

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Gift of a Pastor

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Bishop Wilburn Campbell was Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia when I was Rector of Church of the Good Shepherd in Charleston. It was during the first few months as Rector that I received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Bishop Campbell was very supportive and sent me throughout the diocese to explain the charismatic movement and aspects of it to churches and groups. However, he cautioned me against announcing a public service in Good Shepherd and permit tongue speaking in the service. His reason was people might come to the service not realizing what kind of meeting it was and be confused. I obeyed his restriction, and with his approval, we had a home meeting on Monday nights following the two hour Prayer and Praise service at the church. People were invited after explanation of the nature of the home meeting and some nights we had as many as sixty people. At the home meeting we listened to tapes, entertained questions, had further teaching and ministered as need arose with frequent prophetic words and praying in tongues. Some of the Monday evening house gatherings ended with a very informal Holy Communion service.

One Monday night we had several slices of peter bread and a bottle of red wine on the coffee table. After we had finished whatever it was we were doing – listening to a teaching tape or sharing – we ended the night with Communion. The Book of Common Prayer contains an abbreviated service we commonly refer to as “Rite Three” containing the essentials. We broke the bread and passed it around communing each other. The same was done with the cup of wine. It was the Body and Blood of Jesus who had graciously baptized us in the Holy Spirit.

Following the meeting a young man visiting called me aside. He informed me that he did not “witness” to what we did. “What, might I ask”? guessing it might have been praying in tongues, or praying for one of the people, but had no idea his complaint was about the bottle of red wine on the coffee table.

I asked where he went to church. He was from North Carolina visiting in the area and heard about our Monday night service. I asked what was his denomination, fully expecting him to tell me some denomination that would use Welch’s grape juice. He told me that he and eleven other fellows share a house. They were college students; sort of a religious fraternity. They held church in their house, each taking turns being the Pastor of the month. I asked him if he knew about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. He did! I asked if he believed in praying in tongues. He did! I asked if he believed in praying for people to be healed. He did! I asked if he believed in prophecy. He did! And each reply was emphasized with a holy adjective.

After these various questions about different gifts of the Holy Spirit I lowered the boom. "My friend, if you can accept the gift of tongues, the gift of prophecy, the gift of healing, why can you not also accept the gift of a pastor?"

In Ephesians 4:11 St Paul lists Pastor as one of the enabling gifts Christ has placed in the Church to equip the membership in ministry. Unfortunately seminaries are not teaching much about what constitutes a lifestyle of a Pastor. A Pastor nowadays is one who sits behind a desk and gives advice to those who bring their problems to him. He is a faux psychologist! That image may well fit a "counselor" but not a "Pastor".

The image of a Pastor is that of a shepherd who protects his congregation, feeds them the Word and Sacrament, and does all necessary to further their spiritual growth. He is in the midst of his congregation as the shepherd is in the midst of the flock of sheep he is shepherding. In the case of real four footed animals, they need to hear the shepherd's voice because of their poor eye sight, and as the shepherd speaks to them or sings in their midst, they follow. This closeness of the shepherd assures them of their safety. He loves the flock enough to discipline the obstinate sheep, or tenderly bring back the erring member. The same is true of the Pastor who is a true shepherd of Christ's lambs. He is guided by the One who was willing to lay down His life for the sheep, and likewise, will arise from his bed at two o'clock in the morning to go to the side of one in trouble, or go without a meal while sitting at the bedside of a dying member.

When I would go to a new church I would find a retired man who was familiar with the community and membership. He and I would start at ten o'clock in the morning and go until nine o'clock at night visiting the membership. I could not know my people by shaking their hand at the church door as they left worship on Sunday morning. In one church I called at a home and the lady of the house greeted me at the door. I introduced myself to which she replied, "yes I know who you are. Why are you here?" I explained that I was making a pastoral visit to which she informed me no Pastor had ever visited her house. We talked at the door but she never allowed me inside. The concept of a Pastor visiting was beyond her comprehension.

I carried a pocket tape recorder in my shirt pocket and as we processed down the aisle at the end of a service I turned it on. I taped everything that was told me at the door as the people left. People often tell the Pastor information he is expected to remember but forgets. I did not. Only my secretary knew I wore the mic. Privacy issues were not an issue in the 1970s. Monday morning I gave her the tape and she took off the information I needed. I had the reputation of having the best memory of any Pastor they ever knew. If a new family visited, I asked their name and address, and by Tuesday afternoon I was on their doorstep. I got new members simply because of my incredible memory.

In one small town church the residents had postal boxes. I would go to the post office at nine o'clock in the morning to get my mail. I could park in front of the post

office, prop my foot on the back bumper of my car, and visit half my congregation in the next hour. Leaving the post office, driving to the local pharmacy, I could see most of the remainder of my people. There are different ways in which the Pastor can keep in contact with his people.

Church members play a game called "hide and seek". They hide out in a hospital, not letting the Pastor know they are sick, and if they can be discharged without his visiting them, they win. Rarely did I lose at that game. Hospital calls took priority, and although the visits were brief, nevertheless, my parishioners were visited and prayed over. The Reserved Sacrament was also given those preparing for surgery or having an extended stay in the hospital. Many hospitals provide a church membership list of patients and all that is required is the Pastor go to the hospital and check the list.

When a parishioner died I spent a lot of time with the family. I would "drop in" two or three times a day until the funeral, comforting the family by my presence. After the funeral I would go again to the house within the hour after leaving the grave, and in most cases, visiting the home every few days for the next few weeks. After the funeral, when everyone has gone back to their places, is a time when the survivors need the strength of a Pastor.

I do not believe the Holy Spirit has withdrawn His gift of a Pastor. Only seminaries have neglected emphasizing the need for pastoral care and how a clergyman provides it. Very few clergy visit their membership; some now send an email in response to a family crisis, giving assurance of their prayers. I am told one Roman Catholic parish in the northeast mail the communion Host to home bound members. Circulars, advertisements, and signs attempt to attract people to a church where Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, one of the mega churches of America, grew in its membership by Jerry Falwell visiting one hundred homes each day Monday through Friday until several miles radius of his building was covered.

Lest you conclude that the only Pastors are those ordained I have found very competent and efficient Pastors among the laity. Their ministry is truly one empowered by the Holy Spirit. In one church I served a retired military officer had a list of the home bound people and regularly visited them, taking a copy of the Sunday worship folder, and a tape of the service. Years ago I had a parishioner who was going to the Anderson Cancer Hospital in Houston and I phoned Father Jeff Shiffmeyer, then Rector of Church of the Redeemer, and requested ministry to my parishioner during his stay. Redeemer Church was one of the best known as charismatic in the Episcopal denomination and I was confident the Priest would be a blessing to my church member. Upon his return to Florida I visited my parishioner in his home and asked what he thought of Father Jeff to which he responded that he never met him. I was furious, ready to phone Church of the Redeemer and tell them what I thought about their failure to minister to my parishioner. Had they phoned me I would have at least made one visit to the hospital. Within a few minutes I came under conviction. My parishioner continued "but Mr. Jones (*not his real name*)

came every day and read scripture with me and gave me Communion". Then I realized this charismatic church recognized lay people who had the gift of being a Pastor.

June and I have also been blessed with the ministry of a local layman and his wife who visited us during our recent illness, anointed us with Holy Oil and prayed for us with the laying-on-of-hands. Blessed is the Church whose paid Pastor is not hung up on his own status that he fails to recognize the anointing of the Holy Spirit on lay people whom He calls also to be a Pastor.