

Growing Stronger in Faith and Action



*A Group Process of Strengths
Exploration and Development*

All passages of Sacred Scripture are from the
New Revised Standard Version of the Bible: Catholic Edition, 1993 except as noted.
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This process has been developed with you in mind! Whether you are part of a group that is coming together just for this purpose, or you are a group that already knows one another, take time to become familiar with each other's talents. Help one another reflect deeply on the talents each of you has been given and the ways in which you may develop and use those talents throughout your lives.

The sessions use a pattern of gathering that includes prayer, words from Sacred Scripture, sharing from others who are on the journey of strengths development, and questions to guide your reflection and sharing. Each session ends with a closing prayer and questions to guide reflection on your own between the group sessions. Your group may choose to meet weekly for five or six weeks (session five may be extended to provide a sixth session that will serve as a closing evening/day of reflection), or you may take more time between sessions, as your lives and schedules will permit.

This process will be most effective when led by a trained strengths facilitator. If this group is the first to participate in strengths in your parish as a trial prior to sending someone for strengths training, you will find support at CatholicStrengths.com should you have questions along the way.

The sessions are intended to be read aloud; members may take turns drawing the group into shared reflection and sharing. If a member must miss a session he or she is encouraged to read and reflect on the session before re-joining the group for the following session. Hold each other in prayer during this special time! Trust that the Holy Spirit will be with you now and always, guiding you and strengthening you to live as a disciple and steward of the many gifts you have been given.

“You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.” (John: 15: 16-17)

Session I: A New Beginning

❖ What brings you here? What do you bring to this process and to the people who are here with you?

Do you bring excitement, or worries, skepticism or a sense of adventure?

We will take a while to introduce ourselves (if you do not already know one another) and to share our thoughts as we begin.

After introductions and initial sharing:

Brothers and Sisters,

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 service. We will share much together, and through that sharing we will see God’s blessings in our midst.

With the awareness of God’s presence within and around us this day and every day, let us be mindful of the many ways in which we are blessed more abundantly than we can grasp. We continue by asking the Holy Spirit to open our minds and our hearts, that we may become more fully the people God created us

to be, singularly equipped to be Christ's presence in fearful and wonderful ways. And so we begin in 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.

A reading from the holy gospel according to John. (John 1: 35-51)

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "what are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." they came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah"

(which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “you are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Imagine those early conversations between Jesus and the first disciples. Like us, the early followers of the Lord were ordinary people. They worked hard. They had concerns for their families and wondered about life. They shared their joys with those around themselves, as well as their challenges and trials. Still, they sought something in life they had not yet found.

In finding Jesus, they quickly see that life will be different. Within moments, Jesus invites the two disciples into life with him. We have to wonder what they thought about those first meetings: what did they talk about? What did they discover about themselves or the others who found themselves in Jesus’ company? In Jesus’ presence, each is valued. We see evidence in the gospels of our Lord’s patience as those nearest him learn to love him and to embrace his way of life; Christ challenged them, too, and called each to focus on God’s ways, to go beyond themselves and their limited perspectives, to grow into the person each is created to be. Somehow in those early moments with our Lord, those first followers found in him hope for something better, for life with meaning and purpose. It seems that from the very beginning, he showed them that life with him will exceed all possible hopes or expectations, all of their grandest dreams, all they could dare imagine.

- ❖ What about you? What do you hope for? What is your relationship with Christ like? Do you hope for something greater than what your life holds at present? Do you dream of life with meaning and purpose? Is that perhaps what brought you to this group? Do you dare imagine discovering the talents that help to make you the unique person you are, called by Christ into relationship just as those early followers were called?

Talent? Do I have talents? I have a sense of things that come easily to me, and things I enjoy. Are those signs of talents?

What is your experience? As part of this first session, we will take some time to share our thoughts. Look at the questions above, along with those below. Quietly reflect on these for a few moments individually, then share with the group what you feel comfortable sharing.

- ❖ What do you think of when you hear the word “talent?”
- ❖ Is it easier for you to recognize talents or weaknesses in yourself? In others?

The process we begin today will be one of discovery and exploration, as we share together the ways in which each of us has been created with a combination of talents that help to make us who we are, a reflection of the wonder and glory of God. We will read passages of Sacred Scripture and quotes from Church documents that will help us to think about our call as disciples of our Lord Jesus. We will look into our hearts and lives to see God’s abundant grace. Our process will include sharing of experiences of recognizing and using our God-given talents, and we will find new ways to develop our talents and offer them as stewards of God’s goodness.

We will use a book called “*Living Your Strengths*” as a tool. Each person is receiving a copy of this book, and between this meeting and the next group session, each participant will complete an online talent-identification questionnaire called *StrengthsFinder*. To better understand this process, we will read pages 3-8 (the section labeled “What is a strength?”) of *Living Your Strengths* together.

Gallup’s *StrengthsFinder* is the result of research with over 3 million people worldwide. Dr. Donald Clifton and his team identified 34 themes of talent that people possess in one degree or another. The *StrengthsFinder* rank orders your talent themes, based on your responses to the timed questionnaire.

Between now and our next group session, set aside approximately forty-five minutes to complete *StrengthsFinder* online. You will want uninterrupted quiet time for this activity. After completing *StrengthsFinder*, you will be given a list of your Top 5, or Signature Themes. These Top 5 themes of talent are the ways in which you most strongly interact within your relationships and in your life. Your themes of talent will help you understand yourself as a unique person created in God’s image; you have a 1 in 275,000 chance of meeting someone in your lifetime with the same Top 5; you have a 1 in 33 million chance of meeting someone with your Top 5 in the same order!

The group sessions contained in this book will help you to explore the talent themes identified as your Signature themes; you will look at the ways you have experienced these talents, how you may already be using your talents in your life, and how you could develop your talents over time. You will also reflect on the ways your talents help you to recognize God’s presence in your life, how such understanding might influence your relationships, and how you are being called to offer your talents in service to others.

{Before leaving this session, trade contact information, determine your next group meeting date, time and place, and promise to hold each other in prayer.}

As we leave one another's company, we will spend a few moments offering a prayer of gratitude for the many ways in which we are blessed:

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 all things,

through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Between each session, participants are encouraged to continue reflecting on their talents with the “homework” questions provided.

****Between sessions I and II:**

Set aside forty-five minutes of uninterrupted quiet time to complete the *StrengthsFinder* questionnaire.

Read the sections of *Living Your Strengths* that describe your signature themes.

Underline words or phrases that strike you as being particularly descriptive of you; note any portion that does not seem to resonate with you, or questions that you might have. Your *Living Your Strengths* book is your workbook for this process. Bring your book with you to each group session.

“We are God’s work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated to make up our way of life.” (Ephesians 2:10 NJB)

Session II: *Gifted in Christ*

As we come together for this session, take a few moments to greet each other. Share anything that you wish to offer in prayer as we gather, and resolve to put behind you for the time being any worries you may have, leaving them to God’s care.

Lavishly loving God,

we praise you for this time set apart.

Open our lives to your loving presence:

our minds that we may think as you think;

our eyes and ears to see and hear as you do;

our hearts to love as you love;

may we know your presence in our lives,

and respond in all things as your holy people.

We make this prayer as your grateful children.

through our Jesus Christ, our Lord and brother.

Amen.



A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (1: 43-46)

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathaniel said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” The Gospel of the Lord.

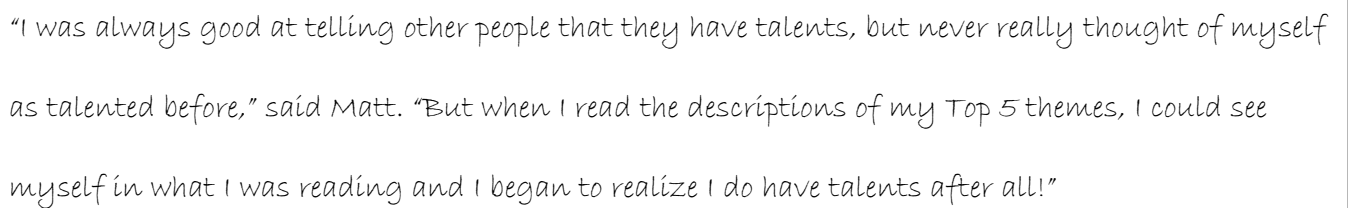
The Gospel of the Lord.

It seems from the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry he drew people to himself, and those who were drawn to Jesus immediately recognized something special in his call. Following Christ and answering Christ’s call to love and serve is a compelling way of life. Even those, like Nathanael, who are sure of themselves and of their views of the world discover more in themselves in Jesus’ presence.

The bishops of the United States say it this way:

Jesus “does not summon disciples as a faceless crowd but as unique individuals. ‘How do you know me?’ Nathanael asks. ‘Before Phillip called you,’ Jesus answers, ‘I saw you under the fig tree.’ He knows people’s personal histories, their strengths and weaknesses, their destinies; he has a purpose in mind for each one.” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., “*Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, Tenth Anniversary Edition,*” 2002, p. 13)

Since we last gathered, each of us completed *StrengthsFinder*, an online talent-identification questionnaire. Our time today will be spent in sharing with each other our Top 5, or Signature, themes of talent. We will see the great variety of gifts that are present in this group, and we will begin to perceive the Lord's purposes for us as individuals and as a community of disciples.



"I was always good at telling other people that 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!"

What is your experience? Take a few moments to look at your list of five themes and the descriptions of those themes.

Quietly answer the questions below, in writing or in your mind. After the group has had a few moments to do this individually, each person will share what he or she is comfortable sharing.

❖ List your Top 5, and write a one or two sentence summary of the theme as you understand it:

❖ What were your initial reactions to seeing your Top 5? Were there things that come to mind that illustrate the ways in which you are already using these themes of talent?

❖ When you reflect on your own personal history, your strengths and weaknesses, do you see God's hand guiding or strengthening you?

{Share your Top 5 with the group, including a one- or two-sentence explanation of what the talent theme is and any reflections from above that you feel comfortable sharing. If the group knows each other, members are invited to share the ways in which they have experienced the person living his/her strengths. If the group does not know one another, this will serve as an extended introduction time. }

Closing Prayer:

God who fashions us

and who transforms us

each day,

we give you thanks for the blessings of talent:

{Each member is invited to offer a prayer of thanksgiving for his/her talents}

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.

****Between Sessions II and III.****

Between now and the next session, re-read the descriptions of your Top 5 themes, and those of other group members. Spend a few moments each day thinking back on the ways in which you recognize yourself using your talents in your daily life, and record here any examples you wish to remember.

How might reflecting on your talents affect your relationship with God in prayer?

Session III: *The Grace of Being*

As we begin our time together, let us offer this prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Holy Spirit, Fire of Love,

Open our hearts and minds

to your wisdom;

Come, Holy Spirit!

guide our community

as we walk the ways of discipleship;

Come, Holy Spirit!

give us courage

to serve boldly and with compassion;

Come, Holy Spirit!

strengthen our faith

as we grow more deeply in relationship with

Christ and one another;

Come Holy Spirit!

enliven us

in your presence;

Come, Holy Spirit!

for you are God, with the Father and the Son,

now and forever.

Come Holy Spirit, Come! Amen.

We continue by taking a few moments to offer any thoughts or reflections on our talents, or anything that is happening in our lives that we wish to share:

- ❖ Have you found yourself using your talents differently since doing StrengthsFinder and since your last time together?

This session will help us explore our signature themes, knowing that our talents give us special ways of understanding and knowing God's presence in our lives.

We continue with the words of Sacred Scripture:

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians (1: 25-31)



God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." The Word of the Lord.

There is a paradox here, of course. Living our strengths will require us to accept the talents God has given us, to remember and honor the Giver through the ways in which we use the gifts. In doing that, our strengths become the ways in which we see God's grace working in and through us.

In their letter on evangelization, the bishops of the United States make this observation:

“The Lord Jesus, ‘the way and the truth and the life,’ came to us as a teacher, opening for us the wisdom that not only leads to life eternal but also leads to a human fulfillment that reflects the dignity and mystery of our nature. Unless people know the grandeur for which they are made, they cannot reach fulfillment and their lives will be incomplete. Nor will they know that they are called into interpersonal union with God and with each other.” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., “Go and Make Disciples,” Tenth Anniversary Edition, p. 17)

The woman at the well; the man who had many possessions; the crowds who heard the Sermon on the Mount; Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus; the disciples and those who could not find the strength to respond to our Lord: it seems everyone who encountered and was encountered by Jesus learned much about themselves and about God's vision for us as human persons. When we think of it, each person who found themselves in Jesus' presence was asked to be nothing more, nor anything less, than the fullest expression of the person God created him or her to be. Jesus, in being God-with-us, Emmanuel, took our very nature and raised humanity toward divinity. Christ shows us how to live our lives as God's children, plain and simple, yet profound.

Reflecting on the talents we have been given and accepting those gifts in humility will become a way of appreciating the wisdom of Jesus who shows us the “dignity and mystery of our nature.” Much in our

society calls us to try to fix our weaknesses, denying the beauty of our being created in God's image. Christ instead calls us to accept the persons we are, and to respond to God's love by living humbly as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (see 1 Cor 4: 1-2) This is not to say that we are not called to grow in all the ways possible, but rather, that we will be at our best when we do what we do best.

Marie speaks of reflecting on her Top 5 themes for the first time: "As a child and young adult, my father used to tell me to toughen up. 'You carry other's burdens as though they're your own, and wear your heart on your sleeve,' he used to say. I tried for many years to deny the part of me that feels so deeply. Then I did StrengthsFinder, and found that my number one theme is "Empathy!" Now I am learning to accept that part of myself as a talent, and one that I can offer in meaningful ways throughout my life. What a gift!"

Now, with a partner, share whatever reflections you feel comfortable sharing. Following the sharing, conclude by praying the Lord's Prayer slowly and deliberately together.

****Between Sessions III and IV:****

Where is the balance between self-recognition and acceptance of your strengths and the holy humility of the Christian?

How does recognizing and accepting your talents help you to see God's grace in your life? What difference would it make in your life to build on your talents rather than endlessly trying to fix your weaknesses?

Between this session and the next, recall experiences in your life in which you have used your talents. What skills and knowledge did you use in those moments? What strengths do you recognize in those times of combining talent, skill and knowledge?

Session IV: Giving Ourselves as Christ's People

As we come together for our fourth session, we will delve more deeply into the ways in which we are using our strengths, combinations of talent, knowledge and skills, to answer Christ's call to love and service. As has become our pattern of gathering, we first take a few moments to offer prayers for any who are on our minds at this time.

Christ, our Lord and Savior,

You call us to draw on the strength

of your Holy Spirit dwelling within us

so that we may have the grace

to respond to your call

as good and faithful disciples.

Baptized into your death and resurrection,

may we be united with you

in heart and mind, body and soul,

ready to be your loving people

in our world.

We pray this in your name,

for you are one with the Father and the Spirit,

now and forever.

Amen.



A reading from the holy gospel according to John (John 13: 12-18, 20)

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.” The Gospel of the Lord.

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 to be the unique person we have been created to be 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 (cf. Mt 10:5ff.; Mk 6: 7ff.; Lk 9: 1ff.) 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.” (*“Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response,”* p. 14)

“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?”

What is your experience? Spend a few moments in quiet reflection on the following question, then share with your group as you feel comfortable.

- ❖ When you thought of your experiences of combining talent, skills and knowledge together, what came to mind?

- ❖ Christ’s way is the way of self-giving, especially to those in need. How will you live your strengths in service to others, to work for justice, to be a peacemaker?

- ❖ What concrete steps could you take in order to grow as a disciple, a follower, of our Lord?

Closing Prayer:

Christ who says to each and all,

“Follow me,”

help us to hear your call

in the midst of our daily lives.

You are God’s love,

poured out on a world

very much in need.

Make us willing to follow your servant way,

bent in humble giving,

sacrificing all and gaining more.

You who are Christ and Lord

are one with the Father and the Spirit,

now and forever. Amen.

Between Sessions IV and V:

In what ways did Jesus call forth the gifts of his disciples, even in the midst of their human frailty? How does Christ call you to use your strengths, even in the midst of human frailty?

If you have not already done so, read pages 105-112 of Living Your Strengths and the portions that follow that pertain to your Top 5 themes between now and the next group session. Reflect on the possibilities for ministry and service that result from your reading.

Session V: *Partners in Faith and Action*

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. As we begin our time together, let us turn our thoughts to how we act in partnership with others. Let us begin by listening to the words of Sacred Scripture:



A reading from the letter to the Ephesians (3:14-4:6)

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and the 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 by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. The Word of the Lord.

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”?

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 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.

There is more! 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!”

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! 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.”

What is your experience? Reflect quietly on the following, and then share with one or two others as you feel comfortable.

- ❖ With whom do you partner in service? How do you draw on each other's strengths to most effectively be a sign of Christ's presence in our world?

If you will conclude your sharing at this point, proceed to page ____ for a final reflection and process.

Session VI (as a separate session or as the conclusion to Session V): *Living Our Strengths*

As we begin (or continue), we draw on the presence of the Holy Spirit:

Holy Spirit, Fire of Love,

Open our hearts and minds

to your wisdom;

Come, Holy Spirit!

guide our community

as we walk the ways of discipleship;

Come, Holy Spirit!

give us courage

to serve boldly and with compassion;

Come, Holy Spirit!

strengthen our faith

as we grow more deeply in relationship with

Christ and one another;

Come Holy Spirit!

enliven us

in your presence;

Come, Holy Spirit!

for you are God, with the Father and the Son,

now and forever.

Come Holy Spirit, Come! Amen.



A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark. (8: 5-8)

*[Jesus] asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven.” Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.
The Gospel of the Lord.*

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. What have you to offer? How might you contribute to the building of the eternal feast, the reign of God?

Take turns reading, and reflect on the gospel passage and the following segments from the U.S. Bishops’ pastoral letter on stewardship as you consider your call as a disciple, now ready to live your strengths:

Reader 1: “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.

Reader 2: “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.”

Reader 3: “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.”

Reader 4: “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.”

Reader 5: “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.”

Reader 6: “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.”

Reader 7: “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?

(Stewardship, 5, 11-15)

Reflect quietly on the questions below, then share in pairs for an extended period of time. After sharing, each person will be invited to complete the commitment that follows. Look back at your responses to earlier questions to remind you of previous reflections and sharing.

- ❖ In what ways will you offer your strengths in ministry to others, within our parish and beyond it, at home, at work, in our city or world?

- ❖ What strengths do you possess that still need to be developed? How will you continue on the journey of discipleship by developing those strengths over time? How will you invite God to transform you as you develop your strengths?

- ❖ Are there things that you are currently doing that would benefit from partnering with others in more intentional ways, especially in ministry to others?

- ❖ How do your strengths equip you to live as a sign and witness to Christ's presence (to live sacramentally)?

My commitment as a gifted disciple, ready to live my strengths:

I am a person who has been given much, including these themes of talent (list your Top 5):

In response to God's love for us in Christ, with the strength and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, I will develop my talents by:

Each of us is called to live as disciples, offering all we are, have and will be as faithful stewards. I will offer myself in service in the following ways:

We have been given companions on our journey, people with whom to partner, and people who are called to mutually support one another. Those who support me, and those whom I will support are:

In prayerful trust, I commit myself to the above as a gifted disciple, ready to live my strengths, on this _____ day of _____ in the year of our Lord _____.

(Your signature here)

After everyone has completed their written commitment, gather together in prayer:

Gracious God,

You have drawn us together

as a manifestation

of the Body of Christ.

We have come to a greater

awareness of our own and each other's talents,

and are now ready to be sent forth,

to love and serve you

as your own.

Be with us as we live as stewards

of your love and mercy;

strengthen us when we falter;

give us wisdom to know your will

and to follow your call in our lives.

You are God, one with Jesus your Son and the Holy Spirit,

now and forever. Amen. (Close by offering each other a sign of Christ's peace.)