

LIVING YOUR STRENGTHS

DISCUSSION GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE



Name: _____

| My Top 5 Signature Themes | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me.

Philippians 4:13

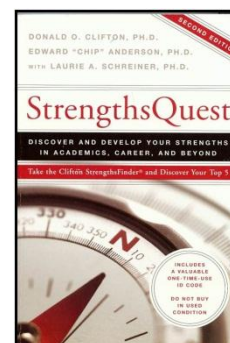
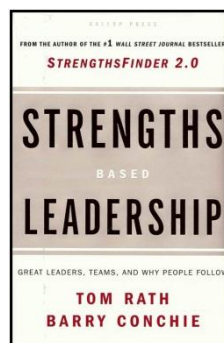
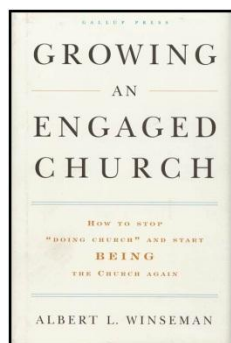
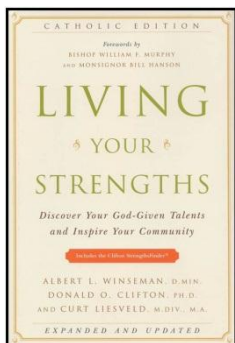
WELCOME & OVERVIEW

This document has been compiled to guide small group discussions centered on the *Living Your Strengths* book and related StrengthsFinder® assessment. Small groups coming together to learn more about their unique God-given talents, those of others, and how we each contribute to fulfillment of the Body of Christ results in a greater sense of belonging and more effective stewardship.

Where there's sharing there's caring...and where there's caring, there's love.

RECOMMENDED READING

Although this guide was prepared to enhance group discussions focused on the *Living Your Strengths* book, each is a valuable resource for gaining a deeper understanding of StrengthsFinder®.



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

At its most basic level, living your strengths is about doing what you most naturally do best. This guide is the result of my talents in action – most specifically the top two of Ideation® and Maximizer®. The many hours spent compiling this material, and the associated Moderator Guide, is one way I feel I am giving a little something back to the Catholic community. I was one of those fallen away cradle Catholics who felt inferior, unworthy and too ill-informed to return to the church, yet the Holy Spirit guided my eyes to the Blessed Pope John XXIII (*Fort Myers, FL*) parish bulletin a few years ago. On the cover was their credo:

***No matter what your present status in the Catholic Church;
No matter what your current family or marital situation;
No matter what your past or present religious affiliation;
No matter what your personal history, age, background, race or color;
No matter what your self-image or esteem;***

You are invited, welcomed, accepted, loved and respected at Blessed Pope John XXIII Catholic Church!

This credo brought me back through the church doors and made me feel welcome. The *Living Your Strengths* discussion groups then made me feel *engaged*. Never in my wildest imagination could I have envisioned being this involved and actively participating in so many great ministries with so many great people. I feel welcome. I feel I belong. I feel at home. I am engaged.

My hope is that this document proves to be a valuable resource for *engaging* members of your parish. While this format serves us well, modifications may enhance your parish's experience.

With Peace and Gratitude,
Steve Engelman
Fort Myers, FL
October, 2011

IN APPRECIATION

This guide was compiled by:

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With valuable input provided by:

Holly Atkins, Business Manager
Mike Navarro, Inner Strengths Ministry Moderator
The numerous ministry team members who provided feedback
Blessed Pope John XXIII Catholic Church, Fort Myers, FL

Jennifer Engelman, my wife, who truly lives her strengths while developing those of others.

Special thanks to:

Monsignor Bill Hanson and Marie Guido
Church of Saint Gerard Majella, Port Jefferson Station, NY (www.stgmajella.org)
Their generous sharing of strengths-related experiences and materials is incomparable.

and...

Leisa Anslinger
The Generous Heart, Indianapolis, IN (www.thegenerousheart.com)
Her spiritual influences and material content are present throughout this guide.



Donald O. Clifton, Ph.D. (1924-2003)

The Clifton StrengthsFinder® used throughout this guide is the culmination of more than 50 years of Dr. Clifton's lifelong work; leading millions of people around the world in discovering their strengths. In 2002, Dr. Clifton was honored by an American Psychological Association Presidential Commendation as the Father of Strengths-Based-Psychology.

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MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to enrich parishioner's awareness and understanding of their unique God-given gifts, and the unique gifts of others, for enhancing their home, work, community and spiritual lives.

GOALS

The primary goals of this ministry are to enhance the sense of belonging we each feel within the parish community while increasing our individual levels of engagement.

APPROACH

These goals will be accomplished by getting to know and understand ourselves and others even better than we already do by using the StrengthsFinder® assessment and group discussions. This will allow us to take steps toward recognizing and fulfilling a calling by becoming increasingly aware of the talents God has given us -- the ways in which we, as unique individuals, most naturally think, feel, and behave.

OVERVIEW

This guide is designed for approximately 10 hours of group discussion. Although written for five 2-hour sessions the material works equally well with sessions of varying frequency and duration. A key point to remember: it is the discussion, sharing, and learning that is most important, not that every topic or activity is addressed and promptly "checked off the list."

COURSE OUTLINE

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| MODULE ONE: | <i>Personal Discovery</i> |
| MODULE TWO: | <i>Understanding Others</i> |
| MODULE THREE: | <i>Team Development</i> |
| MODULE FOUR: | <i>Spiritual Enrichment</i> |
| MODULE FIVE: | <i>Devotion to Stewardship</i> |

PERSONAL COMMITMENT

Confidentiality – *I agree what is shared within the group remains within the group.*

Participation – *I agree to actively join in group discussions and sharing.*

Attendance – *I agree to attend each session.*

On Track – *I agree to stay on topic while respecting session time constraints.*

Develop – *I agree to further enhance and utilize my God-given strengths.*

Respect – *I agree to honor and respect each member's uniqueness.*

Prayer – *I agree to pray for group members that their strengths be fully utilized.*

Listen – *I agree to allow others to speak without interruption.*

Enjoy – *I agree to have some fun!*

Signature

Date

ENJOY YOUR JOURNEY TOWARDS GREATER AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF SELF AND OTHERS!



LIVING YOUR STRENGTHS

MODULE ONE **PERSONAL DISCOVERY**

*"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another."
(John 15: 16-17)*

MODULE 1: PERSONAL DISCOVERY

1) OPENING PRAYER

God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Thank you for gifting each of us with unique talents. Help us to further develop them with skills and knowledge to become strengths.

Please guide us in using our strengths most effectively at home, with friends, within our parish, and throughout our community. Open our eyes to see and appreciate the unique strengths in others and provide the grace to partner with others so that each has the opportunity to contribute with meaning.

We are thankful Dear Lord that you have uniquely blessed each of us. Help us serve you and to always know that we are part of your plan in building the kingdom of God. Amen.

OBJECTIVES:

- To establish the foundation for successful group discussions.
- To meet and get better acquainted with other participants.
- To define and better understand the key elements of “Strengths” and how they apply to each of us.
- To initiate the process of understanding and further developing your God-given gifts.

2) OVERVIEW

We come together to begin something new and exciting. Each of us is likely to discover something about ourselves and others during the weeks ahead. We may deepen our relationship with God and our relationships with family, friends, and co-workers will be influenced as well.

Some of us may discover new ways to apply ourselves in the activities that make up our lives, at home, at work, in our parish, and throughout the community. We will share much together and through that sharing we will see God’s blessings in our midst.

These group sessions will help explore your talents that have been identified as Signature Themes. You will review how you are already using them in your life and how to further develop them.

You will also reflect on the ways your talents help to recognize God’s presence in your life and how He calls upon you to offer your talents in service to others.

EPHESIANS 4:11-12 *“And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”*

3) INTRODUCTIONS:

Introduce yourself by responding to the following. Please note our Top 5 Signature Themes will be discussed later in this session.

- a. My name is _____
- b. I am originally from _____
- c. I have lived in this area for _____ years.
- d. I have been a member of this parish for _____ years.
- e. I am participating in this discussion group because _____
- f. My expectations for these sessions are _____
- g. If involved in ministries, which ones? _____
- h. Something most people do not know about me is _____

4) "SIGNATURE" CHALLENGE

First Task

Second Task

5) WHY FOCUS ON DEVELOPING STRENGTHS, NOT WEAKNESSES?**Reading Comprehension Case Study**

Years ago in Omaha, the Board of Education administered a reading comprehension test to their incoming freshmen. One group of freshmen showed they read at a rate of 90 words per minute with good comprehension. The other group had a reading comprehension rate of 350 words per minute. That is nearly 4 times better than the group who scored 90 words per minute.

The Board of Education did not know what to do with the information, so they brought it to the University of Nebraska, which unleashed a firestorm of opinions. After much debate, they decided to put some of the students who scored the 90 with some of the students who scored the 350 and provided them with additional reading skills using the Evelyn Wood Speed Reading course.

After 6 weeks, the students who scored 90 words per minute improved their score to 150 words per minute...a most respectable 67% improvement! What do you think happened to the students who originally scored 350? They increased their score to 2,900 words per minute! The only thing that slowed them down was turning the page! This clearly shows that those who scored 350 had a natural talent and with the additional knowledge and skills they were able to turn that talent into **Strength!**¹

*Do you now see why we prefer to focus developing our strengths, not weaknesses!*²

6) IDENTIFYING THE PIECES OF THE “STRENGTHS” PUZZLE

Living Your Strengths pages 7-9:

- “What is a Strength?”
- “Talents”
- “Skills”
- “Knowledge”

“A theme is a category of talents, and your Signature Themes are the five categories in which your talents are greatest, as indicated by your responses to StrengthsFinder. A theme of talent is not a strength, in and of itself, even if it is one of your Signature Themes. Your Signature Themes are simply a starting point for discovering your greatest talents, and a strength – the ability to consistently deliver near-perfect performance in a specific task – is what you create when you add helpful knowledge and skills to your talents.”³

7) STRENGTHS SUMMARY

STRENGTH – The ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity.

TALENT – A naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied.

Talents exist naturally within you. They are spontaneous, top-of-mind, perhaps even subconscious, reactions to situations you encounter. Talents are what you do well “without even thinking about it.” Talent is your natural way of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

SKILL – The capacity to perform the fundamental steps of an activity.

Skill deals with aspects of an activity that are rational and predictable. It is the basic ability to progress through the fundamental steps of a task.

KNOWLEDGE – Quite simply, what you know or are aware of.

This may be purely factual knowledge or it may be how you make sense of what you know—your understanding.

$$\text{TALENT} + \text{SKILL} + \text{KNOWLEDGE} = \text{STRENGTH}^4$$

8) SIGNATURE THEMES

The StrengthsFinder® assessment is comprised of 34 themes, each of which contains several talents. Talents are natural, recurring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The talents identified in your Signature Themes are things you do naturally, like breathing. It’s practically impossible to stop doing them. You actually do them without even trying.

Write your Top 5 Signature Themes here. Share with the group.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

As each group member shares their Top 5 Signature Themes refer to the following short descriptions to gain an initial understanding of their talents. Complete the table on page 1-8.

Achiever[®] – People who are especially talented in the Achiever theme have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive.

Activator[®] – People who are especially talented in the Activator theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They are often impatient.

Adaptability[®] – People who are especially talented in the Adaptability theme prefer to “go with the flow.” They tend to be “now” people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.

Analytical[®] – People who are especially talented in the Analytical theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability to think about all the factors that might affect a situation.

Arranger[®] – People who are especially talented in the Arranger theme can organize, but they also have a flexibility that complements this ability. They like to figure out how all of the pieces and resources can be arranged for maximum productivity.

Belief[®] – People who are especially talented in the Belief theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of these values emerges a defined purpose for their life.

Command[®] – People who are especially talented in the Command theme have presence. They can take control of a situation and make decisions.

Communication[®] – People who are especially talented in the Communication theme generally find it easy to put their thoughts into words. They are good conversationalists and presenters.

Competition[®] – People who are especially talented in the Competition theme measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.

Connectedness[®] – People who are especially talented in the Connectedness theme have faith in the links between all things. They believe there are few coincidences and that almost every event has a reason.

“I was always good at telling other people they have talents, but never really thought of myself as talented before,” said Matt.

“But when I read the descriptions of my Top 5 themes, I could see myself in what I was reading and I began to realize I do have talents after all!”

Consistency® – People who are especially talented in the Consistency theme are keenly aware of the need to treat people the same. They try to treat everyone in the world with consistency by setting up clear rules and adhering to them.

Context® – People who are especially talented in the Context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.

Deliberative® – People who are especially talented in the Deliberative theme are best described by the serious care they take in making decisions or choices. They anticipate the obstacles.

Developer® – People who are especially talented in the Developer theme recognize and cultivate the potential in others. They spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from these improvements.

Discipline® – People who are especially talented in the Discipline theme enjoy routine and structure. Their world is best described by the order they create.

Empathy® – People who are especially talented in the Empathy theme can sense the feelings of other people by imagining themselves in others' lives or others' situations.

Focus® – People who are especially talented in the Focus theme can take a direction, follow through, and make the corrections necessary to stay on track. They prioritize, and then act.

Futuristic® – People who are especially talented in the Futuristic theme are inspired by the future and what could be. They inspire others with their visions of the future.

Harmony® – People who are especially talented in the Harmony theme look for consensus. They don't enjoy conflict; rather, they seek areas of agreement.

Ideation® – People who are especially talented in the Ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.

Includer® – People who are especially talented in the Includer theme are accepting of others. They show awareness of those who feel left out, and make an effort to include them.

Individualization® – People who are especially talented in the Individualization theme are intrigued with the unique qualities of each person. They have a gift for figuring out how people who are different can work together productively.

Input® – People who are especially talented in the Input theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.

Intellection® – People who are especially talented in the Intellection theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussions.

Learner® – People who are especially talented in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. In particular, the process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.

Maximizer® – People who are especially talented in the Maximizer theme focus on strengths as a way to stimulate personal and group excellence. They seek to transform something strong into something superb.

Positivity® – People who are especially talented in the Positivity theme have an enthusiasm that is contagious. They are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.

Relator® – People who are especially talented in the Relator theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.

Responsibility® – People who are especially talented in the Responsibility theme take psychological ownership of what they say they will do. They are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.

Restorative® – People who are especially talented in the Restorative theme are adept at dealing with problems. They are good at figuring out what is wrong and resolving it.

Self-Assurance® – People who are especially talented in the Self-Assurance theme feel confident in their ability to manage their own lives. They possess an inner compass that gives them confidence that their decisions are right.

Significance® – People who are especially talented in the Significance theme want to be very important in the eyes of others. They are independent and want to be recognized.

Strategic® – People who are especially talented in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

WOO® – People who are especially talented in the Woo theme love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over. They derive satisfaction from breaking the ice and making a connection with another person.⁵

TEAM SIGNATURE THEMES GRID

| GROUP | NAMES | | | | | | | | | | | TOTALS | |
|-------|-------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--------|--|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Achiever | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Activator | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Adaptability | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Analytical | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Arranger | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Belief | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Command | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Communication | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Competition | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Connectedness | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Consistency | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Context | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Deliberative | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Developer | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Discipline | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Empathy | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Focus | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Futuristic | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Harmony | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Ideation | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Includer | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Individualization | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Input | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Intellection | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Learner | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Maximizer | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Positivity | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Relator | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Responsibility | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Restorative | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Self-Assurance | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Significance | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Strategic | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | WOO | | | | | | | | | | | | |

9) REMINDERS & SUGGESTIONS

- a. Continue reading and referring to the *Living Your Strengths* book regularly.
- b. Commit to pray for each other that we may all maximize our God-given strengths.
- c. Reflect on your talents and observe how they affect your daily life.
- d. Consider keeping a daily journal to capture the ways in which you apply your strengths.
- e. Be prepared to discuss “*Between Sessions*” tasks during next session.

10) INTENTIONS**11) CLOSING PRAYER**

Good and gracious God, we praise you and thank you! We know that your love knows no bounds, and for this we are grateful.

We thank you in a special way for bringing us together, to explore the gifts you have given us in talents to be used for your glory.

Help us to humbly embrace these gifts as signs of your mercy and care for us and for all in our world. We ask this as with all things, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Steve shares: “I first met Bob when he arrived at our Living Your Strengths discussion group on the first of two consecutive Saturdays. As the newly acquainted group began sharing and learning about each other’s gifts, Bob’s WOO talent quickly filled the room.

We spent nine hours together over those two days and I learned a lot about Bob, his family, his career, and how accurately he and family members believed StrengthsFinder® identified his natural talents. Bob had recently been hospitalized for many weeks and his wife frequently commented how happy he was during our group’s time together.

Just 42 days following our first meeting, God called Bob home. Although I previously moderated many sessions, it was not until Bob’s passing that I truly appreciated how much we do learn about someone in such a brief period of time. We’re not chatting about the weather or sports when together, we’re peeling back the layers of who God created us to be.”

As Bob’s daughter mentioned during the eulogy, “He’s now WOOing them in heaven.”

“BETWEEN SESSIONS” - Please complete the following three pages and be prepared to share with the group at our next session.

PART 1 – PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF SIGNATURE THEMES

Using the long descriptions for each of your Signature Themes, highlight...if you have not previously done so...the words and/or sentences that best describe you then answer the following questions.

- a. What was your initial reaction to seeing your Top 5 Signature Themes?

- b. Which of the Top 5 Signature Themes best describes you?

- c. What in the report surprised you?

- d. How well do you feel your Top 5 Signature Themes describe the ways in which you most naturally, think, feel, and behave as a unique individual?

PART 2 – VERIFYING YOUR SIGNATURE THEMES

Share your Signature Themes Report with someone that knows you well. Ask them to read through the report and then ask the following questions. Record their answers.

a. What in the report most accurately describes me?

b. What in the report surprised you about me?

c. Which of the Top 5 Signature Themes do you notice in me the most?

d. Provide examples of how and when you've seen these themes in me?

PART 3 –STRENGTH, THEME, TALENT, SKILL, AND KNOWLEDGE REFRESHER

Check the appropriate column for each statement. There is only one correct answer for each.

| Select the appropriate category for each of the following. | STRENGTH | THEME | TALENT | SKILL | KNOWLEDGE |
|--|----------|-------|--------|-------|-----------|
| 1) A group of similar talents. | | | | | |
| 2) The capacity to do something. | | | | | |
| 3) The ability to hit a golf ball. | | | | | |
| 4) The burning desire to beat the competition. | | | | | |
| 5) Measured by the StrengthsFinder® assessment. | | | | | |
| 6) Ability to develop new software. | | | | | |
| 7) The power to concentrate on computer programming. | | | | | |
| 8) Installing software on a computer. | | | | | |
| 9) Combined with knowledge and skill to create strength. | | | | | |
| 10) Being familiar with rules of a card game. | | | | | |
| 11) The basis for achieving excellence when fully developed. | | | | | |
| 12) “Diamonds” in the rough. | | | | | |
| 13) Awareness of basic plant pruning. | | | | | |
| 14) Baking brownies using a box mix. | | | | | |
| 15) Creating new recipes. | | | | | |
| 16) Using a detour to avoid traffic congestion. | | | | | |
| 17) A naturally recurring pattern of feelings, thoughts, & behavior. | | | | | |
| 18) Your Top 5 talents. | | | | | |
| 19) Top 5 Signature Themes plus skill and knowledge. | | | | | |
| 20) The ability to provide consistent, near perfect performance in a given activity. | | | | | |

PART 4 –CREATE MNEMONIC AND “LIVING MY STRENGTHS” BOOKLET (USING FOLLOWING PAGES)

ACTIVITY

A mnemonic is a learning technique that aids memory. To more easily remember your Top 5 Signature Themes create a mnemonic made from the first letter of each. For example, let's consider a person with these five:

- Ideation
- Maximizer
- Analytical
- Significance
- Includer

A possible mnemonic for this example is:

"I Must Always Seek Ideas"

Mnemonics can be meaningful, logical, funny, quirky, silly...anything to make it easier to remember your Top 5. Be Creative!

Instructions for creating your "Strengths Booklet":

- 1) The opposite side of this page is to be cut off along the dashed line. It will become the booklet cover.
- 2) The following sheets each have two booklet pages. Remove from this manual and once again cut along the dashed lines. You should now have a booklet cover and one page for each of your Top 5, plus one extra. Staple the packet.
- 3) Complete one page for each of your Top 5. The time this takes will allow for reflecting upon your God-given talents while preparing a mini-journal that can be shared with others. Enjoy!



LIVING MY STRENGTHS

Name: _____

Write mnemonic in the five spaces below

Talents (Strengths)

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| TALENT: _____ # _____ | EX <input type="checkbox"/> | IN <input type="checkbox"/> | RB <input type="checkbox"/> | ST <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My talent in me (I am...) | | | | |
| My talent in action (I do...) | | | | |
| My talent requires (I need...) | | | | |
| My talent fosters (I love...) | | | | |
| My talent avoids (I dislike...) | | | | |
| My talent looks like (metaphor/image) | | | | |
| My talent gets distorted (overuse) | | | | |
| A one-liner for my talent is: | | | | |
| A biblical reference describing my talent is: | | | | |
| A song that describes my talent is: | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| TALENT: _____ # _____ | EX <input type="checkbox"/> | IN <input type="checkbox"/> | RB <input type="checkbox"/> | ST <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My talent in me (I am...) | | | | |
| My talent in action (I do...) | | | | |
| My talent requires (I need...) | | | | |
| My talent fosters (I love...) | | | | |
| My talent avoids (I dislike...) | | | | |
| My talent looks like (metaphor/image) | | | | |
| My talent gets distorted (overuse) | | | | |
| A one-liner for my talent is: | | | | |
| A biblical reference describing my talent is: | | | | |
| A song that describes my talent is: | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| TALENT: _____ # _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> EX | <input type="checkbox"/> IN | <input type="checkbox"/> RB | <input type="checkbox"/> ST |
| My talent in me (I am...) | | | | |
| My talent in action (I do...) | | | | |
| My talent requires (I need...) | | | | |
| My talent fosters (I love...) | | | | |
| My talent avoids (I dislike...) | | | | |
| My talent looks like (metaphor/image) | | | | |
| My talent gets distorted (overuse) | | | | |
| A one-liner for my talent is: | | | | |
| A biblical reference describing my talent is: | | | | |
| A song that describes my talent is: | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| TALENT: _____ # _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> EX | <input type="checkbox"/> IN | <input type="checkbox"/> RB | <input type="checkbox"/> ST |
| My talent in me (I am...) | | | | |
| My talent in action (I do...) | | | | |
| My talent requires (I need...) | | | | |
| My talent fosters (I love...) | | | | |
| My talent avoids (I dislike...) | | | | |
| My talent looks like (metaphor/image) | | | | |
| My talent gets distorted (overuse) | | | | |
| A one-liner for my talent is: | | | | |
| A biblical reference describing my talent is: | | | | |
| A song that describes my talent is: | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| TALENT: _____ # _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> EX | <input type="checkbox"/> IN | <input type="checkbox"/> RB | <input type="checkbox"/> ST |
| My talent in me (I am...) | | | | |
| My talent in action (I do...) | | | | |
| My talent requires (I need...) | | | | |
| My talent fosters (I love...) | | | | |
| My talent avoids (I dislike...) | | | | |
| My talent looks like (metaphor/image) | | | | |
| My talent gets distorted (overuse) | | | | |
| A one-liner for my talent is: | | | | |
| A biblical reference describing my talent is: | | | | |
| A song that describes my talent is: | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| TALENT: _____ # _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> EX | <input type="checkbox"/> IN | <input type="checkbox"/> RB | <input type="checkbox"/> ST |
| My talent in me (I am...) | | | | |
| My talent in action (I do...) | | | | |
| My talent requires (I need...) | | | | |
| My talent fosters (I love...) | | | | |
| My talent avoids (I dislike...) | | | | |
| My talent looks like (metaphor/image) | | | | |
| My talent gets distorted (overuse) | | | | |
| A one-liner for my talent is: | | | | |
| A biblical reference describing my talent is: | | | | |
| A song that describes my talent is: | | | | |

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LIVING YOUR STRENGTHS

MODULE TWO **UNDERSTANDING OTHERS**

“Now as you excel in every respect, in faith, discourse, knowledge, all earnestness, and in the love we have for you, may you excel in this gracious act also. (2 Corinthians 8:7)

MODULE 2: UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

1) OPENING PRAYER

God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Thank you for gifting each of us with unique talents. Help us to further develop them with skills and knowledge to become strengths.

Please guide us in using our strengths most effectively at home, with friends, within our parish, and throughout our community. Open our eyes to see and appreciate the unique strengths in others and provide the grace to partner with others so that each has the opportunity to contribute with meaning.

We are thankful Dear Lord that you have uniquely blessed each of us. Help us serve you and to always know that we are part of your plan in building the kingdom of God. Amen.

OBJECTIVES:

- Review Module One assignments to continue learning about the application of Strengths in our daily lives
- Further develop understanding of one's own Strengths
- Gain a basic awareness and understanding of the uniqueness between the 34 Talent Themes
- To consider and discuss if Strengths can be "overused"

2) OPEN DISCUSSION

Please share any strengths-related experiences you encountered since we last met. Have you found yourself using your natural talents differently? What have you observed about other's strengths?

3) ASSIGNMENT REVIEW & DISCUSSION

- a. Personal assessment of Signature Themes
- b. Verifying your Signature Themes
- c. Strength, Theme, Talent, Skill, and Knowledge refresher

4) STRENGTHS REVIEW

Our initial look at Strengths in Module One was summarized by:

TALENT + SKILL + KNOWLEDGE = STRENGTH

Further building on this concept, consider...

TALENT X INVESTMENT = STRENGTH

*...where **Investment** includes time spent further developing skills, continually building your knowledge base, and practicing to achieve excellence through near-perfect performance.*

5) NATURAL TALENTS¹

- a. What types of activities are you naturally drawn to?

- b. What types of activities do you pick up quickly?

- c. What steps just come to you automatically when performing a task?

- d. What activities do you complete and then wonder, “when can I do that again?”

6) GROUP ACTIVITY – TALENT THEME MATCH *(NEXT PAGE)*

We continue broadening our awareness of strengths beyond the unique Top 5 each of us identified using the StrengthsFinder® assessment.

As you match the following talent themes to the appropriate word and statements it is not assumed you possess a deep understanding or can even identify all 34. However, by considering your own strengths; those you’ve heard others speak about; and some good old intuition; see how many you can associate.

Begin by taking a few moments to match as many as you can individually. We will then work as a group to continue completing the table. Good luck & enjoy while learning even more about others!

TALENT THEME MATCH - Understanding Other Strengths

Match each of these talent themes with the word or phrase that best describes it.

| | | |
|-------------------|----|--|
| Achiever | A | Impatient. "Just do it!" |
| Activator | B | Introspective thinker |
| Adaptability | C | Common ground |
| Analytical | D | "What if?" Select. Strike. |
| Arranger | E | Storyteller |
| Belief | F | Confident in their decisions |
| Command | G | Instinctively understands others |
| Communication | H | Core values |
| Competition | I | A collector |
| Connectedness | J | Inspirational dreamer |
| Consistency | K | Celebrates achievements |
| Context | L | Independent spirit |
| Deliberative | M | Journeys from ignorance to competence |
| Developer | N | Historical perspective |
| Discipline | O | Equal treatment |
| Empathy | P | "Breaks the ice" & establishes connections |
| Focus | Q | Stimulates personal & group excellence |
| Futuristic | R | Problem solver |
| Harmony | S | Creative, original, and conceptual. |
| Ideation | T | Routine and predictable |
| Includer | U | Sees everyone's unique qualities |
| Individualization | V | Genuine relationships with close friends |
| Input | W | Dispassionate. "Prove it!" |
| Intellection | X | Utterly dependable |
| Learner | Y | Goal setter. Efficient. |
| Maximizer | Z | Motivated and driven |
| Positivity | AA | No coincidences |
| Relator | AB | Confrontational |
| Responsibility | AC | Being number one |
| Restorative | AD | Flexible |
| Self-Assurance | AE | Cautious, careful, and private |
| Significance | AF | Enjoys dynamic situations. "Juggler" |
| Strategic | AG | All are equally important |
| WOO | AH | Challenges others |

7) CAN OUR STRENGTHS BE PERCEIVED INCORRECTLY?

If we view our God-given strengths as *the ability to consistently produce a nearly perfect positive outcome in a specific task* then we must also consider if the potential for a “perceived” negative outcome exists.

Since strengths are patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behavior it cannot be expected one will simply “turn off” their top talent themes upon demand or at will. After all, these are naturally occurring!

What we can do, however, is to be more cognizant and understanding of our highest-ranking natural abilities and the potential effects we can have on others. By focusing on applying our strengths in *positive and productive* ways we can make the greatest possible contributions to everything we are involved in.

Strengths should not become an excuse or casually tossed about as “that’s just the way I am, accept it!” We must work together, positively and productively, with our combined uniqueness to have the greatest effect on our family, professional, and spiritual lives.

Obviously, you are aware of perceptions you hold – both positive and negative – of others and their specific strengths. But, how do others perceive the natural gifts you possess?

Group Activity

- a. Select one of your Top 5 Strengths. _____.
- b. Consider how “overuse” of this Strength may be *perceived* by others.
- c. Write brief descriptions or common labels of these perceptions (i.e. Belief may be perceived as “hard-headed”).

* _____

* _____

* _____

- d. If the perception is reality, what can you do to further develop this strength?

When we don’t recognize ourselves and others for who we really are, along with the strengths we each possess, negative perceptions can arise. When this occurs opportunities to contribute effectively are lost. Let’s respect and cultivate each person’s uniqueness. We never want to mistake a strength for a weakness!

8) REMINDERS & SUGGESTIONS

- a. Continue reading and referring to the *Living Your Strengths* book regularly to learn more about yourself and others.
- b. Continue to pray for each other that we may all maximize our God-given strengths.
- c. Reflect on your talents and observe how they affect your daily life.
- d. Consider keeping a daily journal to capture the ways in which you apply your strengths.
- e. Be prepared to discuss “*Between Sessions*” tasks during next session.

9) INTENTIONS**10) CLOSING PRAYER**

*God who fashions us and who transforms us each day,
we give you thanks for the blessings of talent.
May we give you praise as we live each day in your image,
created uniquely as your own. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

“From this point of view, to avoid your strengths and to focus on your weaknesses isn't a sign of diligent humility. It is almost irresponsible.

By contrast the most responsible, the most challenging, and, in the sense of being true to yourself, the most honorable thing to do is face up to the strength potential inherent in your talents and then find ways to realize it.”²

*Donald O. Clifton
StrengthsFinder Developer*

“BETWEEN SESSIONS” – *Make notes relating to the overused or positive traits of strengths you experience during the next several days. Remain aware of individual strengths exhibited at home, work, or at stores, restaurants, community functions, etc. Which strengths affected you positively? Which were overused to the point of irritation? If necessary, refer back to the individual descriptions in the Living Your Strengths book or Session One.*

| THEME | WHEN OVERUSED | POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Achiever | | |
| Activator | | |
| Adaptability | | |
| Analytical | | |
| Arranger | | |
| Belief | | |
| Command | | |
| Communication | | |
| Competition | | |
| Connectedness | | |
| Consistency | | |
| Context | | |
| Deliberative | | |
| Developer | | |
| Discipline | | |
| Empathy | | |

(Cont.)

| THEME | WHEN OVERUSED | POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION |
|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Focus | | |
| Futuristic | | |
| Harmony | | |
| Ideation | | |
| Includer | | |
| Individualization | | |
| Input | | |
| Intellection | | |
| Learner | | |
| Maximizer | | |
| Positivity | | |
| Relator | | |
| Responsibility | | |
| Restorative | | |
| Self-Assurance | | |
| Significance | | |
| Strategic | | |
| WOO | | |

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LIVING YOUR STRENGTHS

MODULE THREE **TEAM DEVELOPMENT**

"We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

MODULE 3: TEAM DEVELOPMENT**1) OPENING PRAYER**

God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Thank you for gifting each of us with unique talents. Help us to further develop them with skills and knowledge to become strengths.

Please guide us in using our strengths most effectively at home, with friends, within our parish, and throughout our community. Open our eyes to see and appreciate the unique strengths in others and provide the grace to partner with others so that each has the opportunity to contribute with meaning.

We are thankful Dear Lord that you have uniquely blessed each of us. Help us serve you and to always know that we are part of your plan in building the kingdom of God. Amen.

OBJECTIVES:

- To continue learning about the effect of strengths in our daily lives.
- To further explore our signature themes and how we can contribute to any activity.
- To discuss how our strengths interact with others and the importance of collaboration.

2) OPEN DISCUSSION

Please share any strengths-related experiences you encountered since we last met. Have you found yourself using your natural talents differently? What have you observed about other's strengths?

3) ASSIGNMENT REVIEW & DISCUSSION

- a. Talent Theme Match: Side-by-Side
- b. Review and discuss positive effects as well as perception challenges associated with strengths.

4) COMING TOGETHER (1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27)

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you."

Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy

Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- a. How do you see this scripture relating to your strengths?

- b. Discuss the effects of working together.

- c. "If one part suffers..." How does this affect others?

- d. In what ways are we Christ's body?

5) TALENT THEME DOMAINS¹

The 34 Strengths identified by Gallup naturally align into four distinct categories, or *domains*, that can be used to better understand the interaction between members of groups or teams.

Through this categorization we can better assess and predict how people collaborating with each other will perform and the likelihood of successful accomplishments. The four Domains and their associated talent themes are:

[1 OF 4] EXECUTING: This domain knows how to make things happen. When a solution needs to be implemented these people will work tirelessly to accomplish the task. The following themes are represented in the Executing domain.²

| | |
|--------------|----------------|
| Achiever | Discipline |
| Arranger | Focus |
| Belief | Responsibility |
| Consistency | Restorative |
| Deliberative | |

Considering strengths representing the Executing domain; discuss how each might contribute to “getting things done.”³

[2 OF 4] INFLUENCING: This domain assists in reaching a broader audience. These members constantly sell the team's ideas inside & outside the organization. The following themes are represented in the Influencing domain.⁴

| | |
|---------------|----------------|
| Activator | Maximizer |
| Command | Self-Assurance |
| Communication | Significance |
| Competition | WOO |

Considering strengths representing the Influencing domain; discuss how each might contribute to “reaching a broader audience.”⁵

[3 OF 4] RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: This domain holds the group together resulting in greater success than the individuals could achieve on their own, creating a synergistic experience. The following themes are represented in the Relationship Building domain.⁶

| | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| Adaptability | Includer |
| Connectedness | Individualization |
| Developer | Positivity |
| Empathy | Relator |
| Harmony | |

Considering strengths representing the Relationship Building domain; discuss how each might contribute to “being the glue that holds a team together.”⁷

[4 OF 4] STRATEGIC THINKING: This domain keeps the group focused on what could be. These team members constantly absorb and analyze information resulting in enhanced decision making. The following themes are represented in the Strategic Thinking domain.⁸

| | |
|------------|--------------|
| Analytical | Input |
| Context | Intellection |
| Futuristic | Learner |
| Ideation | Strategic |

Considering strengths representing the Strategic Thinking domain; discuss how each might contribute to “enhancing decision making.”⁹

BENEFITS

The benefit of this analysis is identifying where specific strengths assist and how they contribute to the accomplishment of tasks and the achievement of goals. Just as importantly, it also highlights a group's "blindspots" where specific domains may not be sufficiently represented. By identifying these blindspots conscious decisions and specific actions can be taken by groups to overcome potentially ineffective outcomes.

"The only possible failure would be never managing to find the right role or the right partners to help you realize that strength."

*Donald O. Clifton
StrengthsFinder Developer*

For instance, if a group has significant representation within all Domains except "Executing" there may be a tendency to continually improve plans – in pursuit of perfection – without taking action. Strategy, relationship building, and influencing others matter little if the group is less effective in taking action through execution of their ideas, concepts, and plans. This scenario may be viewed as “ready... aim... aim... aim...” without getting to “fire.”


Conversely, if significant execution strengths exist within a group there may be a greater tendency towards “ready, fire, aim” resulting from inadequate preparation and planning.

While individuals are not expected to be well-rounded, teams or groups working toward a shared common goal must be; or at a minimum they must be cognizant of their shortcomings and strive to overcome them.

By creating this awareness, group activities will become more efficient and greater successes achieved.

DISCUSSION

- a. Refer to the *Team Domain Table* representing this discussion group.
(Moderator may have prepared or group can create using form on following page)
- b. If this group assumed responsibility for accomplishing a specific task where would we excel?
- c. What “blindspots” might challenge the group?

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
|  | ACHIEVER | ACTIVATOR | ADAPTABILITY | ANALYTICAL |
| | ARRANGER | COMMAND | CONNECTEDNESS | CONTEXT |
| | BELIEF | COMMUNICATION | DEVELOPER | FUTURISTIC |
| | CONSISTENCY | COMPETITION | EMPATHY | IDEATION |
| | DELIBERATIVE | MAXIMIZER | HARMONY | INPUT |
| | DISCIPLINE | SELF-ASSURANCE | INCLUDER | INTELLECTION |
| | FOCUS | SIGNIFICANCE | INDIVIDUALIZATION | LEARNER |
| | RESPONSIBILITY | WOO | POSITIVITY | STRATEGIC |
| | RESTORATIVE | | RELATOR | |
| TEAM MEMBER | EXECUTING | INFLUENCING | RELATIONSHIP BUILDING | STRATEGIC THINKING |
| | | | | |
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6) REMINDERS & SUGGESTIONS

- a. Consider how well-rounded, or not, any groups you are involved with actually function. Do you see the effects of individual strengths?
- b. Continue reading and referring to the *Living Your Strengths* book regularly to learn more about yourself and others.
- c. Continue to pray for each other that we may all maximize our God-given strengths.
- d. Reflect on your own strengths and observe how they affect your daily life.
- e. Be prepared to discuss “*Between Sessions*” tasks during next session.

7) INTENTIONS**8) CLOSING PRAYER**

*Creator God, you have fashioned us as your own,
giving us talents to be used for your glory.
Open our hearts, you who are greater than our hearts.
Reawaken in us a desire to serve you above all others.
Transform us, so that we may more fully be a sign in
our world of your love for all.
This we ask, this we seek, through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

“The first time I joined a church committee, it left a pretty bad taste in my mouth. I was completely taken aback by how petty, arrogant and belittling people were. I had seen these qualities in other groups, but it was especially demoralizing to encounter them among believers. What was the point of belonging to a committee – or a church – in which people seemed to act no better than they did in the world at large?”

Like it or not, people of faith are still just people, with all their flaws. Are they hypocrites? If so, then I’m in good company. I am just as imperfect and sinful as the next person. And this is the reason we gather – not because we are perfect and good, but precisely because we are not. We need the support of other believers in our own life of faith. We gather to help each other to be better than we are.”

*Karla Manternach
Living Faith, Daily Catholic Devotions*

BETWEEN SESSIONS - COMPLEMENTARY PARTNERS

Assume you are working with a partner to perform each of the following tasks. What strengths would you like the person to have for that particular task? Why? How do they complement your strengths?

a) Planning and hosting a surprise birthday party with 100 people attending.

b) Increasing membership and participation in a ministry.

c) Comforting a friend who recently experienced loss.

d) Developing and teaching a course on the Gospels.

e) Conducting a fund-raising activity.

f) Preparing a five-year financial plan for the parish.

g) Buying a new car.

h) Changing the culture of an organization.

REFERENCES

1. Tom Rath and Barry Conchie, *Strengths Based Leadership*, Gallup Press, New York, 2008, pp. 22-27.
2. *Ibid.* 24
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.* 25
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.* 26
9. *Ibid.*



LIVING YOUR STRENGTHS

MODULE FOUR **SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT**

“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

MODULE 4: SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT

1) OPENING PRAYER

God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Thank you for gifting each of us with unique talents. Help us to further develop them with skills and knowledge to become strengths.

Please guide us in using our strengths most effectively at home, with friends, within our parish, and throughout our community. Open our eyes to see and appreciate the unique strengths in others and provide the grace to partner with others so that each has the opportunity to contribute with meaning.

We are thankful Dear Lord that you have uniquely blessed each of us. Help us serve you and to always know that we are part of your plan in building the kingdom of God. Amen.

OBJECTIVES:

- To further develop and enrich your signature themes from a spiritual perspective
- To assess the effects of your signature themes on humility and discipleship
- To continue exploring your personal strengths and those of others.

2) OPEN DISCUSSION

Please share any strengths-related experiences you encountered since we last met. Have you found yourself using your natural talents differently? What have you observed about other's strengths?

3) ASSIGNMENT REVIEW & DISCUSSION

- Complementary Partners

4) CHANGING CULTURE

Recall the final topic from last week's *Complementary Partners* assignment; "Changing the culture of an organization."

If changing a culture is indeed altering how people think, feel and act, isn't this precisely what Jesus was doing?

Prioritize the four *Talent Theme Domains* in the order, from 1 being most important through 4, that you believe Christ applied them. Which needed to be most prevalent? Why?

___ Executing

___ Influencing

___ Relationship
Building

___ Strategic
Thinking

5) GOSPEL READING *John 13: 12-18, 20*

So when he had washed their feet [and] put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it. I am not speaking of all of you. I know those whom I have chosen. But so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'The one who ate my food has raised his heel against me.' Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

COMMENTARY

What an image of the sort of love Christ calls us to, this washing of feet! Jesus knows that his self-giving way is difficult to put into words; every circumstance of life calls for a response that is Christ-directed, and that calls on the greatest of who we are and what we can do. So, in washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus provides a stark image of what this self-giving love and service "looks like."

Jesus has walked and talked and shared much life with this group of disciples at this point in his earthly ministry. He knows them. He knows their gifts and passions, and their human

tendency to fail. Remember, on this same occasion, as he institutes the Eucharist, the ultimate gift of God for us in Christ, he tells the disciples that he knows they will not always be faithful to him – one will betray, one will deny, many will flee...

Christ knows us, too. Still, Jesus says, "Follow me." Christ calls us, knowing that it takes each of us offering ourselves to re-create the world in love. It will take each person offering our gifts generously, as our finest model and teacher, the Lord himself gives, to truly transform our homes, workplaces, parish, city, and world.

"Jesus not only calls people to him but also forms them and sends them out in his service. Being sent on a mission is a consequence of being a disciple. Whoever wants to follow Christ will have much work to do on his behalf – announcing the Good News and serving others as Jesus did. Jesus' call is urgent. He does not tell people to follow him at some time in the future but here and now – at this moment, in these circumstances. There can be no delay."¹

"I was already involved in a few things at my parish, and helped at my son's school a bit, too, but becoming more aware of my talents seemed to energize me, and I found myself looking at all the ways I could really serve, and offer my talents in deeper ways.

I suddenly feel I've been given gifts and would be selfish to hold them back. What most needs my time and talents?"

THEMES & INSIGHTS

The themes of this Gospel are *Humility and Discipleship*. Humility, being the opposite of pride; or dying to one's self; is necessary to give and receive unconditional, sacrificial love. Jesus even washed Judas' feet as an act of complete humility!

Giving and sharing of our gifts (strengths/talents) transforms us interiorly and draws others to Christ. In so doing, our hearts and minds change from being self-seeking to self-giving.

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."
Matthew 16:24*

Christ teaches us how to be a servant, steward, and shepherd for our neighbor.

Jesus calls all of the baptized to be his disciples.

A disciple is a learner, a student of Christ. One of the greatest gifts from God is his Word, which Christ reveals to us. Reflection is to listen, to read, and to study the Word of God. Then the Holy Spirit will form and guide us in sharing Christ's love with our family, friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ.

In our weakness we put things off and delay answering Jesus's call to discipleship. We do not feel a sense of urgency to follow him by serving others. How much time do we have in our lives to answer His call? What is holding us back?

a. What are your thoughts regarding the washing of feet as described in the gospel reading? How do you view humility and discipleship?

6) ACTIVITY – RELATING STRENGTHS TO HUMILITY AND DISCIPLESHIP

- Using the following form, enter your Top 5 Strengths in the center column.
- Reflect on the gospel readings and discussions regarding humility and discipleship.
- How do your particular strengths *support* being humble and living a life of discipleship. Write notes in the first column next to the corresponding strength.
- How might your particular strengths act as *barriers* to humility and discipleship? Write notes in third column.

| HOW STRENGTH SUPPORTS HUMILITY & DISCIPLESHIP | TOP 5 STRENGTHS | HOW STRENGTH ACTS AS BARRIER TO HUMILITY & DISCIPLESHIP |
|---|-----------------|---|
| | (1) _____ | |
| | (2) _____ | |
| | (3) _____ | |
| | (4) _____ | |
| | (5) _____ | |

Considering your unique strengths, what actions can be taken to grow as a disciple of our Lord?

7) REMINDERS & SUGGESTIONS

- a. Continue assessing how your strengths affect humility and discipleship. What “blindspots” are limiting your efforts?
- b. Continue to pray for each other that we may all maximize our God-given strengths.
- c. Reflect on your own strengths and observe how they affect your daily life.
- d. Be prepared to discuss “*Between Sessions*” tasks during next session.

8) INTENTIONS**9) CLOSING PRAYER²**

*My church is composed of people like me.
I help make it what it is.*

It will be friendly, if I am.

Its pews will be filled, if I help fill them.

It will do great work, if I work.

It will make generous gifts to many causes, if I am a generous giver.

It will bring other people into its worship and fellowship, if I invite and bring them.

*It will be a church of loyalty and love, of fearlessness and faith, and a church with a noble spirit,
if I, who make it what it is, am filled with these same things.*

*Therefore, with the help of God, I shall dedicate myself to the task of being all the things that I
want my church to be. Amen.*

*LORD, you have probed me, you know me: you
know when I sit and stand; you understand my
thoughts from afar. You sift through my travels
and my rest; with all my ways you are familiar.*

Psalms 139:1-3

BETWEEN SESSIONS *(continued)*

4) How does recognizing and accepting your talents help you to see God's grace in your life?

5) What difference would it make in your life to build on your talents rather than endlessly trying to fix your weaknesses?

REFERENCES

1. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Stewardship, A Disciple's Response, A Pastoral Letter on Stewardship, Tenth Anniversary Edition*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., 2002, pp. 14.
2. Diocese of San Diego:
<http://www.diocese-sdiego.org/Stewardship/stewardshipprayer.htm>



LIVING YOUR STRENGTHS

MODULE FIVE **DEVOTION TO STEWARDSHIP**

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.

Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house.

Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father." (Matthew 5:14-16)

MODULE 5: DEVOTION TO STEWARDSHIP

1) OPENING PRAYER

God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Thank you for gifting each of us with unique talents. Help us to further develop them with skills and knowledge to become strengths.

Please guide us in using our strengths most effectively at home, with friends, within our parish, and throughout our community. Open our eyes to see and appreciate the unique strengths in others and provide the grace to partner with others so that each has the opportunity to contribute with meaning.

We are thankful Dear Lord that you have uniquely blessed each of us. Help us serve you and to always know that we are part of your plan in building the kingdom of God. Amen.

OBJECTIVES:

- To align stewardship and callings to your unique gifts.
- To discuss select scripture and relationships to strengths.
- To reflect on your strengths and opportunities to further improve and apply.
- To discuss “what’s next.”

2) OPEN DISCUSSION

Please share any strengths-related experiences you encountered since we last met. Have you found yourself using your natural talents differently? What have you observed about other’s strengths?

3) ASSIGNMENT REVIEW & DISCUSSION

#2 from *LYS* pages 155-222

- a. From your perspective, select/highlight 2 or 3 of the statements...
- b. Suggest 1 or 2 new statements for each of your Top 5 Strengths...

#3 from *LYS* page 228:

- a. If time and money were no object, what would you do for God?
- b. Where is your passion? What do you love to do?
- c. What are your greatest talents?
 - How could you combine your talents and your passions to fulfill your calling?

#4 How does recognizing & accepting your talents help you see God’s grace in your life?

#5 What difference would it make in your life to build on your talents rather than endlessly trying to fix your weaknesses?

4) WHAT IS STEWARDSHIP?

Derived from two ancient terms meaning “manage” and “house”, the word steward (or stewardship) is defined as someone who manages someone else’s house – or even more specifically, all the owner’s possessions.

From a spiritual perspective, no one actually “owns” anything as God is ultimately the owner of all that exists. Therefore, the fundamental element of stewardship is that everything belongs to God and each of us is charged with managing His house.

5) WHAT IS A CALLING?

As stated by Frederick Buechner, American writer and theologian, a calling is “*the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep need meet.*”¹ With our unique God-given gifts, comprised of the natural talents, skills and knowledge we possess, we are called to serve where we are most effective and able to perform at our best. After all, isn’t this when we truly experience a sense of joy and fulfillment?

6) SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Reflecting on our individual talents leads us to think about the ways in which we are a community of people who are each given particular gifts to be used in service for others. Let us turn our thoughts to how we act in partnership with others.

Ephesians 3:14-21 and 4:1-6

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

COMMENTARY

That we may be filled with all the fullness of God. Imagine! What is it to be filled with all the fullness of God? Could it be that when we allow ourselves to surrender to God's love and mercy, to accept the talents and blessings we have been given, and to allow the Spirit of the Lord to work through us as we offer those gifts and blessings in service, we will know the "breadth and the length and height and depth... the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge"?

"It seemed almost the moment I started thinking about my strengths," said Mike, "I started to see the talents others have to offer, and realized we all have responsibility to offer our gifts in service. If we don't, imagine what is missing in the world!"

The mission Jesus handed over to his disciples, the blessings he gave them, and the promises he made them are precisely the same blessings he offers to us and challenges he asks of us. Two thousand years have passed, but

Now, I find that the more I share myself in serving others, the richer my life is, and realize that when we serve together, we are truly a community. When we do this together, it isn't scary to try something unfamiliar."

God has not changed, nor have his hopes or expectations for his followers. God called them and he calls us. God walked with them and he walks with us. God empowered them and he empowers us, no matter how unlikely that sounds. Incredible things are asked of us and incredible things are absolutely possible, whenever we act in God's name (in other words, in a faithful way) and tap into his power.

We are one in Christ's Spirit, empowered to live as God's love poured out, together in community. Being in communion, in community, with God and with each other strengthens us to use our talents in ways difficult for any of us as an individual person. We are strong when we are together. God's "power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine!"

THEMES & INSIGHTS

Love and Unity are the key themes of this reading. These two letters of St. Paul are prayers that Christ's love will dwell within our hearts and that this love has no bounds and surpasses all knowledge. The power of this love is able to accomplish more than we could ever imagine.

This is also a call to unity as Disciples of the Body of Christ. The seven unities that unite us as a community of believers in Christ are:

One Church One Spirit One Hope One Lord
One Faith One Baptism One God

Our inner strengths are God’s gifts of love for us to use to further His Kingdom on earth. We can only fully experience this love by sharing these gifts. Love is indeed a mystery in that the only way we can keep it is by losing it again and again.

GROUP DISCUSSION – Considering the above scripture and commentary:

- a. With whom do you partner in service?

- b. How do you draw on each other’s strengths to most effectively be a sign of Christ’s presence in our world?

7) GOSPEL PASSAGE [Mark 8:5-9]

Still he asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” “Seven,” they replied. He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then, taking the seven loaves he gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to his disciples to distribute, and they distributed them to the crowd. They also had a few fish. He said the blessing over them and ordered them distributed also. They ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets. There were about four thousand people.

COMMENTARY

Jesus uses what his disciples have to offer, and a feast is produced! The hungry are fed, and people see the glory of God in their midst. Disciples are asked to offer all they are and have and will be as faithful stewards.

Continue reflecting on the above gospel passage while reading the following extracts from the *U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Stewardship*. Consider your call as a disciple who is now even better prepared to live your strengths.

“Mature disciples make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves. Beginning in conversion, change of mind and heart, this commitment is expressed not in a single action, nor even in a number of actions over a period of time, but in an entire way of life. It means committing one’s very self to the Lord. Stewardship is an expression of discipleship with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives.

“The Christian vocation is essentially a call to be a disciple of Jesus. Stewardship is part of that. Even more to the point, however, Christians are called to be good stewards of the personal vocations they receive. Each of us must discern, accept, and live out joyfully and generously the commitments, responsibilities, and roles to which God calls him or her.”

“Every person should walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of a living faith which arouses hope and works through charity.”

“The Christian vocation is essentially a call to be a disciple of Jesus ... Jesus’ call is urgent. He does not tell people to follow him at some time in the future but here and now – at this moment, in these circumstances. There can be no delay.”

“Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ leads naturally to the practice of stewardship. These linked realities, discipleship and stewardship, then, make up the fabric of a Christian life in which each day is lived in an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord.”

“Refracted through the prisms of countless individual vocations, this way of life embodies and expresses the one mission of Christ: to do God’s will, to proclaim the good news of salvation, to heal the afflicted, to care for one’s sisters and brothers, to give life – life to the full – as Jesus did.”

“Do the best with what you have: That’s the time-tested advice the man in the gospel ignored when he didn’t make good use of his gold coin. (Re: Luke 19:20-21)

You have been blessed with at least one gold coin. The gold coin is a beautiful symbol for the particular gift God gave you to use for the good of others. It may be the gift to teach, to console, to encourage, to heal, or even the gift of humor to make people laugh.

Know your gift and put it to use. It would be a great loss to you and to others if your gift were not known and so remain unused.

*Fr. Kenneth Grabner
Living Faith,
Daily Catholic Devotion*

“Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God’s will.” Do you believe that you are called? What experiences in your life have reinforced or validated your faith in that call?

THEMES & INSIGHTS

Community and Stewardship are the key themes of this gospel passage and commentary.

The multiplication of loaves and fishes is the only one of the miracles included in *all four* gospels. Therefore, its message is very important.

When we are united and in communion with others, Christ will produce abundant fruit through us. He will magnify and multiply our offerings (prayers, service, time, stewardship) and efforts. A good example is Mother Teresa.

The church community is where we learn of the gifts and blessings bestowed upon us by God and how best to share them. This ministry is designed to help us discover our God-given talents and guide us in sharing and serving others. By doing this in our parish community we become more Christ-like while furthering God’s Kingdom here on earth.

THE POWER OF BEING CALLED [PAGES 229-230 in the *Living Your Strengths* book]**GROUP DISCUSSION**

- a. Reflecting on your increased awareness and understanding of the unique gifts God blessed you with, what will you do differently when ministering to others in our parish or at home, work, or in the community?

- b. Which ministries best align with the strengths you possess? Why?

8) WHAT'S NEXT?

- Continue to pray we all maximize our God-given strengths.
- Continue exploring and developing your unique gifts.
- Serve as Inner Strengths Moderator
- Be an Inner Strengths Ambassador
- Stewardship opportunities
- Watch for future events
- Respond to Survey

9) INTENTIONS**10) CLOSING PRAYER**

*Lord, you have called us to be stewards
and to form stewards.*

*Send your Spirit into our lives
that we might better recognize
and share the gifts
you have lavished upon us
and lead others to discover
and share their gifts.*

*May we continue to look for ways
to strengthen our ties with those
who have already embraced stewardship
and to discover ways to reach out to those
for whom stewardship is not yet part of their lives.*

*And when, like the Apostles,
we have labored through the night
and caught nothing,
help us to heed your call to set out into the deep
and uncharted waters
that our nets might be filled.*

*In all that we do,
help us to remember that as your disciples
we are called to do your will.
Amen.*

Did You Know?

Ministries throughout the parish are always in need of new members and active participants. We frequently hear parishioners believe ministries have ample support or are "closed" to additional members, which is never the case.

For instance, observing activities prior to a weekend Mass typically reveals a last-minute scramble to identify enough ushers, Eucharistic ministers, etc. Because of the hard work performed by those coordinating these activities all appears complete and calm to attendees.

Now that you better understand your strengths, where are you called to serve?

**As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another
as good stewards of God's varied grace.**

1 Peter 4:10

APPENDIX A: FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

Use the information below to help yourself or someone you know discern ways to more fully serve in Christ's name.

Recall Your Experiences and Observations

If you have never participated in ministry before, or have only done so occasionally and are ready to deepen your involvement, it may be helpful to think about the ways you have experienced or have been inspired by the ministry of others. How can you learn to grow as a servant from others?

Who Needs You?

- The poor, sick, lonely, young and old.
- Those who need compassion, listening or attention
- The homebound, the disabled, those who need education or companionship.
- The grieving.
- Your parish.

Where Do You Feel Called? What Talents or Strengths Can You Offer?

- Talk to someone at the parish who knows current ministry needs.
- Think about the areas that call to your heart, or seem to need you.
- Reflect on your talents, skills and knowledge.

Focus on your Talents and Strengths

- Look to your strengths, what your passion is, and what you love to do.
- What kinds of activities are you naturally drawn to?
- What kinds of activities do you seem to pick up quickly?
- In what activities did the "steps" just come to you automatically?
- In what activities do you "lose track of time?"
- During what activities have you had moments when you asked yourself "how did I do that?"
- What activities provide joy and fulfillment and either while doing them, or immediately after finishing, you say "when can I do that again?"
- Dare to dream, if time and money were no object, what would you do?

Continue Learning More about Your Strengths to Further Affirm Your Talents

- Get a glimpse of how others see your talents & strengths in ways you may not.

Understand the Value of Your Active Participation in Ministry

- Each of us has gifts to offer; each has talents upon which to draw.

How Might You Serve?

- Refer to the ministry list on the following page.

Stewardship in Action Ministries

FAITH FORMATION

- BAPTISM PREPARATION TEAM
- CATECHIST (TEACHER) / ASSISTANT
- CHILDREN’S LITURGY
- EDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL (STUDENT)
- FAITH FORMATION K-5 (STUDENT)
- YOUTH PROGRAM (HIGH SCHOOL)
- YOUTH MINISTRY VOLUNTEER
- VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL VOLUNTEER

SACRAMENT PROGRAM

- BAPTISM
- CONFIRMATION
- FIRST EUCHARIST & RECONCILIATION
- MARRIAGE
- HOW TO BECOME A CATHOLIC (RCIA)
- CATECHISTS & SPONSORS: RCIA/SACRAMENTS

ADULT EDUCATION

- WEEKLY SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

WORSHIP

- ALTAR SERVERS (ENGLISH, SPANISH, VIETNAMESE)
- GREETERS (ENGLISH, SPANISH, VIETNAMESE)
- LECTORS (ENGLISH, SPANISH, VIETNAMESE)
- USHERS (ENGLISH, SPANISH, VIETNAMESE)
- SACRISTANS (ENGLISH, SPANISH, VIETNAMESE)
- ART AND ENVIRONMENT

MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

- CHURCH
- HEALTH CARE CENTERS
- HOMEBOUND
- HOSPITAL

MUSIC MINISTRY

- CHOIR
- CANTORS
- INSTRUMENTALS

OUTREACH

- BLESSED LITTLE ANGELS (PRESCHOOL)
- CARE GIVER SUPPORT GROUP
- CYBERPRAYER
- EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE
- HISPANIC MASS MINISTRY
- HOSPITALITY (WEEKEND)
- INNER STRENGTHS MINISTRY
- KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS
- LIBRARY MINISTRY
- MARRIAGE MINISTRY
- MEN’S GOSPEL FORUM
- MEN UNITE MINISTRY
- NEW PARISHIONER ORIENTATION & WELCOME
- RESPECT LIFE
- THRIFT STORE
- VIETNAMESE MASS MINISTRY
- WOMEN’S GUILD
- SOCIAL JUSTICE PROJECTS
- GARDENING MINISTRY
- COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY
- WOMEN’S FAITH SHARING

SOCIAL GROUPS

- SINGLES CLUB (UNDER 50)
- SINGLES CLUB (50 +)

SPIRITUAL SERVICES

- ARIMATHEAN
(REPRESENT PARISH AT FUNERALS)
- GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP
- FUNERAL MINISTRY
(HELP PLAN FUNERALS)
- PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY

REFERENCES

1. Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*, Harper and Row, New York, 1973, 95