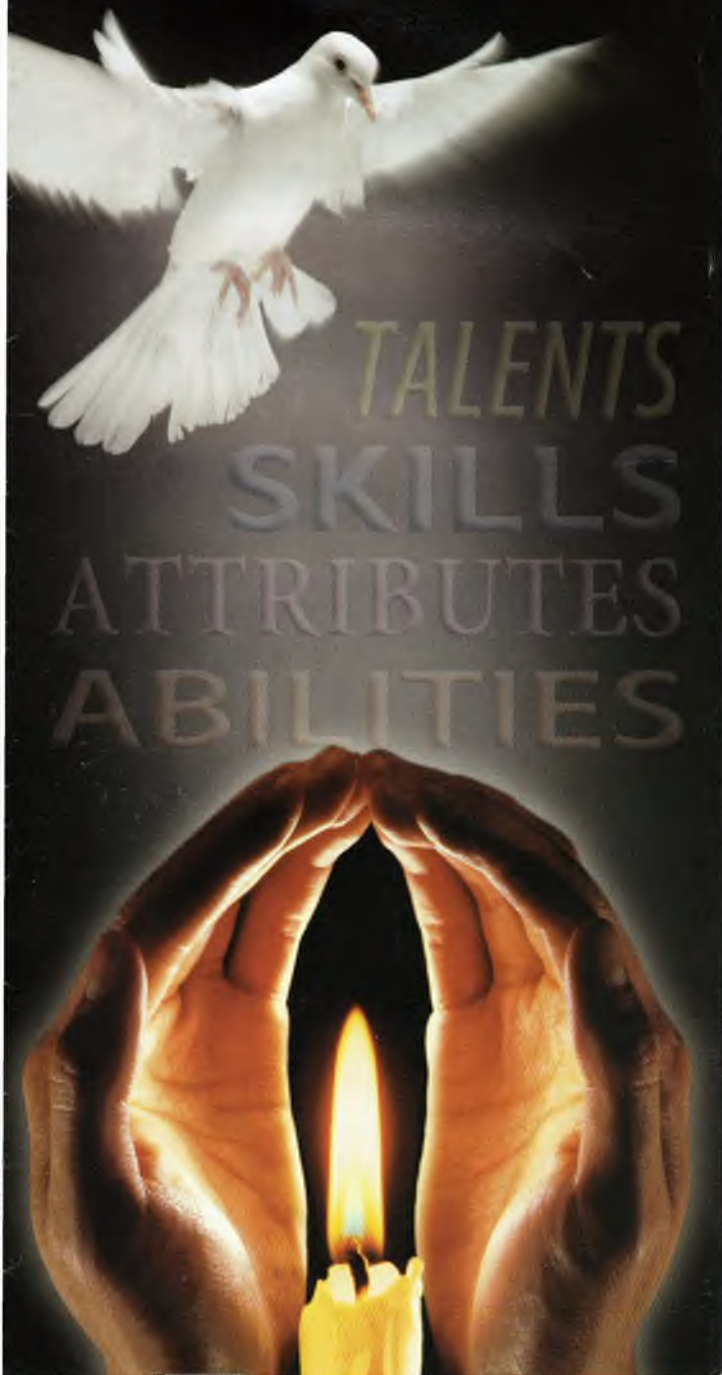


LIVING CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

# DISCERNING YOUR GIFTS



There's an old saying that everyone is born with a bundle of unique gifts, talents, skills, attributes, and abilities. Everything in the bundle is a gift from God; the way these gifts are used gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

- \* We can use them to make the world a better place by helping other people and coming closer to God.
- \* We can use them in selfish ways by exploiting other people, making the world a crueler place, and cutting ourselves off from God.
- \* Or we can take them for granted and drift along — for better or for worse — without any awareness of the spiritual meaning or purpose in our lives.

*How shall I make a return to the Lord for all the good he has done for me?*

(Ps. 116:1)

## WHAT'S IN YOUR BUNDLE?

It's often easier to identify the contents of other people's bundles than it is to make a list of our own. It's easy to recognize that someone else has a talent for music or art or building things. It's easy to say, "She's a great motivator . . . He's an impressive public speaker . . . They are good listeners . . ."

When we try to identify our own gifts, however, we are sometimes stifled by a false sense of humility. We may be really good at something, but we don't want to be seen as conceited or egotistical. If we are the proverbial "jack of all trades and master of none," we may underestimate our gifts or see them as insignificant in comparison to others'.

But all we have, no matter now much or how little, is a gift from God. St. Paul assures us that there are different gifts, "but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one" (1 Cor. 12:6). He's really saying that it's not about us; it's about what God has given us!



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## YOUR GIFTS

The spiritual term for identifying your gifts, and determining how they can be best used for service to others, is "discernment," from a Latin word meaning "to sift through."

Discernment takes time, prayer, and reflection. Begin by setting aside some quiet time with no interruptions. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you recognize your gifts and talents. Then ask yourself some questions:

### MY PERSONAL INVENTORY

- ✓ What are my talents? Music? Art? Photography? Writing? Storytelling?
- ✓ What are my special abilities? Sports? Public speaking? Teaching? Leadership?
- ✓ What skills have I developed? Cooking? Crafts? Building? Mechanics?
- ✓ What people skills do I have? Listening? Empathy? Common Sense? Hospitality?
- ✓ When people compliment me, what do they recognize? Patience? Understanding? Helpfulness? Enthusiasm? Thoughtfulness? Friendliness? Knowledge? Wisdom?
- ✓ What do family members see as my best traits?
- ✓ What is my job or profession? What makes me good at what I do?
- ✓ What are my material gifts? What do I have that I could share with those less fortunate or in need?
- ✓ What activities energize me?
- ✓ What difficulties have I overcome? What have I learned from those trials?
- ✓ What activities in my life have been especially fruitful?

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*For God is the one who,  
for his good purpose,  
works in you both to  
desire and to accomplish.*

*(Phil. 2:13)*



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## FINE-TUNING YOUR LIST

**N**ow, look carefully at each item on your list and expand your initial response. For example, if you have good people skills, do you relate best with people in a specific age group? Are you fluent in another language? Are you willing to go out of your way to help someone?

Sometimes, gifts and talents change at different times during our lives. You may have a hobby that grows into an opportunity to teach, or a skill that develops into an opportunity to share.

For example, perhaps you were a good athlete; as you get older, you can transform that strength into an ability to coach others.

Often, when we're younger, energy is our greatest gift. As we get older, we may discover we have less energy, but more time.

There are also stages in our lives when we have less time, but more money, and one of our greatest gifts may be our ability to provide financial support to someone or something.



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*Every time you smile at  
someone, it is an action of  
love, a gift to that  
person, a beautiful thing.*

— Blessed Teresa  
of Calcutta

## WE CAN USE OUR GIFTS!

**W**e are called to use our talents. Once we realize how God has gifted us, we can ask for God's help to use those talents effectively:

**To change** the part of the world that we touch daily: approaching our family, our vocation, and all we encounter with the Love of God.

**To enhance** the liturgy: playing instruments or singing, serving as a lector, Hospitality Minister, altar server, Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist, or adult leader for children's Liturgy of the Word.

**To bring** Christ to others: teaching religious education classes, assisting in sacramental preparation programs, taking part in prayer groups, serving on the bereavement committee, participating in Scripture study and faith sharing groups, or by evangelizing in our workplace and neighborhood.

**To build** up the Body of Christ: welcoming new members of our parish, working on the parish newsletter, assisting with the youth group, offering neighbors a ride to church — or assisting in outreach to young adults, senior citizens, people who are divorced and separated, or others who may feel alienated from the Church.

**To provide** temporal needs: cleaning the church, writing grants, raising funds, or making donations to support both our parish and other charitable organizations that serve the poor.

**To serve** the community we live in: helping out at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen, volunteering at a hospital or nursing home, or countless other ways.

**To intercede:** praying for the work of the parish, fasting, or offering any suffering we experience for the good of all and the conversion of sinners.

**To offer** our very lives: being willing to serve if God is calling us to the priesthood, religious life, or a lay apostolate.



*All of us belong to the communion of saints, we who have been baptized... we who draw life from the gift of Christ's Body and Blood, through which He transforms us and makes us like Himself.*

— Pope Benedict XVI

L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO PHOTO

## STRENGTH AND NOURISHMENT

**T**he Eucharist provides the spiritual strength and nourishment we need to use our gifts and talents in the way that God intends. When we come together at Mass, we are instructed by the word of God, nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, and commissioned to go into the world to love and to serve.

When we use the gifts and talents that God has given us, we find that we are blessed with even more. Jesus assures us, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap" (Lk. 6:38).

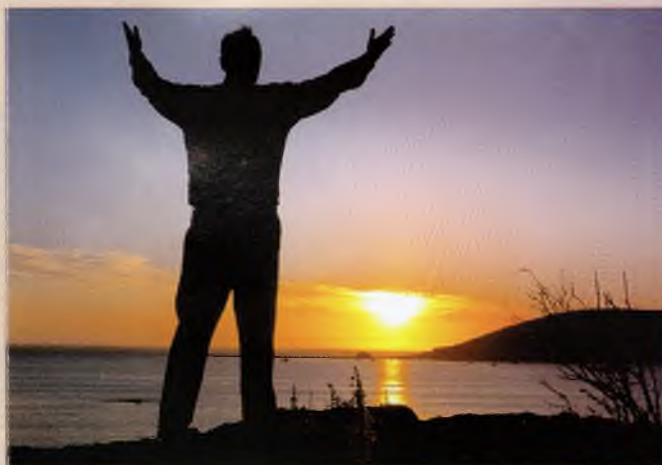


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## BEING HELD ACCOUNTABLE

**B**ecause we have been given our particular bundle for a purpose, we will be held accountable at the end of our lives for how we have used the good things that God has given to us. In their Pastoral Letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, the Bishops of the United States remind us: "God will judge each of us according to what we have done with what we have been given."

Or, as the late columnist Erma Bombeck wrote: "When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'I used everything you gave me.'"



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## PRAY FOR DISCERNMENT . . .

To be open to using your gifts and talents as God intends.

To continue developing your gifts and talents.

To be willing to receive new gifts and talents.

To be aware of how you use the material gifts God has given you.

To do everything "to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).



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