continued guidance and blessing on your small group and on our congregation as we continue into deeper water with Christ. May the Holy Spirit fill us with life and power so that we can become more confident and effective “fishers of people.”

Into the Deep Water with Christ
IDENTIFYING AND UTILIZING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

WEEK #7 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: April 28—May 4, 2019

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, holy is your word. Perfect are your ways. Bless us as we meditate on your Word today. Help us to hand all our anxieties, worries, fears and frustrations over to you, and fill us with the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding. Bless our congregation and make us faithful in our witness to Jesus. Be with all those who need your healing power. In Jesus’ name. Amen.
3. Have you participated in an unfamiliar St. John’s ministry yet?
4. Have you verbally thanked a member of St. John’s for their service to our congregation?

5. Have you introduced yourself to a person at church whom you do not know?

6. Please note that we will have a large-group “Come Back to Shore Meeting” on **Sunday, May 5th**, to close out our current topic: *Identifying and Utilizing our Spiritual Gifts*. Please, try to come to **one** of the meetings: either during the Sunday School Hour (9:30-10:30), or at 6:30 p.m. that night! It will be a time to celebrate where we have come in our journey, and share some of our insights and feedback. Please come!

7. With your partner(s), share your results from the Spiritual Gifts Inventory that you filled out. What were your top three gifts? Write down your partner(s)’ results, below. Read the descriptions aloud together for the gifts that you have identified in yourself (no need to repeat descriptions for gifts that partners share).

8. Identify with your partner(s) any new “top gifts” that emerged from this inventory, compared to the results you obtained from item #7 on page 26 of this packet.

9. Share with your partners the names of people from St. John’s whom you identified as having particular gifts (item 8 from your homework). If you and your partners know a lot of people from St. John’s, this might be a nice opportunity to brainstorm together concerning people’s gifts, which you have witnessed in action at church. Add people’s names to the slots as you see fit based on your conversation. Try to not let this become too much of a “gab” session, though! 😊 If you and your partner(s) know fewer people, don’t feel the need to spend too much time on this one.

10. Note together that you will be giving your completed Spiritual Gifts Inventory booklets to Elaine Bennett **this week**. Make sure you print your names on the top of the front page of the booklets. You can get the booklets to Elaine in the following ways:
 - Give them directly to her at church.
 - Put them in her mail slot (Elaine’s has her name on it: it’s on the far right hand side of the mail slots) next to the church office.
 - Give them to one of the pastors.
 - Give them to Jan in the church office during office hours.

11. Discuss your responses to all the bullet-list items under #10 in your homework, regarding Ephesians 4:1-32. Write any ideas that strike you from your conversation with your partner(s).

12. Encourage each other to write the two THANK YOU cards this week to people whom you would like to thank for their ministry. Share the names of the people you'll be writing.
13. Talk together about the Outcome-based Ministry Skills coaching that Gary and Laurie Pecuch offer to everyone at St. John's (Items 12 and 13 from the homework). Share which items on their list of skills that you put check-marks by. Why do you think coaching in those areas would be of particular benefit to you?
14. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
15. Together, briefly review the homework, below, that you will be doing before your next meeting. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be "doubling up" on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
16. Close with prayer. Today, have one person volunteer to pray for the group. Try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (8th) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish.
Holy Spirit, lift me up from the pit of my sin and selfishness and fill me with your life-giving power. Unite me with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and guide me in the way of truth as I seek your will for my life. Lord God, make me your faithful representative, and help me to pour myself out joyfully in service to your Kingdom. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen
2. Have you participated in a ministry at St. John's that was unfamiliar to you?
3. Have you verbally thanked a member of St. John's for their ministry?
4. Have you introduced yourself to someone at church whom you didn't know before?
5. Have you given your completed Spiritual Gifts Inventory to Elaine Bennett? If not, please do so as soon as you get a chance!

6. Have you written two cards to people at St. John's whom you would like to thank for the ministry they do at church?

7. Please read **Acts 2:1-21**, and then read the following:

When the Holy Spirit came upon the followers of Jesus for the first time at Pentecost, He empowered them to speak in different languages about *the mighty acts of God* so that people from different parts of the world could understand them. The picture is clear: by the proclamation of Jesus through the Spirit-filled people of his Church, God is bringing all people together under his loving rule...people who formerly were isolated and living under the tyranny of false gods. God's awesome goal is to gather up the whole creation in Christ (see Ephesians 1:3-10). Please respond to the following:

- The first thing the Holy Spirit did was to enable believers to start *translating* God's powerful Word into different languages. A translator stands between two different people who can't understand each other, and gives them a common meeting ground where a living and meaningful exchange can happen. How can Jesus himself be thought of as the ultimate translator, and which two parties does he stand between? What kind of exchange does Jesus make possible between the two parties?
- Since Pentecost, the people of God's Church have become the Body of Christ in a very literal way. Obviously we humans are not able to save anyone. But God has chosen to use us as *vessels of the Holy Spirit*. As we stand on nothing else but Christ, the Spirit works through us to bring other people into a relationship with God. He will use our words and actions, our hands and feet, to make a direct exchange happen between sinners and a Holy God—two parties who were formerly broken off from each other. Describe, in your own words, how you understand yourself as a vessel of the Holy Spirit.
- List some events in your life where people have been agents of the Holy Spirit towards you. Remember, this goes beyond helpful things people have done for us so we can face another day with more happiness in our hearts. God loves it when we are kind and helpful to each other. But when we talk about the work of the Holy Spirit, we're talking about God active in someone's actions and words, bringing about an actual exchange of life between us and God. It was the difference between "I can face another day," and "I just received a new future that transforms all my days!" What did they say? What did they do? How did they act?

8. Guided by Paul's vision of the Church, we've been talking about the Body of Christ in terms of "many members," all of whom have a different function to perform in the context of the whole. How do you see yourself, in the roles you can play (or have played) in God's Church,

contributing to the “exchange work” of the Spirit in people’s lives? Give some time to this. In the space below:

- list the spiritual gifts you’ve identified on the left hand side of the space (give some room for each).
- beside each gift, in the middle of the space, list a church ministry that you CAN or HAVE participated in, which would fall under the umbrella of the gift.
- On the right hand side of the space, express how the ministry you’ve done ultimately leads people around to the experience of “I just received a new future that transforms all my days!”

EXAMPLE:

<i>Gift:</i>	<i>Ministry:</i>	<i>Leads people to the “Exchange:”</i>
Administration	Stuffing inserts into bulletins	I am contributing to the web of communication that serves to bring people together, build up the Body, and direct its members to events where they will ultimately be directed to the saving power of Jesus.

Write your Gifts, Ministries, and how they lead to the “Exchange,” below:

9. Please note that your next (8th) small group meeting will be the last for this “expedition” which has been focused on *Identifying and Utilizing Our Spiritual Gifts*. It is possible that you are doing this homework, right now, after Sunday May 5th. If so, hopefully you were able to participate in the “Come Back to Shore” meeting last Sunday. If you’re reading this before May 5th, please remember to come to ONE of the meetings on Sunday, May 5th, either during the Sunday-school hour (9:30-10:30) or at 6:30 p.m.

10. In the course of the past several weeks, some of you might have begun getting ideas for a new ministry, event, or activity that you would like to organize or see happen at or through church. Pay attention to how the Holy Spirit is tugging at your heart when it comes to things like this!

Even if nothing particular has come to mind yet, now is a good time for all of us to give this some thought, as we close out our exploration of Spiritual Gifts. Most of the great ministries that happen in a congregation start as small ideas—mustard seeds. Even if you are not a person who is big on organizing and leading things, you can see needs in our community that others might not. The key is to define the need, formulate the draft of a plan, and then talk to people about it. All of us can at least answer this question: **What kind of activity would I like to see happen at or through St. John’s that would reach people with the love of Jesus Christ?** Think about this and write your idea(s) below:

11. If you can go farther on these lines, jot down some ideas in response to the following bullet points.

- How do you envision this event or activity? What would actually be happening?
- Who would be served?
- How would the event point people to Jesus?
- Who could you bounce this idea off of in order to gauge its “reality potential?”
- What would your role be in organizing and leading this event/activity?

Please think about this more, and keep praying about it. Remember, your church staff is eager to help you channel your ideas and energy in any way they can.

12. In one of the side-pockets of this packet, you will find a sheet entitled “My Spiritual Gifts and Discipleship Goals.” Please look at that sheet and **fill in the blank spaces, in accordance with the headings and instructions.**

13. Please think and pray about your next step in going deeper with Christ. The new focus, starting May 12th, will be “raising up the next generation for Christ.” This next topic will not just be for parents! The *whole church* is responsible for the evangelization and nurture of the next generation of Christians. It’s going to be a wonderful, challenging, inspiring topic! At your next small group meeting, you will be discussing with your partner(s) whether you will continue as a group or reconfigure.

14. Please consider writing a blurb about your experience so far with *going deeper with Christ* for our church newsletter (the Eagle) and/or our website.

15. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other prayers, ask for God’s continued guidance and blessing on your small group and on our congregation as we continue into deeper water with

Christ. May the Holy Spirit fill us with life and power so that we can become more confident and effective “fishers of people.”

Into the Deep Water with Christ
IDENTIFYING AND UTILIZING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

WEEK #8 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: May 5-11, 2019

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).
Gracious heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the opportunity to come together these past few weeks, to be fed with your holy Word and to think seriously about ways that we can use our gifts to serve you and build up your Church. We ask your blessings upon all who have participated in this journey so far; help us to continue into deeper water in our discipleship. Give us joy in our work, courage to proclaim your Name, and confidence to keep reaching out to others with your love and forgiveness. In Jesus' name. Amen.
3. Have you participated in an unfamiliar St. John's ministry yet?
4. Have you verbally thanked a member of St. John's for their service to our congregation?
5. Have you introduced yourself to a person at church whom you do not know?
6. Have you given your completed Spiritual Gifts Inventory to Elaine Bennett? If not, please do so as soon as you get a chance!
7. Have you written two cards to people at St. John's whom you would like to thank for the ministry they do at church?
8. Please read Acts 2:1-21 aloud together (solo or “tag team”).
9. Please review the material under item #7 from your homework (regarding Pentecost) and share your responses to the bullet points. Jot down ideas that strike you from your conversation with your partner(s).
10. Share with your partner(s) your responses to item #8 from your homework, describing the chain connecting your spiritual gifts, your various ministries among God's people, and the

resulting “exchange” that people can have with Jesus through what you are doing (or have done) at church.

11. Please share with your partner(s) any thoughts you might have about the “come back to shore” meeting that took place on May 5th, if you were able to attend.

12. Talk about items 10 and 11 from the homework, regarding new ministries that you might be thinking of starting at St. John’s. This might be a good opportunity for some of you to bounce ideas off of your partners to get a sense of their “reality potential.”

13. Together, go over the “My Spiritual Gifts and Discipleship Goals” sheet that you each filled out (homework item #12). Don’t spend too much time discussing it—just share what you’ve written. *Keep your sheet*, as we will be referring to it periodically as we continue our journey through future topics.

14. Talk together about your plans for the next chapter of *going deeper with Christ*. Will you be staying together as a group? Reconfiguring? Disbanding for the time being? Be sensitive to each other’s needs and commitments. If you are continuing to the next topic and need to find a new group, please act now! Pastor Seth (217.255.2118) or Pastor Patti (614.875.2314) can help you as needed. You will probably have a good chance finding a new group or other people looking for a group at the upcoming “Go Out from Shore” meetings.

15. Could any of you (or all of you) write a blurb about your experience for the newsletter and/or website and/or Facebook regarding your journey so far?

16. For your final prayer, have everyone pray in turn. Thank God for your partner(s). Thank him for this opportunity we’ve been given to share or spiritual gifts with each other, and to build each other up in the love of Christ. Ask for God’s blessings and guidance for our congregation as we continue together on this journey into the deep water with Christ.