

Called to Know and Give Our Talents

What it means to steward our strengths

by Leisa Anslinger



“Do I really have talents?”

I cannot tell you how many times I have been asked that question in talking with people about stewardship. The conversation goes something like this: “Time I get. I never feel I have quite enough of it, but I understand the need to give my time for others. Treasure, too. I always wonder how much money I should share, but I do understand the need to give of my treasure. But talent? Do I really have talents, and if so, how do I know what they are, or how to give them to others?”

we are at our best when we do what we do best, and that building on our God-given talents is a much better use of our time and attention. We will be filled with a greater sense of purpose and we’ll experience less burn-out. We’ll be more satisfied with our lives when we develop and use our talents.

* See the reverse of this sheet for more information on talent study and identification. *

What is a talent, then, and where is the connection with my faith?

“A talent is a natural way of thinking, feeling or behaving that can be productively applied.” Think about that in your own life. What naturally comes easily to you? Isn’t something different for you when you get to do what you do best? Each of us has these natural aspects of ourselves that are planted deep within us by our loving God. Recognizing our talents is like glimpsing God’s grace within us. Once we have this insight, we will never be the same!

Knowing our talents is deeply personal. We see patterns in our past experience in which our talents have led to satisfying interactions with others or gratifying experiences in work or activities. Knowing our talents also helps us appreciate how much we need each other. It takes each of us doing what we can, being who we are, to have the impact we are called to have in our world. Becoming

aware of our talents is freeing; we become more understanding and forgiving of others, and of ourselves. And we find special pleasure in offering our true selves within our parish community, at home, work, and with friends.

The challenge: Our talents are so natural to us, it takes some help to discover and develop them. Once we have a sense of our talents, it is important to build on them, not to go along “business as usual.” We are so accustomed to looking for our weaknesses, it takes a while to appreciate the abundance of talent with which God has blessed each of us.

Let’s get practical. The reverse of this sheet will offer practical guidance for knowing and using your talents.

Let’s be spiritual. We are uniquely created in God’s image, intended to be that image in our world. Each of us has been given a unique combination of talents, abilities, life experiences and interests. If we are not good stewards of all of this, something will be missing in our world!



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Perhaps wondering about our talents shouldn’t surprise us.

Studies in talent tell us that most of us much more readily want to know our weaknesses, thinking we can somehow fix the inadequacies we feel when we try to do something that doesn’t come naturally easily to us. But the same bodies of research tell us



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“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. ...By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13: 34a-35)



Practical Ways to Grow as Stewards of Our Talents

Learning to Live Your Strengths

The information on talent that was described on the front of this sheet is taken from a body of research that was begun by the late Dr. Donald Clifton and his team of people, committed to helping others know their talents and live them in their lives. Drawing on over thirty years of research, the Clifton StrengthsFinder, an online questionnaire, was developed to help people discover their God-given talents and to develop them into strengths. Here are practical first steps for learning to live your strengths as a good steward:

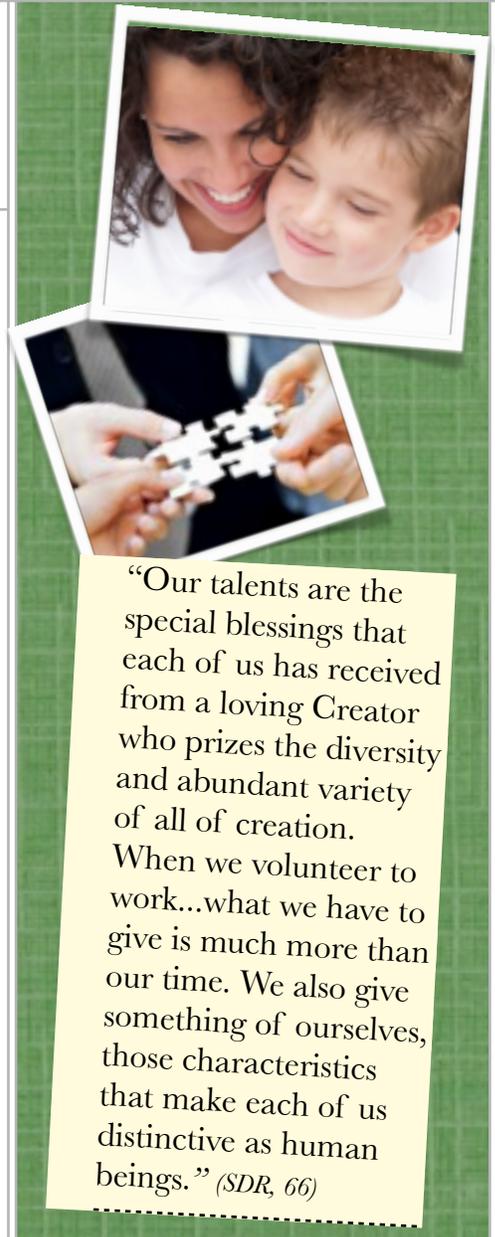
Discover Your Talents: The StrengthsFinder is available in many applications. The two most readily used in parish settings or by individuals are *Living Your Strengths* and *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. Each book has a one-time use code for the questionnaire; once you have completed the questionnaire which takes about 45 minutes, you will receive a list of your top 5 themes of talent.

Explore Your Talents with Others: Because our talents are so natural to us, it often takes someone we

know well to help us recognize our talents. Talk with your family or friends about the things they see you naturally doing well (if you do StrengthsFinder, this conversation becomes much more concrete). Do the same for others -- you will be giving them a gift beyond measure.

Apply Your Talents in Life and Service: Our talents can be applied in every aspect of our lives, and doing so will give us a deeper sense of meaning and purpose. Once you recognize the talents God has given you, apply them in life and service.

Use Your Talents in a Team: Remember that each of us has been given talents, and that we are most satisfied when we have the opportunity to be that best self at home, work and in our parish. Building a talent-based team gives everyone the chance to give of themselves. If your team lacks someone with a particular kind of talent, like the ability to think things through carefully or the ability to execute a plan, seek out someone to join you. You may find someone who has never been involved before, who has just been waiting to be asked. Understand, too, that what you find difficult, someone else finds pure joy!



“Our talents are the special blessings that each of us has received from a loving Creator who prizes the diversity and abundant variety of all of creation. When we volunteer to work...what we have to give is much more than our time. We also give something of ourselves, those characteristics that make each of us distinctive as human beings.” (SDR, 66)



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.” (Jn 13:12-14)

How Are You Already Stewarding Your Talents?

Don’t be shy or falsely humble. God has given you great talents! How are you already stewarding these natural areas of strength within you? We will always have ways to grow as disciples. How are you already a good steward of talent? What areas of your life need attention in order to develop and use your talents in the coming year? Use this space to record your thoughts and your commitment for the future: