

## INTERIM THOUGHTS

### *The Gift of Encouragement*

We've just celebrated Pentecost (May 31) – celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the community of Christ's followers, birthing the church. One of the signs of the Spirit's presence is spiritual gifts.

The idea of gifts of the Spirit, or spiritual gifts, has an air of mystery to it. Among Christians with high regard for rational thought and highly developed powers of reason, spiritual gifts may seem a bit "spooky." Managers and executives who know how to apply well-honed managerial skills and knowledge of the mechanics of organizational life may tend to discount gifts of the Spirit as unmanageable, if not indecipherable. We may acknowledge and respect pentecostal or charismatic faith communities as appropriate venues for spiritual gifts, but at Friedens (Peace) United Church of Christ?

The following story suggests a different perspective on spiritual gifts. A couple was recognized by their church for their long record of bringing large numbers of visitors – as many as forty-eight on a single Sunday! In explanation, they said, "We do it several different ways. We write letters. We call them on the phone. And we invite them in person."

Pressed to be more definitive about what makes their methods work so well, they replied, "That's simple. After you recognize that all a lot of people need is a little **encouragement**, the rest is easy."

**Encouragement.** There is remarkable spiritual vitality in this word and power in its exercise. This should not surprise us, because encouragement is one of the gifts of the Spirit that is cited in the New Testament. Nothing mysterious or spooky about encouragement, is there? Nothing contradictory to reason and rationality, or to healthy management techniques or organizational dynamics, either, is there?

**Encouragement.** What a gracious gift to offer someone. All of us recognize that encouragement motivates us far more effectively than 'shoulds' or 'oughts' or guilt and fear, way more than fault-finding.

**Encouragement.** What a gracious gift to offer one another at FPUCC Sunday after Sunday. All of us thrive with encouragement, while none of us thrive on indifference, a cold shoulder, or inattention.

**Encouragement.** Many other gifts can spring from this seed: Evangelism, service, generosity, mercy, to name a few. All of these are mentioned as spiritual gifts in the New Testament. Here is how St. Paul puts it: *...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: ...if service, in our serving; ...he/she who encourages, in his/her encouragement; he/she who contributes, in generosity; ...he/she who does acts of mercy,*

*with cheerfulness.* (Romans 12:5-8, paraphrased)

Some translations read "exhorts" and "exhortation" where I have used "encourages" and "encouragement." Both are accurate, but "exhorts" sounds a little too preachy.

The very same word is used by Jesus to identify the Holy Spirit, i.e. "paraclete," which means, "the one called alongside for encouragement and support." This word is often translated "Comforter."

**Encouragement.** Exercised as a gift of the Spirit, an act or word of encouragement carries a small but mighty charge of the Spirit of Christ himself into someone's life. In such a Spirit-charged word or act, there is huge power to bless. Whom will you and I bless today with a simple spiritual gift of **encouragement**?

*Let this mind* (of The Encourager) *be in me/us, which was also in Christ Jesus . . . .*

*Jerry*