

*Rekindling our Gifts and
Passions
and
Reconnecting to our
Neighbors and Community
Meditations for
March 21
through
Apr. 10*

Introduction

As we begin these reflections, I want to share what we declared our Mission to be on April 3, 1999 for First Christian:

The Mission of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) at Goldsboro North Carolina is to worship God as revealed in Jesus Christ, to nurture the spiritual growth of its members, to serve the needs of others within and beyond the congregation and to be committed to the unity of God's people.

I did not give that before in Part 1 because sometimes we need to think again about who we are.

How does this mission describe our purpose?
How might our individual gifts and connections to community serve this mission?

George Reavis wrote this useful fable in 1940:

Once upon a time, the animals decided that they should do something meaningful to

meet the problems of the new world, so they organized a school.

They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer, all of the animals took all of the subjects.

The duck was excellent at swimming. In fact, he was better than his instructor. However, he made only passing marks in flying and was very poor at running. Since he was so slow in running, he had to drop his swimming class and do extra running. This caused his webbed feet to become badly worn, meaning that he dropped to an average mark in swimming. Fortunately, “average” was acceptable, therefore nobody worried about it – except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because he had so much makeup work to do in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher insisted that he

start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed cramps from overexertion, so he ended up with a C in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was a real problem student and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing class, he beat all of the others to the top, but insisted on using his own way of getting there!

Meditation 1

I Don't Know What My Talents Are

According to Ephesians 4:4-7, there is “one body and Spirit” who calls to us to “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

What was your first gift? Some of us remember certain gifts from family on special days – graduation, wedding, or special

anniversaries. But do you remember your first *spiritual* gift? Perhaps our first and best spiritual gift is the grace given through “Christ’s gift.” Because he gave, we have been given. And these gifts are given to draw us into this one body and to this one Lord.

We have been given a variety of gifts to live in this one body and Paul reminds us in I Corinthians 12 that one gift is not more important than another. In I Corinthians 12, Paul speaks about feet and hands and eyes and ears. What kinds of gifts would each of these have?

Feet

Hands

Ears

Eyes

What talent or skill is unique to each of these?

Which one are you most of the time? When are you a combination? When have you needed another set of feet? Of hands? Of ears? Or eyes?

Why do they need to work together?

In I Corinthians, 12, Paul talks about two kinds of problems between the parts of the body. In verse 15, the problem is the issue of low self-esteem, of underrating the self. "If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,'" it is no less valuable just because it feels this way. The second problem is the issue of overrating the self by devaluing others. In verses 21-23, the eye may say "I have no need of you" to another part of the body, but that devaluation does not change the worth of the other parts.

In other words, we need all the gifts of the body. One is not more valuable. Since all the gifts come from God and not from us, there is no reason for pride. And the opposite is true – because all the gifts come from God, there is no reason to disparage the gifts you have. They are valuable because they are God given. Imagine what would happen if half of every basketball team playing in the national tournament this year just didn't show up. The moment we wonder if the big

toe has value, we just need to talk to someone who has lost one. The body cannot stand without it.

Take a moment to reflect on this idea.

Meditation 2

Rekindling the Gift

We have mentioned before how Paul directs Timothy to “rekindle” the gifts given to him by his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:6). You have this gift of faith and grace. You even have recognized some specific talents God has given you to live your life serving God and others, but from time to time, you are not moving in the power of all those gifts. Why?

We burn low when we try to keep the flame going. Sometimes we are wet kindling and sometimes we are good kindling, but without the fire, there is no passion. And without

that, there is no sustained joy or service. You could be the most talented violinist in the world but if you had no audience, no message, and no purpose for your gift other than to “play for your own pleasure,” soon your fire would burn low.

The gifts are God-given and Spirit-sustained. Sometimes God will ignite an old fire about to go out and sometimes he will bring a whole new spark – new gift, new talent, or new ability you had never recognized before.

Ask God now to rekindle all the gifts in you He has placed there or is placing there. List what is stirring in the embers of your thoughts right now about your talents and how they might be used:

This old gift rekindled and how God might use this gift_____

This new gift being ignited and how God might use this gift_____

Meditation 3 Trying Out New Gifts

Sometimes we are good at something we don't enjoy. There was a sunflower who was praised for all our strength, height and the marvelous seeds she provided, yet she was unhappy. "How I would like to burrow in the earth like the mole or earthworm where it is not so hot! He has the best job in the world!" Turns out her earthworm friend was having the same mid-life crisis: "How I would like to be out in the sun for a change where it is not so damp and cold. She has the best job in the world." So, they decided to switch lives for a while. But soon the sunflower found her petals torn from trying to burrow in small places and she collapsed discouraged for she had barely moved an inch in two days and had created no tunnels for the rain to pass through. She felt like a failure. The earthworm fared no better. He was not handling the heat at all, was drying out, and getting some flack about not being able crawling up everyone's stalk to get up in the world. He felt like a failure too. So what did

they do? They returned happily back to affirm their own talents. We need both: one burrow in deep places to funnel out paths for the rain to nourish the seed, one with a large leaf face to gather the sun's energy to grow the seed.

There is nothing wrong with trying out new gifts or jobs in the workplace or in the church. They may fit or they may not. When the church organizes itself around the traditional roles (practices, committees, groups) it has always had, rather than around the current gifts and needs of the people it now has, frustration sets in. Jesus asks "if the man is made for the Sabbath or Sabbath for the man" (Mark 2:27). This may be an example of trying to make the people fit old ways of observing the Sabbath rather than honoring the Sabbath with the gifts of the people gathered.

Sometimes people want you to be an earthworm but you are really a sunflower and sometimes people want you to be a

sunflower but you are really an earthworm. When we insist on “having to have this” role filled, sometimes we pressure someone (anyone) to take that up. Now there are times that gentle nudging is fruitful. There is a woman at Carr Memorial who will tell you she was terrified to speak in public, but under the gentle nudging of some Board members, she became what was called the Sunday School Superintendent. She flourished and became more confident. I have heard some through the years share that many of our churches traditionally had a Sunday School secretary/treasurer out back or in the sanctuary to count attendance and take up Sunday School money and a Sunday School superintendent also always in the sanctuary as well and continued to try to staff both roles for years until they realized one of them had no job! Why? Well, for years, the sanctuary was where Sunday School started. All would gather and someone would be in charge. That role was needed. The other would count attendance

and collect money. Over time, people just went straight to their classes.

Created in the image of God, humans receive their giftedness from their Creator. The writer of Exodus notes that God equipped certain artists with the necessary talents to fashion the Temple:

Then Moses said to the Israelites, 'See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. He has filled him with the Spirit of God – with skill and understanding, with knowledge, and with all kinds of work, to design artistic designs, to work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in cutting stones for their setting, and in cutting wood, to do work in every artistic craft (Exodus 35:30-33).

Even if two or three are gathered together to worship God, God is in that assembly, equipping it for every good work that is needed. *There is never a scarcity of gifts, just a scarcity of faith and imagination.*

Meditation 4 A Great Variety

When we receive communion, we proclaim,
“The gifts of God for the people of God.”

Every Sunday we say that. What do we mean? The most precious gift of all – the of God’s grace to us in Jesus Christ – is the source of every gift we will have. This gift is given our every week in worship to gift us!

Sometimes the “gifts of God for the people of God” might be understood as:

Gifts of Proclamation and Witness (the Word itself, the Bible, the Gospel, the Good News, stories of faith, sacred stories, stories of the people, having a prophetic witness or advocacy – gifts of the text or story). The Greek word *kerygma* sometimes is used in reference to these, and we may think of these as the Gifts of the Text.

Gifts of Communion and Fellowship (the fellowship of the Table, hospitality, forgiveness, discernment, reconciliation). Sometimes the Greek word *koinonia* is used

in reference to these, and we may think of these as Gifts of the Table.

Gifts of Service (the gifts of service, stewardship, compassion). Sometimes the Greek word *diaconia* is used in reference to these, and if we remember how Jesus picked up the towel and washed his disciples' feet, we may think of these as Gifts of the Towel.

Gifts of Sacred Time, Space and Place (sacred time and space, liturgy, prayer, praise, songs, rituals of faith, silence, or the order and flow of the church service itself). Sometimes the word Liturgy from the ancient root *leitourgia*, is used to reference what we do in sacred and time and space from keeping Sabbath to keeping rhythm and order.

Now, it is also possible to think of spiritual gifts this way used in worship, even though some of the gifts overlap:

Kerygma Gifts – teaching, exhorting or advising, interpreting, sharing sacred stories,

evangelizing and witnessing to the Gospel good news.

Diaconia Gifts – serving as deacons, serving the Body of Christ, reaching out to serve the community

Koinonia Gifts – the gift of friendship, hospitality, welcoming, being community and family, openness to others, listening, encouraging, reconciling differences, smoothing, offering and encouraging forgiveness

Leitourgia Gifts – the gifts of prayer, community liturgy, silence, meditation, reflection, song, praise, thanksgiving, spiritual direction or leadership, or keeping rhythm and order in other ways in the church: administration, record keeping, efforts to organize or record what happens in time and space.

Which of these gifts has God allowed you to share?

Which of these gifts is God forming or reshaping in you?

Now, imagine one way under each category we live into our mission:

1. To strengthen or enrich our community of faith at First Christian.
Under *Kerygma* – ex. New ways to share our faith stories with our youth
Under *Leitourgia* – ex. New ways to include youth in our worship service

What are other ways to enrich?

*Kerygma – Teaching, Proclaiming,
Study*

Diaconia – Serving

Koinonia- Welcoming

Leitourgia-Worship

2. To strengthen our ministry to the community
Ex. *Kerygma* – Tutor or teach a child to read

Ex. *Koinonia* – Host an inter-racial community worship service (i.e. Good Friday Service)

Meditation 5 Gifts and Spirituality Types

From *equippedforeverygoodgift.org*, we can find under Discipleship Resources six different ways we may be more inclined to express or understand our faith. While not all the descriptions apply, some of the distinctions are listed. These are also related to how we share our gifts:

1. Head Spirituality – Study is important; faith is rational
2. Heart Spirituality – Experience is important, prayer is central; depth of feeling and empathy are important
3. Pilgrim Spirituality Faith formation is a process; seeking and remaining open are important
4. Mystic Spirituality – Prayer, listening, silence, waiting, and meditation are central; God is a mystery; retreat and renewal are important

5. Servant Spirituality – People are doers more than hearers; living faith is central; living and acting faith in specific ways are important
6. Crusader Spirituality – Devotion to advocacy and speaking out for others in need are central; crusaders seek others to join with to take up the cause. Is there one you identify more with? Are you a combination? Which are you least inclined to relate to? How might all six expressions or personalities offer a variety of gifts for the Body of Christ and the community in unique ways?

The Head Person

The Heart Person

The Pilgrim

The Mystic

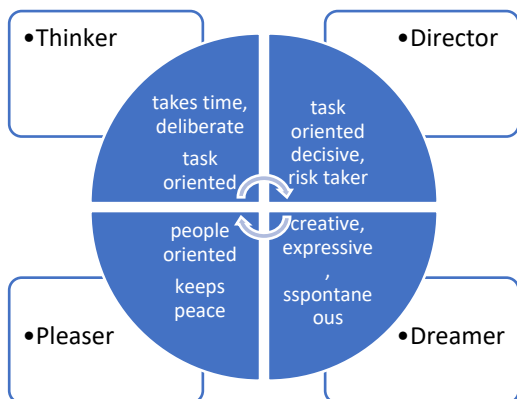
The Servant

The Crusader

Meditation 6

Gifts and Leadership/Interaction Styles

Think about the rich variety of gifts offered by these different leadership or interaction styles:



Which do you most identify with? Which could you grow towards? How might the dreamer and thinker need to work hard to be open to each other?

What would be lacking if all were one of the following to the exclusion of the rest?

What gift does the Thinker bring? The Director? The Pleaser? The Dreamer?

What needs to be balanced in each one?

Thinkers Methodical “Take all the time you need” people (problem – analysis paralysis; nothing gets done until it is perfect)

Directors Risk taking “Let’s get it done” people (problem -acting too hastily without getting all on board or acting impulsively)

Pleasers Smoothing “Let’s just all get along and avoid all conflict” people (Problem: never learns that creative difference of opinion can be fruitful)

Dreamers “Let’s just dream” people (Problem: lack of concrete reflection and planning to implement)

What will help you harmonize with the following if you are not that type?

The Thinker Ex. Gather the data, allow time for questions and input; look at several options

The Director Ex. Avoid chit chat; stick with task, put things in writing, talk facts, not feeling, move things along

The Pleaser Ex. Stay calm, focus on people, acknowledge feelings, respect all opinions, offer praise, assurance and affirmation, make sure all are clear on responsibilities and have what they need.

The Dreamer Ex. Be open to new ways, consider the importance of long term, possibilities, and visions, and be prepared to speculate (I wonder... What if...)

Meditation 7 What are my passions?

In Exodus 35:26, we are told “all the women whose hearts moved them to use their skill spun the goats’ hair” to contribute to the work of God.

Now, what about your gifts? What “moves your heart to use your skills?” Take a few minutes to reflect on these questions:

What activity brings you joy? _____

Fill in this blank. I am most alive when I am _____.

Or, fill in this: “I can’t wait to have some free time to _____.”

If you could have any job or work and money was not a consideration, what would it be?

Has anyone told you had a gift for something specific? What? _____

What training do you have that might be of service? _____

What can you do that someone in your community might want to learn to do?
Sometimes you discover this by filling in the blanks:

What has someone complimented you on?
When have you heard, "I would love to be
able to do that"? Or "You have a gift for
that"?

To whom _____

Circle any of these you are interested in:

Creative Arts: Painting, drawing,
photography, sculpting, cartooning

Material Arts: quilting, knitting, crafting,
sewing beading doing banners, metal
working, work working, glass art, paper art,
pottery, decorating sacred spaces
(communion table, altar, etc.)

Narrative Arts: dramatic reading, storytelling

Written Arts: diaries, poetry, journey,
prayers, devotions, cards, letters

Culinary Arts: cooking, tying ethic themes to
menus, baking bread for communion or
special suppers

Natural Arts – gardening, working with flowers, creative decorating

Musical Arts: Singing, playing an instrument

Movement: a sport, dance, walking, prayer walking, labyrinth walking, riding a bike, driving

Dramatic Arts: plays, dramatic readings, balloon or clown ministries

Others _____

Do you have a favorite hobby or pastime?

Have your hobbies changed?

How would you fill in this blank? “I have always wanted to learn to _____ or try to _____.”

Write down two of your passions, hobbies or gifts and brainstorm how they might be used:

1. In our faith community

2. In our community

Meditations for March 28 to Apr. 3

Meditation 1

Where Are You and Who Are Near?

Have you *ever not known* where you were? I remember going to Raleigh once, where I had lived for some years. Some time had passed, but not a long time, or so it seemed to me. I did not have a garmen. Why would I need one? I knew this place like the back of my hand: Western Blvd., Hillsborough St., St. Mary's St. But suddenly, I had no clue where I was.

The roads had changed, the landscape was completely different. There were new malls and stores. Where was I? Sometimes we can be disoriented even in places we assumed we were familiar with.

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, God came calling, "Where are you?" They had lost their way. They had travelled outside the safe confines and familiarity of the garden. Suddenly, their eyes were opened and they must have echoed God, "Yes, where are we? How did we get here?"

In the same way, we can become unfamiliar with our own communities. If we have not traveled in an area lately, we may look up and ask, "When did that get here?"

I remember the girls having a history assignment once. They were given pictures of landmarks in Goldsboro and asked to identify what it was and

how to get there. I looked at the first and wondered, "What is that and where is it?" I looked at the second. I did not have a clue about that either, but both turned out to be places I passed by all the time.

Can you remember a time you passed by a familiar landmark and never *really saw it*? I guarantee you I could not tell you right now the name of the shopping strip at the corner of Cashwell and Spence or even the name of the shopping area where the Spence Walmart is located.

I'm not so worried about that, but what concerns me is that it's possible for me not to really know my neighborhood and who's in it. It's possible for me to pass by people too and not notice them.

Meditation 2

Where in the world is...

Here is a test I am giving myself, but I may not do very well without some study:

1. See if you can name the location of three housing projects with the Goldsboro Housing Authority.
2. See if you can name three ministries that serve the needy in Goldsboro
3. See if you can name two shops whose proceeds go to some charitable cause.
4. See if you can name three ministries that serve the hungry in Goldsboro.
5. See if you would know how to contact someone to drop off goods for an abuse shelter or if someone asked you how to get to an abuse shelter.

Or how about this for extra credit:

1. Who is someone just half a mile from our church we could minister to?
2. If we wanted to talk to someone about tutoring or literacy, where would we go?
3. If we wanted to find out information about services to young mothers, who would we call?
4. If we wanted to find out about services to the aged, where would be go?
5. If we wanted to learn how we could help youth in our area, where might we start?

I believe all our answers to the extra credit are no more than a mile or mile and a half away, and maybe like the rich man who passed by Lazarus at the door every day, we don't drive

by because we are callous, but because we are caught up in going on our own mission that day rather than asking God how to join in the mission He has for us that day.

Meditation 3

What if they had not been looking?

Here is a biblical reflection I like to call, “What if they had not been listening and looking? What if they hadn’t ventured out?”

1. What if Abraham had not been listening and looking and missed the ram in the thicket the day he went up the mountain to sacrifice Isaac?
2. What if the Egyptian princess had stayed in the palace that day and not seen Moses by the river?
3. What if Naaman had refused to go dip in the Jordan that day?

4. What if any one of the disciples had responded to the call of Jesus by saying, “No thanks, I like this neighborhood and my routine just fine. Nothing out there I need to see.”
5. What if the travelers along the Emmaus Road with Jesus after his resurrection had never invited him to spend the night?
What would happen if you and I went home a different way? What could we learn about our neighborhood? Who might we meet?

We are usually afraid to go into areas that have not always been considered “safe.” That is understandable. But what if one day we look up in Goldsboro and ask, “Where in the world am I and who is that person right across the street?”

Meditation 4

Sid's Shoe Shaped Shoe Shop

Brantley Watkins sent me a picture of a landmark that was formerly used to identify First Christian Church: Sid's Shoe Shaped Shoe Shop, a big blue shoe shaped shoe shop just across the street in Sunrise Shopping Center, although I'm not sure it was named Sunrise Shopping Center then.

"Where are you," someone used to ask and the response, "Oh, we are that church across from Sid's Shoe Shaped Shoe Shop." That was all that was needed!

How are we identified today?

As the church with the bell or tall tower?

As the church beside Edgewood?

As the church with the delicious barbecue?

I was happy to hear that someone from our Lenten service at St. Luke's asked if we were the church that gave out the sandwiches. How does the community see us? How are we known?

Someone once asked, "If your church would disappear tomorrow, who would know?" I pray many would notice. Not that we do what we do for recognition, but we want to embody Christ in our neighborhoods.

Meditation 5

Whose are You?

More and more, the face of theology is changing, so that people of faith and the culture and communities surrounding them will move away from asking the church: "Who are you and what do you believe? And instead will want to know how we are willing to connect and receive them. The new questions I have heard voiced are:

“Whose are we?” “Who are we willing to welcome?” and “Who are we connected to?” The focus on the last question is on our relationships. It focusses on belonging to each other and explores the depth of our connections.

At our Community Lenten Service this year I shared a Zimbabwean greeting. When someone asks, “How did you sleep?” the response is “I slept well if you slept well.”

If we review our Mission statement, our Vision, and our Affirmation of Faith, other than to God, which is essential and primary, *to whom* are we called to belong as we proclaim our mission of witness and love to all people?”

Think of ways we belong to our community or might belong to each other or to our community.

Meditation 6

Asset Mapping

Luther Snow has written a book entitled *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on its Gifts*. In it, he states that this simple exercise can take less than an hour and could be used in groups from 6 to 600. The exercise includes: recognizing your assets. An asset is a gift, resource, or strength. The assets are divided into several categories. In the interest of time, Snow notes, “you do not need to cover all the five types.”

The three or four to cover might include:

Physical assets – church building or grounds or any tangible thing.

Individual assets – the individual talents, gifts and passions of the congregation

Associations –groups you are connected with or might be connected with

Institutions – institutions that have something in common with your congregation, such as a neighbor church.

1. Review your mission and God's calling upon your congregation.
2. Write all the different types of assets you can think of for each category.
3. Now look around. How could you pair assets to accomplish some action?
4. An action might be *a service project, or way to come together to do a cooperative ministry, the sponsoring of an event, holding a meeting to collaborate with community leaders about a shared work, or opening the church space for others to meet or for other purposes*
5. Does someone want to add an asset to any of your pairs to create a cluster?

6. Have you come up with two to six clusters of possible actions? Post the name of the action by the cluster.

Example: Someone wrote down old yarn found in closet as an asset under *Physical Assets*.

Someone else wrote down two ladies who knit under *Individual Assets*

Someone else wrote down Chemo Ward of a local Cancer Center under *Institutions*

They were clustered and the Action was a project to knit lap shawls for the chemo patients. And the creative title: "Covered by Grace"

In some asset mapping, people are then asked to stand next to a proposed action they find most interesting or they vote for the one they like best.

Meditation 7

Asset Mapping Reflection and Planning

Sometime after two or three possible actions have been identified (things we might do), there needs to be a time of reflection. This would usually take place at another session. We will map on April 3 and discuss on April 10. At that time or another (such as our May 9 Administration), we could identify the steps we might want to take to plan each action.

Then those interested in being a part of that project could plan when to meet with the necessary people or organization.

Begin now to list all the things of value under our:

Physical Assets

Individual gifts of members

Community associations or institutions

You also may want to think of some special ministries or needs we could meet by bringing these together.

Meditations from April 4 to April 10

Meditation 1

It's Just OUR Thing!

Sometimes congregations can get trapped trying to look like other churches which they feel are more successful. God makes us all different. The gifts of the members at St. Luke's will be different than ours. Some of our mission or purpose will be similar, but *how we choose to live out that mission based on our particular talents, resources and passions will look different.*

Churches who try over and over to recreate themselves to look like another church will always be frustrated failing at trying to do what Jesus never asked them to do!

Even though other churches may have fundraisers like our barbecue fundraisers, no one is located at our corner, serving the people who have come to treasure this.

What other things are *just our thing*?

Does “our thing” ever evolve or dissolve? Sure, ministries change all the time. What was helpful or needed 10 years ago may not be as needed now. That is why we continue to stay connected to our community and our assets. Sometimes it’s hard not to keep doing what has always been done. Can you think of a ministry that may have become obsolete?

Sometimes we don’t dispense with a ministry, but tweak it by networking with another institution. Do we do away with what we used to think of as VBS? We don’t need to. We just need to reimagine an

experience of faith formation in a different way. When I talked to the secretary at St. Luke's, she mentioned they did not have many children. So, what if one summer we brought our assets and desire to live into our mission to connect to youth together? This is just an example, but you can see the way asset mapping might work.

Meditation 2

That's Scary Mrs. Penny

I have probably told this story before, but here goes. When Andrew Clarke was small, I was doing the children's sermon one morning. I just wanted something new. I'm sure I gave some thought about the relationship between the message and this pretty sketchy looking battery operated weasel I had purchased at Cracker Barrel, but that Sunday morning, the innovation factor did not outweigh the fear factor. The point of this action to teach a certain point about fear

or God or whatever point I was making was lost in the trepidation in Andrew's eyes. He backed away slowly, never taking his eyes off the creature and let me know, "That's scary, Mrs. Penny!" That became our catch phrase ever since when are facing something we are not quite sure of.

Sometimes we just want to do something different. Anything. We grab something novel just to break the monotony of sameness or to get attention. We may be tired of sameness or sense the congregation needs a change. And different can be good, but it is not necessarily good unless there is some connection between who we are called to be or become and what we are attempting. Starting a new venture or action can seem overwhelming. If we have not done something before, there may be some fear or uncertainty:

1. If the building is to be used for another purpose, we may have hesitations

such as the following:

2. We may be hesitant because we feel once we get into something, there's no coming out. In other words, we are afraid of long term commitment. That is why it is good to start out small. Decide on certain specific actions or events rather than commit for 10 years. Starting with the *doable* is always best.
3. We may be hesitant because we are afraid we will be left as the lone ranger with all the responsibility and little support. That is why it is important to map out who will do what, when, for what length of time, or how often.
4. Sometimes we are hesitant because we question the value of the action. This is why we always try to link what we do to who we are – our core values, our mission, our vision, and our purpose. *That is way we spent some time on our mission and our gifts*

before we even begin the process of asset mapping.

Meditation 3

Right in Front of Us

Sometimes our assets or resources are right in front of us. Consider how this congregation thought about the common actions they performed every day and found ways to connect to their community's needs:

1. One woman who likes to cook many casseroles once a week, added two more and found two people to share with each week.
2. Another lady who loved to wash, came together with others to create a laundry service for the disabled as she was able. She enlisted others to

help who also shared that energy.

3. Someone else who loved to write cards volunteered her time writing cards for those in nursing home to send out.
4. Another person who found technology easy volunteered to show people how to text and tweet.

What do we do every day which we could share with another?

Meditation 4

The Bear Lady and Repurposing

Just as we sometimes repurpose our lives, we own things we could repurpose. What do we have laying around? Before you throw large quantities away, ask someone crafty or creative what they could possibly be used for. Here are some answers given:

1. Repurpose those thick socks and buttons into puppets.
2. Repurpose the left-over buttons or fabric to decorate picture frames for yard sales.
3. Decorate pine cones for various crafts. (Thank you, Jim Pittman!)
4. Put broken colored glass in container to use for stained glass decorations.

How many of you remember Ann Dawson? Ann looked around one day and had some extra quilt stuffing and scraps of material. Her volunteer work at the hospital soon sparked an idea: she would begin *a bear ministry for children*. Soon she got a local business to donate stuffing and others brought their material to her. She loved sewing and took thousands of bears to scared little kids in the hospital. All this from noticing some stuffing and scraps.

Just as God can repurpose us, the Spirit can guide us in reimagining new ways to make all things new!

What ideas come to you?

Meditation 5

Begin By Asking

Sometimes we try to do things all alone when God never intended that. I shared in a meditation last year that every morning George Washington Carver sought God's wisdom about what he should do that day. Just that simple beginning brought amazing results since Carver was one of the most productive scientists American has known, inventing and creating

more uses for the peanut than anyone could have imagined.

If we are seeking to be the people God has created us to be, we need to begin each day by asking God to show us, to direct us, to lead us and inspire us. When we pray, we may ask him to lead us to people who share our passion and might do cooperative work together:

God of all wisdom, share your wisdom with every person at First Christian Church. Reveal to each one their gifts. Open them to the gifts of others and connect all of us to those with whom and for whom we can do work pleasing to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Meditation 6

Taking Some Time and Sometimes Starting Over

I once heard someone comment that since God took 7 days to create the world, we probably should not try to do everything in one day. Connections take time. Relationship building takes time. Planning takes time. Communication takes time and then more time. Details are important. Sometimes we need to start over, refine a project or idea, back up and try again.

Now, no project will be perfect and we don't want to be lost in what has been called "analysis paralysis," but we need to persevere, be patient, and keep our energy and enthusiasm high.

And how do we keep *enthusiasm*? Maybe by remembering that the word literally means *en* (in) *Theos* (God). When we stay "in God," we keep our spirits high. When we are led by "God's spirit," we are "inspired." Literally we are creatures "God breathed into."

Meditation 7

Making All Things New

In Isaiah 43:19, the prophet writes, *“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”*

Our congregational life has changed from 1912. But would you go back to that time? Really, would you? And go through WW 1, the Great Depression, WW 2, the Holocaust, the Korean War? Now you may say, “Yes, but times were better then.” In some ways yes, but human nature is human nature in any age, and God is God in any age. We are here at 1609 E. Ash St. in a facility many would love to have with loving members one could only thank God for and a commitment to others that is amazing. When our annual report asked me to estimate the number of people we served last year through Last Saturday Supper, Pantry, other Benevolence gifts, helping with this project or that in our

mission giving, there was no way to number them all. Just the ones I counted numbered almost 1,000 and we were just getting started. The new emphasis is not to focus on your *in house membership numbers to the exclusion of your out of house membership numbers* – those you are Christ for, those to whom you embody the life of Jesus. Growth is to be measured by the depth of width of our ministry and life together. When we look at it that way, we have a large congregation and we pray, that by God's grace, it will keep growing and flourishing. May it be so.