

Simple Gifts

In his book, Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster suggests a number of options for service that are open to all of us and need to be recognized by anyone attentive to volunteering. All these areas of service are certainly needed in the gathered/scattered church:

- The service of hiddenness. These are acts of service or gifts of money that are shared anonymously for the joy of giving. It doesn't matter who gets the credit.
- The service of small things. It's pitching in, or lending a hand. These gifts create the climates we live in. Paul Scherer points out, "You aren't likely to be sent out under the will of God to do startling, impossible things. You are likely to be sent out to do the quiet, unspectacular things that matter precisely where you are and with what you have."
- The service of guarding the reputation of others. This is the commitment to keep from the backbiting or gossiping that can so easily destroy persons, even groups, in the church. We have a tendency in churches to slowly kill off people with words, innuendoes and accusations. "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is simply not true. Words can kill people, their confidence, self-esteem, initiative, and hope, and even eventually their health. How many people have been driven out of church because of the lack of this particular gift??
- The service of being served. We have had the notion that it is more blessed to give than to receive drummed into us so often that we have forgotten that it is also a blessing to be the receiver. This is often a gift given to us by the chronically ill or disabled among us.
- The service of common courtesy. How precious this has become in our hurried and worried world! "Please", "thank you", "excuse me", whatever words will affirm someone's worth.
- The service of hospitality. This means opening our homes and lives to others, not just making a coffee.
- The service of listening. We live in a society of strangers, where small talk abounds. How the world needs listeners, those who have the gift of non-possessive caring!
- The service of sharing the Word of God with one another. We are all called to be witnesses, not attorneys, not juries, not judges, but witnesses to sharing what God has done in our lives.
- The service of bearing the burdens of each other. Nouwen says that "we must be able to avoid the distance of pity as well as the exclusiveness of sympathy." Compassion is what counts.

(Adapted from a speech of Marlene Wilson, 2000)