Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod

Festival de los Regalos de Dios

Planning Guide

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Credits

This guide accompanies a three-part videotape, "Festival de los regalos de Dios," and a set of eight stewardship tracts, "Los dones," (Concordia Publishing House No. 16-6060). Together with the videotape and tracts, this guide helps stewardship leaders in Hispanic/Latino Luth-eran congregations conduct a weekend stewardship festival about personal and congregational gifts.

The development of Los regalos Project and this planning guide was funded by the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, with generous support from Aid Association for Lutherans, a fraternal organization.

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Festival de los Regalos de Dios

Planning Guide

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Festival de los Regalos de Dios

About los Regalos

A **word** from the planning team

Welcome to the Festival of God's Gifts! In just a few weeks, you'll be saying that to the members of your congregation, and to their families and guests from the community. We're the members of the planning team, and we want to welcome you to this planning guide. We're very happy that you decided to offer this festival as a part of your congregation's life together.

When we first began the planning for this festival, we were overwhelmed with the depth and breadth of the giftedness of Hispanic/Latino Lutherans throughout the country. As we talked to Christians just like you, we discovered how richly God has blessed our communities of faith.

"Los regalos de Dios" was born out of a sense that our congregations could benefit from knowing their members' gifts. We also thought that by using those gifts increasingly for God's work through our congregations, all of us could help ensure the health of Lutheran Christianity.

In these pages, we offer the best work of each one of us who have been part of this planning. In our five years of work together, we have discovered new excitement and energy about the future of our congregations. We want you to feel the same about your church, and so we offer this planning guide as a gift of God for you!

May God richly bless the work you do to bring the Gospel into the lives of your congregation members!

Los Regalos planning team members, left to right: José Miguel Díaz-Rodríguez, Lori Claudio, Evelyn Soto. Second row: Roberto González, Héctor Hoppe, Laurel Hensel, Ron Nelson, Bob Sitze. Not pictured: Karl Heimer

About the Festival de los Regalos de Dios

The Festival is a two-day celebration of the gifts God has given you and your congregation. It is comprised of three parts—we'll call them "events" in this guide.

Participants in these events will:

- Discover God's gifts in themselves and in their lives.
- Rejoice in the gifts of God in their families and in their congregation.
- Increase in their generous giving of their gifts in God's service inside and outside this congregation.

Los regalos is a festival, and so the people you invite will share several enjoyable experiences during their time together. They will:

- Share personal stories about their life and faith.
- Sing, eat, dance and play together!
- Watch and react to a dramatic videotape of the stories of struggle, faith and hope of Christians like them.
- Enjoy viewing a "gallery' of the individual and family legacies of your congregation.
- Worship and praise God for all God's blessings in their lives.
- Make a commitment to help fund the mission of God in this congregation.

What's in this planning guide?

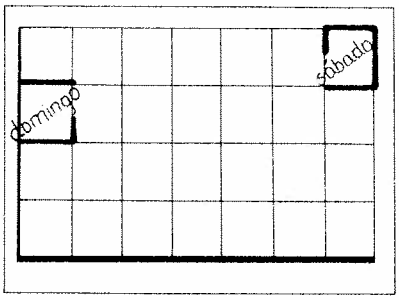
This guide can help you design your own Festival, taking advantage of the assets of your congregation. It includes:

- Step-by-step planning helps for each part of the festival. (SEE THE SECTION "PLANNING THE EVENT.")
- Hints for getting ready for the festival. (SEE THE SECTION "PREPARATION.")
- Original copies of all materials you will duplicate for the festival. (SEE THE SECTION "ORIGINAL COPIES.")
- Additional materials you can use to expand the festival over time. (SEE THE SECTION "MISCELLANEOUS.")

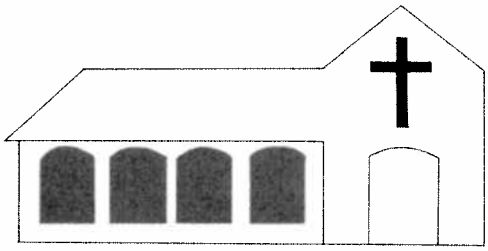
As you page through this guide, imagine how individual people fit into the event. How do their gifts get noticed? How do you bring together the leaders who will help make this event happen? How do you make this event a valuable experience for members of your surrounding community?

Brief **description** of the festival

Here are some of the notes and diagrams the planning team made as we constructed Los regalos. Perhaps they'll help you understand the size and scope of the festival you plan.



Ideally, Los regalos happens over two days, all day Saturday and Sunday morning and afternoon.



The festival uses the inside and outside facilities of your building.

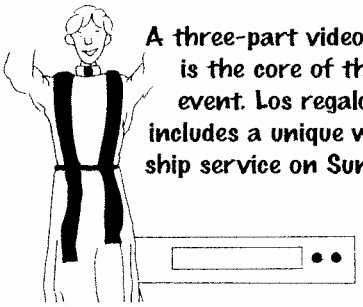
LEGACY
ASSETS
FUTURE
HOPE
FAMILY
HISTORY
GIFTS

Los regalos helps you start down many interesting paths.

OPTIONS

You can assemble and adapt the elements and events in the festival to match your setting.

The Festival celebrates the gifts of ALL God's people, including children. Families and guests from the community are invited, too.



A three-part videotape is the core of the event. Los regalos includes a unique worship service on Sunday.

MISSION

Los regalos helps your congregation fund God's mission, and helps you see yourselves as uniquely capable.

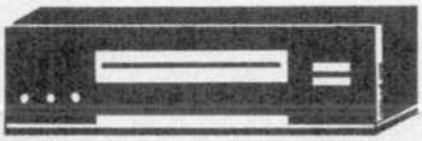
On the following page you will find a copy of a map of the entire festival. You might want to duplicate it for quick reference as you plan how to make your own unique festival.

The Festival of the Gifts of God

Preparation
(Weeks Before)
Suggestions and hints on how to get ready for the Festival.

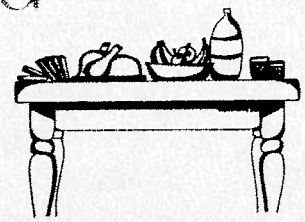
Event 1
God's Gifts to Us
(Saturday Morning)

Welcome/Devotions
Bible Conversations
Songs
Activities, "Getting to Know You" Game, "Lining Up" (optional)
Video Part 1 viewing
Stories and Sharing
Video Part 2 viewing
Activity, "What's a Gift?"
Activity, "My Gifts"



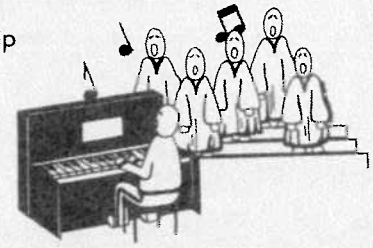
Meal
(Saturday Noon)

Shared or catered food
Guided conversation
"Guess Who? Gallery" and Contest
Entertainment



Event 2
God's Gifts in This Church
(Saturday Afternoon)

Presentation/Activity, "Beyond Limosna"
Video Part 3 viewing
Activity, "Our Church, Our Neighborhood, Our World"
Getting Ready for Worship



Event 3
Dedicating Our Gifts
(Sunday Morning)

Processional
Worship and Dedication of Gifts
Celebration Meal

Additional Options
(Sunday Afternoon)

Suggestions for offering a community fair, congregational picnic or family time at church.

Follow-up

Expanding and continuing the good things that happened during the festival.

What will the festival accomplish?

To put it simply, the purpose of the Festival de los regalos de Dios is to increase stewardship in your congregation.

What we mean by "stewardship," however, is a very large and ambitious idea. (See the following section for more about stewardship.) So you can expect that the festival will end with a variety of outcomes for you and your congregation.

Here are some examples:

1. Members will know each other better, as they really think of themselves.
2. You will all discover new assets, new capabilities among your members.
3. You may rethink the way you begin and sustain new programs in your congregation. Instead of trying to find people to fill volunteer positions, you will be asking members to follow their passions and use their gifts for God's purposes.
4. Because they will be free to use their gifts in new ways, new members may be attracted to your congregation.
5. Members on the edge of your congregation may be drawn back into the vibrant center of your life together.
6. You will have fun together!
7. More people—members and non-members—may contribute more time and money to the work of your congregation.
8. You will all feel blessed by God with unique gifts you possess, even some you did not realize were important.
9. You will all see how your lives make a difference in the world, how God's work gets done.
10. You will all be more willing to try new ideas in your congregation, and in your life.

Who will attend?

This festival is a unique way to involve all members of your congregation, invited visitors and special guests, to experience some of the excitement that happens when God's people come together in one place, united in common mission and purpose.

Children

Children are included in the activities of the festival, except perhaps infants and toddlers. Pre-school, elementary and middle school children will find many of the activities enjoyable and challenging them to use their unique gifts. Check the Event Plans to see how each of the activities has been written so that whole families can participate in the festival together.

Youth

Junior and senior-high youth will find certain aspects of the festival very engaging of their inner selves. The video spotlights several young Christians, and the activities of each event allow youth to participate fully. Because of the festive tone of this weekend, youth can also function as effective leaders of some of the activities. Consider asking several teenagers to be part of the planning process.

Visitors and guests

Although there are some places in the festival where guests might feel like they are participating in a "family gathering"—honest conversations, joking and laughing, talking about the congregation's life—the overall tone of the event is light and enjoyable. Hence, guests of any kind—whether special dignitaries, prospective members, neighborhood residents or "inactive members"—will enjoy their time with your congregation during this festival.

Members of host or neighboring congregations

If applicable in your situation, invite members of host or partner congregations to this event. Because this festival is a unique combination of fun, learning and inspiration, they will be heartened and encouraged by their participation in the event.

What is "stewardship"?

For Hispanic/Latino Christians, "stewardship" may not be easy to understand. As in the Anglo Christian culture, perhaps the teachings have been inadequate, or perhaps other ways of learning stewardship haven't been tried.

Among Hispanics, the Anglo-Saxon word "steward" has been translated—some would say mistranslated—as mayordomo. Even the translation in this guide—administrator—may still leave something missing from what the Bible proclaims about stewardship.

During the time of the festival, try to think of "stewardship" as a big word. Think of it as a word that pulls together everything that means "being a Christian every day of your life." Think of stewardship the way St. Paul thought of it: fulfilling God's plan for the world by doing what God best equips you to do.

In that way of thinking, all Christians are stewards. All Christians give, at church and at their workplace. All Christians have a place in God's plan for the world. All Christians do part of God's work. And all Christians have gifts, assets, capabilities to do their part of God's work.

We've included a short written piece, called "Stewardship Among Hispanics," on pages 93-97 in the Miscellaneous section of this guide. The pages can serve you well as a way of preparing for the festival. This essay shows how Hispanic/Latino Christians may have unique ways of understanding and practicing stewardship. When you've read the pages, perhaps you'll see how well-gifted you are, and how well you have been practicing stewardship all your life!

What is it about "gifts"?

Popular comedians use the phrase "What is it about...?" to begin their routines. Usually the question is the start of a humorous jab at a subject that is just a little odd. For example, "What is it about using a talking dog to persuade people to eat human food? Am I supposed to think this dog knows something I don't know, or what?"

We start this section, "What is it about gifts?" because it might feel just a little odd to base a whole weekend at your church on the idea of "gifts." Instead of jabbing at the subject, though, we're presenting "gifts" as a joyful way to approach your life together in your congregation. Like God approaches the subject...

So, what is it about "gifts," anyway? Here are some ideas to keep in mind. You may find yourself enjoying these ideas so much you'll be smiling and laughing. What's odd? That this whole idea of "God giving gifts" is true for you and for every member of your congregation! God chose you to be his own, and has given you gifts you don't even know about!

So, did you find yourself smiling at the possibility that all this "gifts" talk is really about you, your family, your congregation? We thought so...

Gift Ideas

Here are some gifts-ideas to keep close to your heart as you plan this weekend:

All gifts are a result of God's grace, which is always active in the lives of God's people. (See Ephesians 2:8-9 or 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.)

If you want examples, the New Testament has lists of them! (See Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4; Hebrews 5:14; and 1 Corinthians 7.)

Part of God's work is to put gifted people right here, in your congregation. (See Deuteronomy 8:11-18 or Acts 17:26-27.)

God's people are gifts to one another. (See 1 Corinthians 12:1.)

One of our responsibilities as God's people is to use the gifts we've been given. (See Ephesians 2:10 or Hebrews 12:1-2.)

It is a joyful thing to use the gifts God gives, and we can always celebrate the results. (See Psalm 102:18; Psalm 146; or Philippians 4:4-7.)

One good way to use God's gifts is to share them with others. (See Galatians 6:10 or 2 Corinthians 9:12-15.)

We can encourage each other to use our gifts. (See Romans 12:8 or Hebrews 3:13.)

When we identify and share gifts, and encourage each other in their use, we build up our congregations as families of faith, right now and into the future. (See 3 John 3-4; 1 Corinthians 1:7, 7:7; 1 Corinthians 12:12; 1 Peter 4:10; Galatians 6:10; or Ephesians 2:13.)

Another way to think of "being gifted people" is to think of ourselves as people whose lives have been changed by the Holy Spirit. (See 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:23; or Romans 5:7.)

Here's a joyful idea: We can expect to see growth in ourselves and our congregation as a result of these gifts. (See 1 Corinthians 14:12; or 2 Corinthians 3:3.)

If God asks the question, "So what are you going to do with all my gifts to you," we answer by living our lives in service to others. We're responding to God's grace in Jesus Christ. (See Psalm 116:12-14, 17-19; or 2 Corinthians 9:12-15.)

God commends proper use of the gifts we have been given. (See Ephesians 6:7-8; or Colossians 3:23-24.)

Festival de los Regalos de Dios

Preparation for the festival

Festival de los Regalos de Dios

Preparation
for the festival

ou already know how you plan best. So we recommend that you prepare for this wonderful festival in the way that best fits your congregation and your setting. (We have included a simple planning form, "Planning the Festival," in the section, Original Copies.)

Consider some of these matters as you start your planning:

What are the big areas of planning?

This is a good question to answer right away. In its ideal form, the festival includes these elements:

Food preparation and serving

Preparation and clean up of the building and grounds

Entertainment (music, dancing, drama)

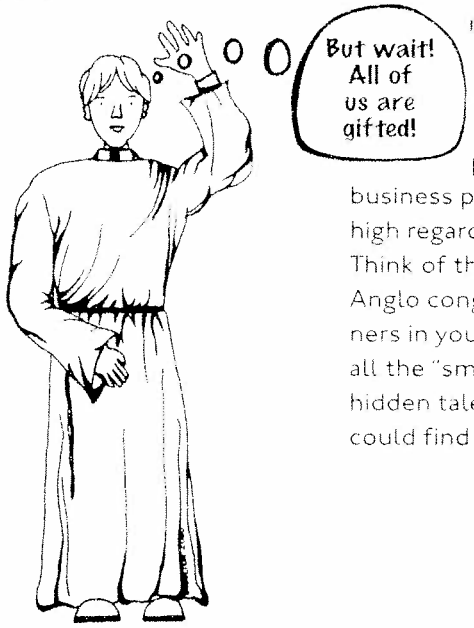
Activities (e.g. viewing video, presentations)

Worship planning

Distributing, collecting and counting commitment forms

Publicity and invitations

Other



Do your plans match your capabilities?

This festival can be as big or small as you like. What-ever the amount of your capabilities—musicians, actors, influential members of the community, indoor and outdoor space, capable leaders—you can plan for a festival that accomplishes much for your congregation.

But there is a trick to the answer to this question: Do not underestimate your capabilities. Remember, for example, to include non-members (spouses?) who love your congregation, or local politicians or business people who have high regard for your ministry. Think of the members of an Anglo congregation that partners in your ministry. Think of all the "small gifts" and the hidden talents for which you could find good use.

What time, money and space will your festival require?

After you have thought about the capabilities and gifts available, think of what the festival will require in terms of money, time and physical location. Take a quick look through the Event Plans section of this guide to be sure that you will not be limited by time, money or space.

Again, do not underestimate the capabilities of your members or your surroundings. If inside space is limited, think how you could use outside space – parking lots, lawns, patios. If time is limited, think how you could cut down on planning meetings. If funds are scarce, think how food costs could be shared, how special donations, sponsorships or grants could be secured.

Who would be the ideal people to plan the festival?

Again, you already know who they are, so ask them! Don't be deterred from asking because someone is already too busy or too important or too distant. You have enough people in your congregation who know how to put together a 15th birthday party, a confirmation, a large wedding, block parties or a Three Kings Day gathering. This festival will be just as much fun!

When is the best time for the festival?

You know your congregation and community well, so you can find a good weekend when most people would be happy to come to a festival like this. You might think about:

- A time when no other events are scheduled.
- Times when this festival could accompany other events (such as a neighborhood carnival).
- Times when the weather will be good.
- A weekend when many visitors can be expected.
- A time when you are getting ready to plan for your congregation's financial budget.
- A time that is special for your congregation (e.g., anniversary, new pastor's installation, thank-you celebration for partner congregation.)
- A time that is special for your community.

Scheduling options

You might not want to offer the festival in one weekend. In that case, you will need to try one or more scheduling options, such as these:

Four shorter events:

Separate the festival into four shorter segments, one focused on each part of the videotape plus Sunday worship. Use Friday evening if needed, and shorten the time on Saturday. Decide at which event(s) you will serve a meal.

Friday Night	Saturday Morning	Saturday Afternoon	Sunday
Introductions	Video 2 and its activities	Limosna activities	Celebration worship & meal
Video 1 and its activities	Meal	Video 3 and its activities	
		Preparation for worship	

Several evenings in a row:

Extend the festival over several evenings, each beginning with a simple supper. Use the video segments on the first, second and third evenings. Add special entertainment for each evening. Finish the festival with a big Sunday celebration.

Evening 1	Evening 2	Evening 3	Evening 4	Sunday
Meal Entertainment Introductions Video 1 Activities	Meal Entertainment Video 2 Activities	Meal Entertainment Limosna Activities Video 3 Activities	Meal Entertainment Preparation for Worship	Celebration Worship and meal

Several Sundays:

The festival could be a series of special Sundays in your congregation. For each of two or three Sundays, follow your usual worship with a simple lunch and parts of the festival. On the final Sunday, offer the special worship outlined in this guide and a final meal and celebration. This option allows for further invitations, follow-up conversation and visits during each week between Sundays.

Sunday 1	Sunday 2	Sunday 3	Sunday 4	Sunday 5
Meal Entertainment Introductions Video 1 Activities	Meal Entertainment Video 2 Activities	Meal Entertainment Limosna Activities Video 3 Activities	Meal Entertainment Preparation for Sunday 5 Worship	Celebration Worship and meal

If you choose other options than those suggested in this planning guide, be careful of these factors:

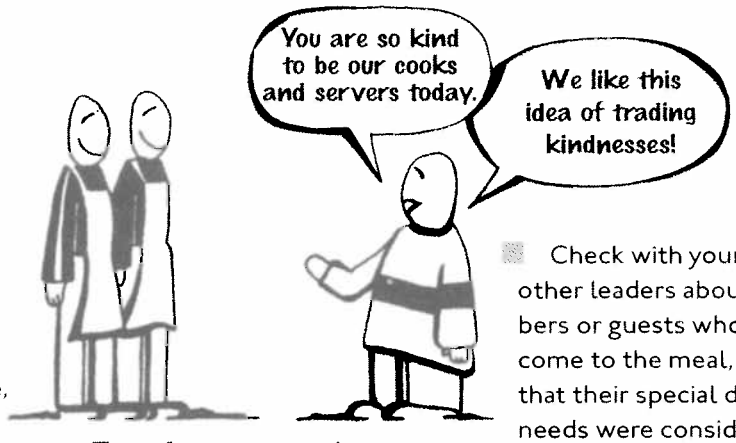
How many people might miss some events

The amount of additional work necessary

Ways in which participants can review what happened previously

Good places in the event plan to stop and start each new festival day

The availability of the building (or other locations) for multiple dates.



Planning hints and ideas

We've included some hints and ideas for your use, things we've learned over the years in our own congregations. These items are sorted by areas of responsibility.

Learning about the festival themes

Your planning should start with some study or conversation about the general themes of the entire festival and each event as well. You can familiarize yourself with the spiritual and Scriptural bases of the event by:

- Read and discuss the Bible study, "You are a pneumatikon." A reproducible original is found in the "Original Copies" section of this guide.
- Try out some of the thematic activities inside the events.
- Read and talk about the matter of "gifts," using the Bible study located in the "Miscellaneous" section of this guide.
- Later in your preparation time, rehearse some of the content presentations with members of the planning group.
- Read through the three plays, located in the "Miscellaneous" section of this guide.

Food preparation and serving

- Ask members of a neighboring congregation or local service group to prepare or serve the meal. When they have their own festival, you can prepare or serve their meal. This trading of favors ensures that all members of your congregation can participate fully in all the activities of the festival.
- If you will ask congregation members to bring food to share, consider variations on the food that is brought, such as "favorite food of my grandmothers" or "a food from a special time in my life."
- Think about adding recipe cards or short descriptions of the food, perhaps posted on a wall or table near the food.
- Ask men, youth and children to offer their food-preparation skills, too!
- If you decide to have a catered meal, consider food from another ethnic group in your neighborhood.
- Ask neighborhood groups or businesses for donations for this meal. Invite them specially to come to the festival.
- Check with your pastor or other leaders about members or guests who might come to the meal, to ensure that their special dietary needs were considered.
- Make the time of food preparation and cleanup as enjoyable as the rest of the festival! (You already knew that hint, right?)
- If you will serve snacks and beverages throughout the event, remember the needs of children as well as adults.
- Think how this meal or these snacks might be a surprise treat or very special for this festival. (For example, a large cake, treats to take home as gifts from the festival, or artistic table decorations.)

Preparation and clean up of the building and grounds

- Think how your building and the area around it can be made attractive. Don't overlook flowers and potted plants borrowed from members!
- Where could you store unneeded items that might clutter up the space and make it unattractive?
- For fun, think how you might make a "stage" for the entertainment, perhaps even outside.

Plan for some entertaining signs that help festival guests know where and when things are taking place.

Ask families to be responsible for various tasks, or groups of friends. That may be easier than forming a committee.

Take a "Five Senses Tour" of your building and grounds, as though you were a new member or guest at the festival. What do you see, hear, taste, smell and feel that you will enjoy?

Entertainment

Ask congregation members to be the preferred performers.

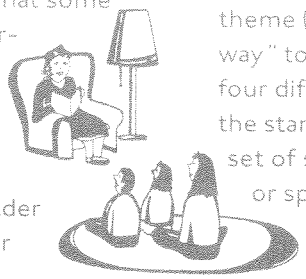
Think about an "art show," either inside or outside the building. Local artists, including children and youth, could be featured.

Consider continuous entertainers, like clowns or puppeteers or musicians, who could move around the facility.

Invite members of your partner or host congregation(s) and community guests for the entertainment segments of the festival.

If you will concentrate the entertainment during the Saturday meal time, find a master-of-ceremonies who can introduce each entertainer and keep the audience happy.

Don't forget that some of the best entertainers are storytellers, and that some of the best storytellers are the older members of your congregation.



If you want to make the entertainment time a kind of "talent festival," don't overlook children and youth as talented individuals, too.

Here are some entertainers who might be fun to invite: Children and their pets, orators, magicians, individuals who play unusual musical instruments, people with unusual and entertaining physical skills, individuals visiting from another country, comedians.

Here are some other ways to think about "entertainment": A "quiz show" (as though from television); a humorous telenovella segment; a contest, mental or physical; whole family games; variations on a theme (such as the "best way" to dance the samba, or four different stories about the start of this church); a set of skits (rehearsed or spontaneous); or a festival of singing folk songs.

The Miscellaneous section of this guide includes several reproducible scripts that can be played as readers' theater—no rehearsal required and minimal props. They also serve as publicity for the entire festival.

Have fun trying to find and invite congregation members to show some entertaining skills that perhaps few others know about!

Assemble displays of members' hobbies and talents (e.g., collections, handiwork, crafts)

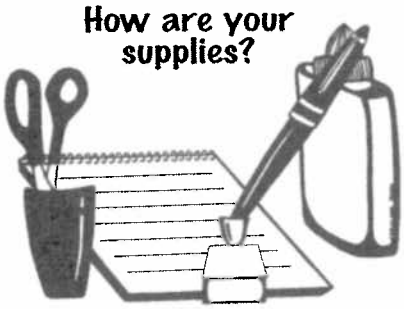
Talented Person	Hidden/Unknown Talent	Who Will Invite Him/Her
Alfredo	Tells funny stories	Marisol and her children
Marisol	Cartoonist	Her children
Pastor Ruiz	Plays pan flute	His wife or Sra. Sanchez

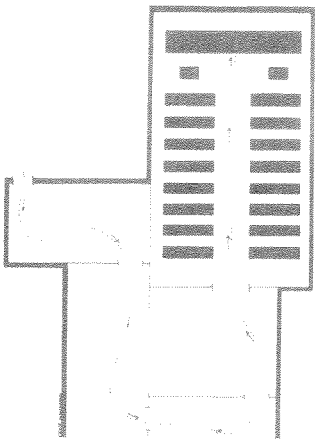
Activities

- Think who could best lead each of the activities you have chosen. It might be fun to have a variety of leaders for the weekend, each responsible for a specific activity.
- Don't forget to preview the videos at least once.
- It never hurts to have a few extra activities on hand and ready to go, just in case you have extra time, or another activity doesn't work very well. The Miscellaneous section has some suggestions.
- Imagine your congregation members doing these activities together, in groups or in families. Think how you will give directions and answer questions about the activities. Sometimes it helps to rehearse or explain an activity with a friend or spouse, just to see if the directions make sense to them.
- Because several activities require making copies for each participant, make the copies in advance and be ready to make extra copies in case of a large turnout.
- Although we have indicated approximate time needed for each activity, check to see if our ideas match how quickly or slowly your participants might work.

Worship planning

- The outline for the worship service (IN THE PLANNING THE EVENT SECTION OF THIS GUIDE) suggests ways to make a liturgical worship service special. This is a place to add excitement to your congregation's worship of God, and a place to have fun, too!
- Here's another good place to involve many congregation members, including youth and children. (See the special preparation notes for the Sunday worship on page X for other ideas.)
- Because the festival worship is going to be unique, you might use worship planning time as a way to help members learn about liturgical worship. Talk together about the meaning of elements such as the Kyrie, Holy Communion, the readings, the Benediction.
- Because this is a festival of gifts from God, think about all the ways that this idea could be experienced by worshipers. Remember the "Five Senses Tour", and try it on the worship space, the elements of the liturgy, maybe even what worshipers are given to wear or hold.
- Each element of the worship service can be made special by your work. See the Sunday worship segment of the Event Plan section of this guide for ideas.
- If you want to ask a special person to preach or lead worship that Sunday, who might that be? Think of former members, guests, and church officials.
- Consider who among your members might give especially powerful testimonies about God's gifts in their lives. Yes, children and youth, too!





The processional is a kind of parade into church. How might you add to that processional? Think of the route for the processional. Where might it travel, besides up the aisle toward the altar?

As you choose the options for Sunday worship, keep in mind how you will honor the gifts of all God's people. This is the key idea that will make worship especially meaningful on this special Sunday.

Perhaps you can try new ways to distribute Holy Communion on this day of gifts. How could that happen in your congregation?

Is it possible that some of the "entertainment" from other parts of the festival could also be part of worship? (For example, stories, puppets or dancing)

Commitment forms

As you prepare commitment forms for distribution to members, plan written or spoken explanations that will accompany the forms. Remember that you are asking for financial and personal commitments to support God's ministry in this congregation, in the community and in members' families.

Samples of commitment forms—"Mi promesa de compromiso con el Señor" and "Called by the Spirit"—are included in the "Original Copies" section of this guide. See the instructions for participants for the form you choose.

Decide early in the planning process how you will distribute and collect the forms. Choose a method that matches your congregation's gifts, even if it may be new or slightly uncomfortable.

Ask several individuals to serve as commitment counters.

Ask several others to make follow-up phone calls or visits on individuals who do not complete and turn in their commitment forms.

If you will use other stewardship materials—such as posters or letterhead—order those materials as soon as possible.

How could some gifted artists and writers work together to construct your own theme art, your own letters about commitments, your own forms? Don't overlook talented high school students or children's art.

SEVEN IDEAS ABOUT CONTRIBUTIONS

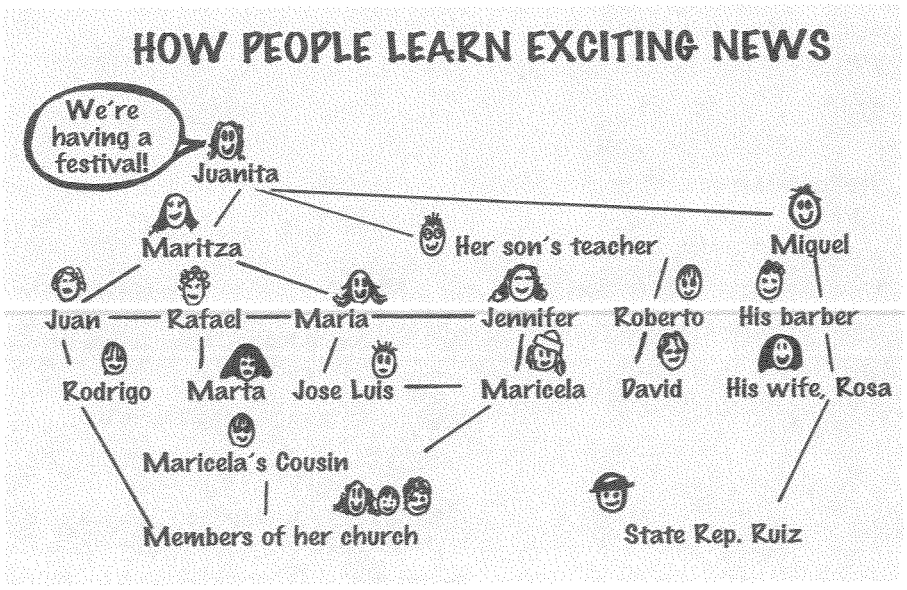
1. All that we have comes from God.
2. A good question: How do we use God's gifts to accomplish God's purposes in the best way?
3. People give to people who ask.
4. Generosity is a gift of God that keeps on giving.
5. Be ready to answer the question, "What good will my offerings do?"
6. Regular giving ensures our church's continuing health.
7. Hispanic/Latino Christians are generous people.

- Decide early how you will approach the funding of the congregation's mission from the viewpoint of "gifts." This may mean re-examining some of the ways you have approached this matter in the past.
- If the term, "commitment forms," is not familiar to your congregation, use another term that they do understand. (For example, "estimate of giving" or "pledge cards.")
- Think how you will total the commitments and report them during the Sunday meal. How can the totaled commitments be seen in a positive way, no matter what the total?

Publicity and invitations

- Because this event is unique in the life of the church, invite special guests to the festival. Think about public officials, members and leaders from other congregations, church officials and members of local organizations.
- Spotlight certain segments of the festival to be places where special guests are invited. For example, the Sunday worship and the meal afterward, or the video segments.
- If the festival will also serve as a way of inviting friends and relatives to become part of your congregation, think how they could be invited in person.
- Find or make a good logo or symbol for your festival. See how it might look on T-shirts or caps or other forms of special publicity.
- Think what has been the most effective means of publicity you have used in the past. It will probably work just as well for this festival.

If each member of your church tells four other people...



Ask members of the congregation to be your publicists, too. Ask them who they know who might work at newspaper, radio or other media outlets. Remember that the most effective publicity is word-of-mouth.

If you have a web site or choose to place an ad, try to include an interesting photograph, which usually means people doing something interesting. (And remember, you are interesting people!)

If you wanted to "think big" for publicity, you might consider billboards, distributing fliers, getting an interview on local radio or cable television, or getting sponsorships from community organizations or corporations.

If you choose to use one or more of the dramatization scripts in the Miscellaneous section of this guide, select and adapt those which will fit with the unique qualities of your festival.

Plan how you will welcome special guests and make them feel at home. Your hospitality will shine in this festival!

Other

If you expect many infants and pre-school children to attend the festival, plan how you might offer childcare or otherwise help parents during the weekend.

If you intend follow-up activities or events, choose which you will use and plan with them in mind. (SEE THE MISCELLANEOUS SECTION OF THIS GUIDE FOR IDEAS.)

You might want to think about the matter of name tags, especially if many members do not know each other well, or if you anticipate many guests. How can you make name tags interesting and fun to look at?

If you intend to videotape portions of the festival—for shut-ins or replay at other congregational events—make arrangements for a videographer. Help this person choose locations for filming and for microphones.

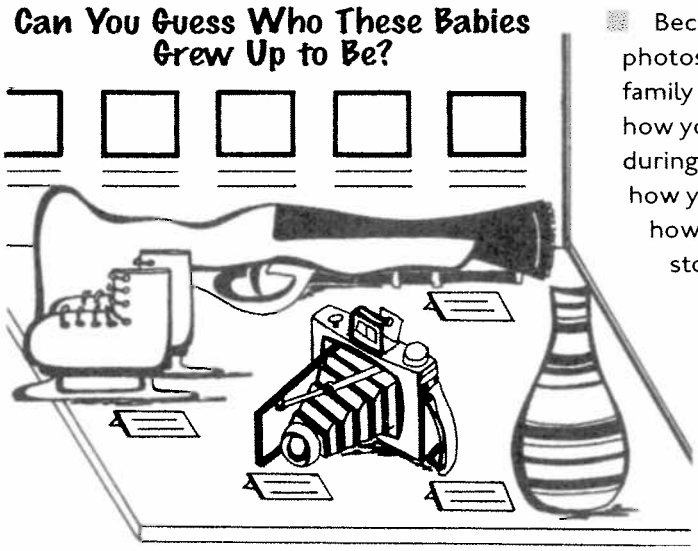
Send personal thank-you notes on stationery that features "gifts art" made by the children of your congregation.

Specific planning tasks

There are some parts of the festival that you will need to prepare well in advance of the festival. We thought you'd like to know about them right away.

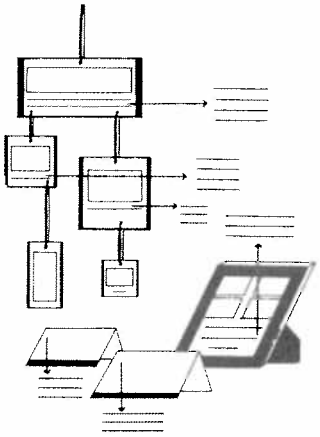
"The Legacy Gallery"

In the section "Planning the Event," this guide suggests an activity called "The Legacy Gallery." The Gallery is a collection of photos and artifacts from each individual or family in your congregation that is displayed for the amazement and enjoyment of all who visit the "gallery." Some congregations may want to make a guessing contest out of some of the photos, too. The gallery matches some of the content in the festival videotape.



You can prepare for this gallery with these simple tasks:

- Several weeks or months before your festival, make a general announcement about the gallery (or the contest). Tell people why it is significant for your congregation: You are all amazing, gifted people. A collection of photos and artifacts will show how our congregation has a legacy of being blessed.
- Specify a place and time you'd like to collect all these items and photos. Ask for some written explanations and captions for the items.
- In case members don't understand "artifacts" as a part of the gallery, explain that they are items that show as much as a picture. For example, if you are a gifted musician, I could see that in a photo of you playing your instrument or in an actual piece of music you wrote or played at a recital.
- Because some artifacts or photos will be cherished family treasures, determine how you will keep them safe during the festival. Plan now how you will frame photos, how artifacts will be stored and protected.



- Think how simple explanations could be put on cards or poster boards. Be sure to write, print or type large enough that the explanations can be read from a distance of about five feet.
- You may need to approach individual members and ask them specifically about photos that show their legacies in other places and life situations. Help them understand how other members will learn from their personal history, and will get to know them more personally.
- Think carefully where you will place the gallery. In some places, an outside location would be good because lighting would be wonderful and you can spread tables in a wide area. In other places, an indoor location would be best, because you can keep track of the photos and artifacts. In that case, remember to leave plenty of space around tables or walls, and to check that lighting is adequate.

If you will be displaying this gallery along with an art show, think how the two ideas will work together.

If you will conduct a guessing contest ("Who IS this baby today?" or "Who does this artifact belong to?"), be sure to offer some kind of simple prize.

Arrange to store and return photos or items that are not claimed at the end of the festival.

An idea: Put up the gallery several weeks BEFORE the festival, as a way to encourage people to attend.

Another idea: Over a period of several weeks before, during and after the festival, keep adding items to the gallery, or add whole new sections in other locations in your building.

Showing the videos

The content of the festival is centered on a three-part video that tells the inspiring stories of several individuals who have, by God's grace, overcome difficult life circumstances and continue to live their lives for God's purposes. Because the video is a powerfully emotional core of the entire festival, it is important that festival participants experience the video without any difficulties. The video is close-captioned in English, for bilingual audiences.

You can prepare for the showing of the videos by these simple tasks:

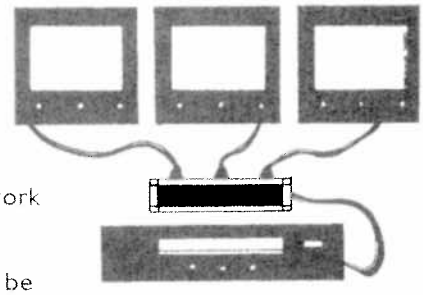
Preview the video segments, keeping notes about what you see. The section, Event Plans, contains summaries of the videos and good follow-up activities, but it always helps you to be a good leader if you know the video content beforehand.

Because the video segments are very evocative, they elicit strong emotions among viewers. You might want to keep track of your feelings as you watch the video segments.

You may need to rent or borrow video equipment for the festival, especially if you anticipate a fairly large number of people. Several options are possible:

Borrow or rent a video projector and large screen.

Rent or borrow several monitors, and a device that splits the signal from the VCR into several separate cable lines and hook it to several monitors for simultaneous viewing. Check with the audio visual company to make sure that all the fittings and cables will work together.



If you will be using the video in a bilingual setting, make sure that your system has the capacity for close-captioned viewing.

Rent or borrow a larger monitor for your VCR. A 48" or larger monitor can work well with a group as large as 50-75 people.

Check your sound system for adequate sound levels in all areas of the room. This is important because the video features many people talking personally, as though directly to each member of the audience.

Getting ready for Sunday worship

The Sunday worship for this festival is a unique adaptation of liturgical worship to include the "gifts" theme. One of the activities of the previous afternoon or evening is a time of preparing for Sunday worship.

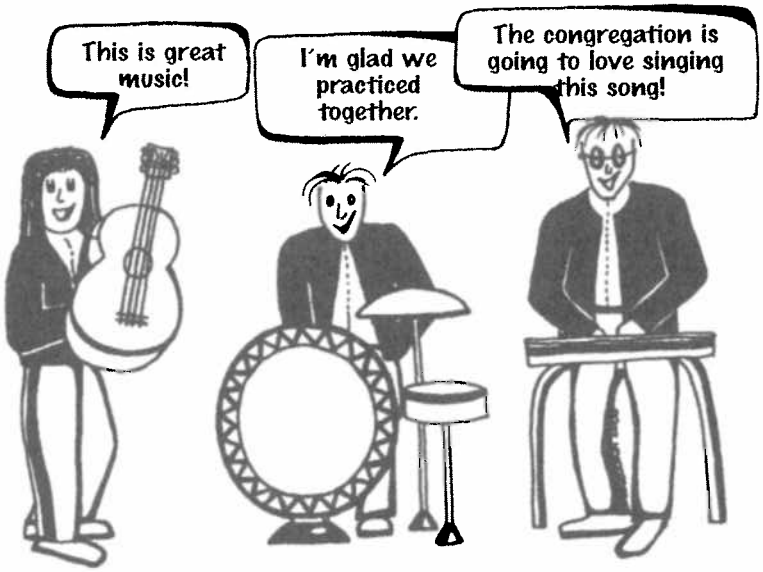
This preparation includes:

- Understanding the theme and the texts for the day
- Making special decorations
- Distributing commitment forms
- Practicing readings, dramas or special songs.

In order to be ready for this activity, you will need to accomplish the following tasks:

- Decide how you will conduct this worship service. What readings will you use, what hymns, what form of "sermon," what special liturgical variations you will use, what special paraments, vestments and decorations you will need.
- On the basis of these decisions, determine what festival participants can realistically prepare in about one hour of time on Saturday night. Other preparations may need to be started weeks earlier.
- If you want participants to start thinking about the texts for the day, provide Bibles and a series of questions or items to talk about together.
- If you intend to sing special or new music together, musicians will need to practice before the festival. You may need to provide copies of the music for participants to use on that Saturday session.
- If you will be practicing a drama—such as a dramatic reading of the lessons or a dramatic sermon—make copies of the scripts. If congregation members will write their own "script" as a part of the Saturday afternoon or evening event, reserve a space in the building where they can talk together with a minimum of distraction.
- If you will distribute commitment forms during this time on Saturday, you should duplicate (and perhaps personalize) enough forms for each family or congregation member. (In some congregations, children and youth also are asked to make financial commitments.) Sample reproducible forms for both financial and personal commitment are included in the Original Copies section of this guide.
- If you will be making your worship space especially festive, look it over with these matters in mind:

1. How can the decorations be carried in as part of a processional?
2. How easily can items be placed, attached or hung as part of a processional?
3. How can the worship space be filled with adornments?



If you want to make decorations, special paraments or vestments for this day, provide ample supplies for the making of banners, pew decorations, bookmarks for hymnals, altar and pulpit cloths, flower arrangements, and other items.

If you will use homemade or ethnic bread and wine for the communion elements and communion ware, assign individuals the responsibility for finding or preparing these items.

If you share worship space with another congregation, arrange with them how your decorating of the space might be useful to them as well, or how this activity will take place.

See the following section of this guide for ideas of what you might do to make your worship space a place that shows your congregation's joy and gratitude for God's gifts.

Banners and other festive decorations

Your festival will be an enjoyable and exciting event if it includes a variety of items that draw participants' eyes toward the theme or otherwise brighten your physical space. Consider these tasks as preparations for decorating your festival space, including the worship space.

Using the tracts, "Los dones"

A sample copy of the eight-tract set, "Los dones," has been included in this guide. (The tracts are available from Concordia Publishing House, No. 16-6060, at the Spanish Resources toll-free number, 877.450.8694.) If you wish to use the tracts, you might prepare in these ways:

Read through the copies of the tracts, making notes about interesting ideas you find.

Order enough copies of the tract sets for each member of your planning committee or each congregation member. (The tracts are wrapped as sets for your convenience in distribution.)

Decide how you will use the sets, or individual tracts, in your Christian education program, as content for publicity or as follow-up for the festival.

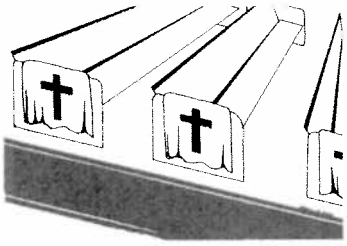
If you decide to use the tracts as discussion material for adult or intergenerational study classes, find a group leader and give instructions on how these tracts will fit with the festival.

If you will use the tracts as part of pre-festival publicity, choose which will accompany mailings, which will be distributed at church, and which best fit your festival.

Consider non-festival uses of the tracts, and save these copies for those uses. (For example, the tract, "Pastorear," might be helpful for young people in your congregation considering the vocation of Word and Sacrament ministry.)

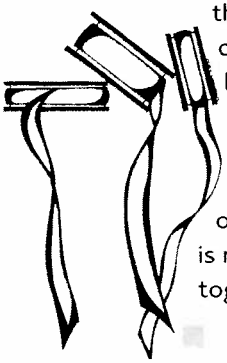
Ideas for Festive **Decorations**

Big banners draw participants' eyes upward or to the side. By their size they show that something important is happening in this place. Use inexpensive cloth, butcher paper, or poster boards taped together.



Pew decorations can be placed at the end of each pew, and can includes flowers, ribbons or simple messages on mini-banners.

Ribbons make inexpensive and attractive decorations that join together parts of the worship space, add color to clothing or hymnals, or add movement as the air stirs in a space. Ribbons can be purchased or made out of any material or item that is repeated and fastened together.

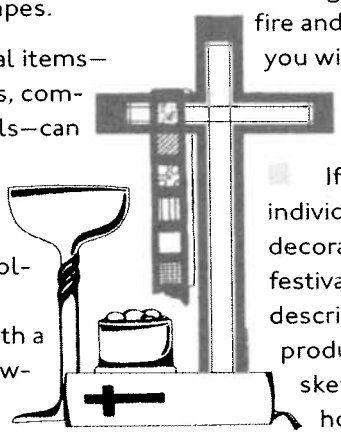


Altars and pulpits (and other tables or stands) can be decorated with simple mini-banners that suggest the "gifts" theme. Make sure that words and symbols can be seen from the back of the sanctuary.

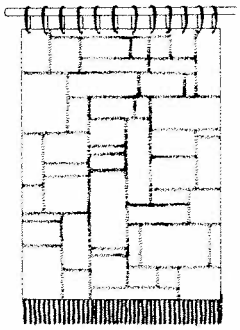
Bookmarks can adorn pew Bibles or hymnals. Art can be drawn on narrow strip of poster board, and laminated. Ribbons add a festive look to bookmarks.

Look at the space you want to decorate, and let your imagination soar. Think of places where items can be hung, added, attached to what already exists. (For example, small banners can be hung from overhead lights.) Remember to think large, filling the space with colors and shapes.

Processional items—crosses, Bibles, communion vessels—can be decorated with ribbons, or large swatches of colored cloth or paper, each with a symbol or drawing added.



Walls can be decorated with murals assembled on the spot, or pre-assembled and displayed as a banner.



Before you purchase any items, see what supplies are already available. For example, twenty sheets of colorful paper can be joined together to make a long banner. Or, a series of children's drawings about "gifts" can make a wonderfully colorful wall decoration.

If you will be using fresh flowers or potted plants as part of your decorating, make arrangements for their early arrival, placement and care before the festival.

Check with custodians or building trustees regarding fire and safety codes that you will need to observe as you plan decorations.

If families or individuals will prepare decorations before the festival, provide a brief description of the finished product—perhaps with a sketch—and an idea of how the item will add to the festival.

Decide how the decorations will be useful AFTER the festival. Will they stay in place for several weeks, given to congregation members, or stored for another use?

Planning the Event

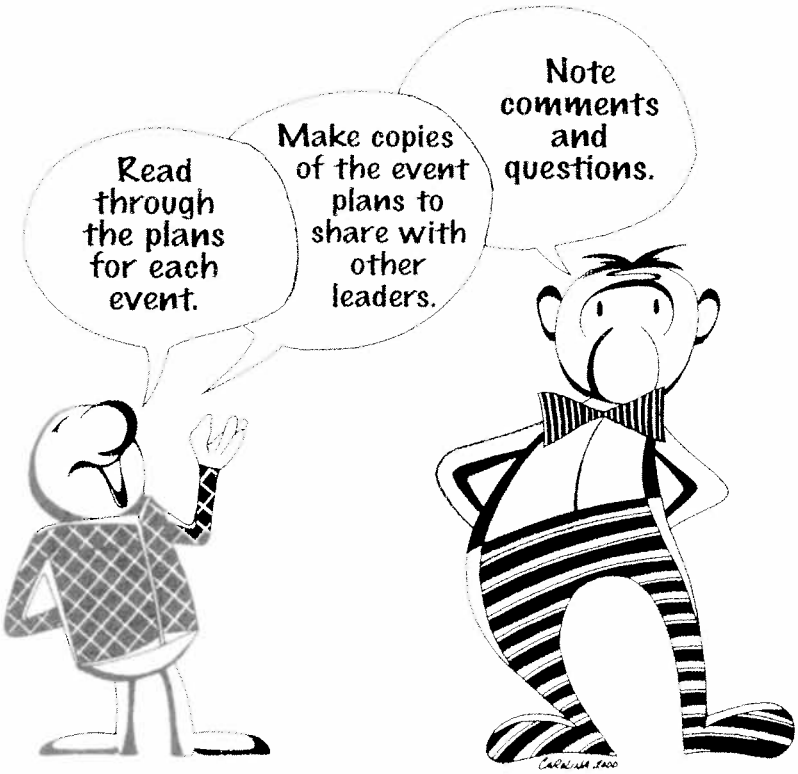
Festival de los regalos de Dios

Introduction

This section of the planning guide gives you step-by-step helps in conducting each of the three events that form the Festival de los regalos de Dios.

Each event has its own character, and works in a sequence of learning and festive activities that bring participants to understand and appreciate how their gifts help God's will to be carried out in this congregation and the world.

These plans, like all suggestions about this festival, should be adapted to fit the special gifts and assets of your congregation. The quality of your congregation's festival will depend on how you add and subtract elements of each event to make them effective tools for your congregation's spiritual and personal growth. To help you make the adaptations, we have included approximate time suggestions for each part of each event.



As you use this section of the planning guide, you will also be referring to the sections, Preparation and Miscellany. If you intend to expand the festival into Sunday afternoon or beyond, see "Additional Options" and "Follow-up," found later in this part of the guide.

Summary of Events

Event 1: God's Gifts to Us (3 HOURS)

In this first event, participants begin with prayer, Bible conversations and singing. They get to know each other in two enjoyable games, "Getting to Know You" and/or "Lining Up." They view Part 1 of the festival video, and share their reactions and their history. Part 2 of the video follows, with further sharing. Participants play with the question, "What's a Gift?" and assess their own giftedness. The first event lasts about three hours.

Meal (2 HOURS)

An enjoyable meal time occurs between the first and second events. During the meal, participants enjoy a meal together, including a time of guided table conversation. They visit a "Legacy Gallery" of photos and artifacts, and enjoy special festival entertainment. The meal time lasts about two hours.

Event 2: God's Gifts in this Church (3 HOURS)

In the second event, participants listen and learn about how "limosna" can be a starting place for understanding how God's mission can be funded in their congregation. They watch Part 3 of the festival video, and engage in the activity, "Our Church, Our Neighborhood, Our World." They complete the event by preparing for Sunday's festive worship. Commitment forms are distributed, for collection at the final event. This event lasts about three hours.

Event 3: Dedicating Our Gifts (4 HOURS)

This event is comprised of a special worship service, focused on the matter of "gifts," and a celebratory meal. The worship service is anchored by "The Blessings of the Gifts," the Word of God and Holy Communion. At the meal, the congregation celebrates the collected commitments, and enjoys several whole-group activities. Including worship, this event lasts about four hours.

Summary of Video Segments

The close-captioned video, "Festival de los regalos de Dios," is comprised of three parts. Each of the segments is used during the specific portions of the festival.

Part 1: En búsqueda de una vida con sentido (12 MINUTES)

In this segment of the video, viewers meet four families from an Hispanic/Latino congregation, whose lives of difficulty have been changed by the grace of God.

They are:

Mónica Muñoz Baigorri, a single mother from Chile who lost everything, and emigrated to the United States with hopes for a good future.

Joe Curbelo, a Uruguayan/Norwegian artisan, struggling with his ethnic identity and his sense of life purpose.

Juan Aspurú y **Silvia Paz,** Guatemalans who came to this country, and sensed the need to fill their spiritual void. José Estrada, whose life in Mexico and the United States was at first filled with continuing addiction and lack of life purpose.

The video segment includes dramatic flashbacks of their lives, showing their stories of struggle and hope. These "ordinary Christians" speak their own words, not only telling their life stories but also witnessing to the ways in which God visited their lives and changed them.

Part 2: Descubriendo los dones de Dios (25 MINUTES)

In this segment, you meet again each of the individuals in the first segment. You begin to see how each of these individuals, seemingly burdened by difficulties in life, is actually gifted in amazing and surprising ways. They reveal how being a part of their congregation has helped them discover and use the gifts with which God has graced them.

You also begin to understand how the gifts of these individuals affect some of the people who surround them, including their co-workers, children and other congregation members.

Part 3: Construyendo para el futuro (15 MINUTES)

In this last segment, you see how these individuals makes a difference in their church and community, and how they contribute to the life of this congregation, financially and with their time.

The video segment ends with matters of giftedness and giving turned back to the viewers: What gifts has God given you? Which of those gifts can you offer your church and community?

Event 1:
God's Gifts to Us

Schedule at a glance

Welcome and Devotions	5 minutes
Bible Conversation	10 minutes
Songs	10 minutes
Activity, Getting to Know You	15 minutes
Activity, Lining Up	15 minutes
Break	10 minutes
Video, Part 1	20 minutes
Stories and Sharing	25 minutes
Video, Part 2	25 minutes
Presentation, What's a Gift?	10 minutes
Activity, My Gifts	30 minutes
Summary Thoughts	5 minutes
Total	**180 minutes**

Supplies and materials needed

Gather the following items before the event:

- Handout, "Bible Conversations," one copy per person
- Handout, "Who Are We?", one copy per person
- Handout, "The Gifts of God among Hispanic/Latino Christians"
- Bibles (optional)
- Felt tip markers, pens and pencils
- White drawing paper, 11 x 17" or larger
- White drawing paper, 8 1/2 x 11"
- Song sheets or hymnals
- Festival videotape, VCR and monitor(s)
- Chalkboard and chalk, or flip chart

Before the event

Double-check the items in the Preparation section of this guide that apply to this first event. Be sure that you have done the following:

- Previewed the video tape segments you will use during this event.
- Set up and checked the video and sound equipment you will use during the event.
- Made enough copies for each of the activities.
- Arranged for musicians to accompany the songs you will sing in the Songs activity.
- Understand the directions for each of the activities.
- Practiced the presentation(s) you will make.

Welcome and Devotions

5 MINUTES

As participants are seated, welcome them to this first event in the Festival of God's Gifts. Note any special details about hospitality – the location of child care and rest rooms – and assure guests of your special pleasure in having them here.

Begin the event with a time of prayer, using a prayer such as the following:

> **Heavenly Father, we thank you for bringing us together on this day to celebrate what you have given us: our lives, our families and our friends. The most precious gift of all is your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.**
>
> **Bless this time we spend together, and those who have prepared this day for us. We ask this in your Son's name, Jesus Christ.**
>
> **Amen**

Bible Conversation

10 MINUTES

During this segment, participants will talk together in groups about their thoughts about Deuteronomy 8:7-8. Provide Bibles for participants, or reproduce and distribute copies of the handout, "Bible Conversations." (SEE THE MASTER COPY IN THE SECTION, ORIGINAL COPIES.) The passage and questions are reprinted here for your reference:

> **For the Lord is bringing you in to a good land . . . land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing.** (FROM DEUTERONOMY 8:7-8)

If you were talking to a recent immigrant from Mexico, how would this passage be true (or not true) for that person?

How would a store owner think about this passage?

Which of these two groups – poor people and rich people are pictured on the handout – would most likely agree with the meaning of this passage in their lives?

How is this passage true (or not true) for you?

Introduce the activity by noting how "si Dios quiere" is part of our daily conversation. In this event we meet people, perhaps like ourselves, who have experienced difficulties in their lives, but hold on to hope and faith that God's will directs their lives.

Read the Deuteronomy passage out loud, and ask participants to find one or two other persons close to them, and to talk together about any of the questions.

Songs

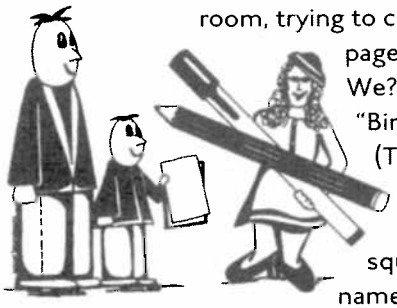
10 MINUTES

Sometimes group songs can celebrate the legacy of God's activity in people's lives. Spend some time together, singing favorite songs from the ethnic heritage of your congregation. If possible, let participants suggest the songs they'd like to sing. (THIS ACTIVITY CAN ALSO BE USED DURING THE MEAL TIME AS ENTERTAINMENT.)

Activity: Getting to Know You

15 MINUTES

In this activity, participants seek others in the room, trying to complete a page, "Who Are We?," a kind of "Bingo" activity. (The first person to complete all the squares with names of individuals is "the winner.")



Use the master copy in the Original Copies section of this guide to duplicate and distribute copies of the handout to each participant, including children. Have markers or pens available.

The directions:

1. Read each of the descriptive phrases on the handout.
2. Find people who fit the descriptions on the sheet.
3. Write the name of that person in the box that describes them.
4. For a variation, tell participants that they can use the name of each person only once or twice. This allows interaction with more individuals, but limits the possibility of "a winner" and takes more time.

After five minutes, ask individuals to name each of the people they've found who fit the descriptive phrases.

If time allows, write the categories on a chalkboard or newsprint while participants circulate, and write the names of all the individuals who fit each of the descriptive phrases.

Activity: Lining Up

15 MINUTES

This activity gives participants a chance to move around, while requiring them to listen closely.

Ask participants to get out of their chairs, and stand along the walls. (You may also need to clear chairs and tables from the center of the room.)

Show participants an imaginary or real line on the floor of the room. (If you have a large group, divide into two or more groups, each with its own line on the floor.)

Explain that in this activity they will stand along the line, according to your directions. They may need to talk to each other to find out where to stand.

Try a practice round based on ages. ("The youngest person at this end of the line, the oldest person at the other end of the line.") After the group has lined up, answer questions.

Then try one or more of the following "line-ups:"

- Line up according to the place of your birth, the person born closest to this location at one end of the line, the person farthest away from this place at the other end of the line, and everyone else geographically in between.
- Line up according to the amount of years you have been in this country, the person most recently arrived on one end, the person here the longest on the other end of the line.
- Line up according to how much "strength" is required by your daily work (or daily tasks, if you aren't employed), the person whose job requires the most strength on one end, the person whose job requires the least strength on the other end.
- Line up according to how much your hobbies involve your mind or your body, with one end "Mostly my body" and the other end "Mostly my mind."
- Line up according to the number of places you've lived in your life, one end the lowest number and the other end of the line the highest number.

Line up according to how talented or gifted you think you are. On the one end, the person who thinks he or she has fewest talents or gifts, on the other end the person with the most talents or gifts. Save this line-up to be your last activity, because there may be considerable discussion about people who think they have few gifts. Obviously, the idea that some people have "few gifts" and others have "the most" is the wrong question, but we think the friendly and affirming conversation will be fun!

The fun in this activity is what happens when people talk with each other to find their place in the line. Take some time after each line-up to let participants talk about what they've discovered about each other.

Break

10 MINUTES

This is a good time to break for snacks, rest room or time outside. Remind participants you want them to return in ten minutes.

During the break, check video and sound systems for proper operation. Break time is also a good time to make guests feel welcome.

Video: Part 1

20 MINUTES

When participants have returned and are settled, briefly introduce Part 1 of the video, "En búsqueda de una vida con sentido," perhaps characterizing it as a time to meet some families not that different from our own, or people we know. Note that their histories, their life stories are difficult but inspiring, perhaps not that different from our own histories.

Show Part 1 of the video entirely. After its conclusion, allow just a minute of silence before proceeding further. This gives participants a chance to recall the emotions they have felt while watching the stories of these inspiring people.

Stories and Sharing

25 MINUTES

In this activity, participants share their feelings about what they have just experienced and begin to talk about their stories of faith in adversity.

Ask participants to gather in groups of 3 to 5 individuals, and talk about this question, **"Who in the video reminds you of someone you know, someone outside of your family?"** Spend about five minutes on this activity.

Now direct participants to share their own family histories.

Draw the following chart on the chalkboard or newsprint. Explain that in each of our family histories we may have a legacy of adversity that, by God's grace, our forebears were able to overcome.

3 Generations

2 Generations

My Parents

My Family Now

As you draw, you might want to suggest these ideas:

- One of the elements of our heritage as Hispanic/Latino Christians is a time, either recently or several generations back, when our family faced difficulty.
- Part of our heritage is that God has equipped us with gifts such as faith, patience and tenacity that have equipped us to overcome adversity.
- When we look into our legacies, somewhere we find God working!

Ask participants to add at least one child or young person to their discussion group. Distribute large sheets of drawing paper, pencils, pens and felt-tip markers to each group.

Each group now talks about this question: **"When you look back in your family history—or your own life—where do you find events or situations like those you just saw in the video?"** The job of the children in each group: Make drawings of what stories they hear.

These drawings can include pictures, diagrams, words, sayings, captions—anything that will help viewers to understand the story that it shows. (In case you have few children at your festival, select one person to be the "artist" in a group.)

These drawings will become part of a large mural that will be shown at the Sunday worship service.

Groups have about 15 minutes for this activity, so each story-teller has between 4 and 5 minutes to answer the question. At the end of the activity, collect completed drawings. Children still drawing can complete their drawing during the following activities or during the meal.

Video: Part 2

25 MINUTES

As the drawings are collected, briefly introduce the next segment of the video, "Descubriendo los dones de Dios." Tell participants that they now get to see how each of the people they've just met go on with their lives, especially their lives of faith.

Show Part 2 of the video, which takes 20 minutes. As in Part 1, allow a minute or two of silence at the end of the viewing, so participants can review their emotions.

The Time Our Lives Were Saved

Presentation: What's a Gift?

10 MINUTES

In this short presentation, you or another leader explain the meaning of the word, "gift" in the way it is understood in this festival. Use a chalkboard or flip chart, writing key words or adding drawings. (You may want to review the section, "What is it about gifts?" in the section, "About Los regalos," in this guide, or refer to the materials in the Bible study about gifts in the "Miscellaneous" section of this guide.)

Prepare the presentation according to your own style, using these possible ideas:

Any conversation about "gifts" starts with God. Everything we have and are comes from God, so God is the first and best gift-giver.

The Bible lists many "spiritual gifts." (HERE YOU MAY WANT TO REFER TO THE PASSAGES THAT LIST GIFTS NOTED IN THE "ABOUT LOS REGALOS" SECTION OF THIS GUIDE, PAGE 13.)

In a sense, all gifts are "spiritual," because they come from God's own spirit, God's will for the world and for its inhabitants.

All gifts are spiritual, too, because God intends them to be used for his purposes, not our own.

In our world today, a "gift" becomes valuable when it is used.

What defines a gift? Someone gives it and someone receives it. So, if my distant relative gives me a scratchy sweater, it's a gift.

But if I never wear the sweater, it's not useful, it's not valuable. Why? Because I do not use it.

When we talk about "gifts" in this festival, we mean anything and everything God gives you , whether for a short time or lasting your whole life.

But we don't want to treat God's gifts like a scratchy sweater. How sad that would be!

Instead, we remind each other of the real gifts each of us has been given, even those we don't see clearly.

And we want to discover how these gifts can be used for God's purposes, used to get God's work done in our church and in the world.

So we will work during this festival to discover the gifts of God, like the people in the video.

At the end of the presentation, distribute copies of the two-sided handout, "The Gifts of God among Hispanic/Latino Christians" and pencils or pens. (SEE THE REPRODUCIBLE ORIGINAL IN THE SECTION, "ORIGINAL COPIES," IN THIS GUIDE.)

Refer to the list on the front side as an example of skills, knowledge, personal traits and qualities of life God gives to the world. Each of these gifts is a characteristic of the lives of Hispanic/Latino Christians. Of course, the list is not complete or exhaustive.

Activity: My Gifts

30 MINUTES

In this time segment, participants will discover some of their gifts, using the front side of the handout, "The Gifts of God among Hispanic/Latino Christians."

Ask participants to read the directions on the front side—the list of possible gifts—and to check as many of the gifts they think they have been given from God. Note the space to add what is NOT listed. Provide about five minutes for this activity.

While participants are finishing the checklist, distribute to each participant a pre-folded paper tent and markers. Ask participants to keep the completed checklist handy for reference in the next activity.

When participants have completed the checklists, reassemble them into groups of 5to 7 persons.

Refer to the paper tents and markers, with these directions:

1. At the top of one of the outside sides, print your first and last name in large letters. Turn the tent inside out and refold it. Be sure your name—now on the inside of the tent—is not visible.
2. Take about five minutes to write or draw your personal gifts on both exposed faces of the tent. Be specific, using the checklist you've just completed for ideas. Don't let others see what you've written.
3. After five minutes, put your tent into a pile with others' in the middle of your group. Shuffle them well.
4. Now draw out a tent, read the gifts out loud and see if your group can guess who has those gifts. As soon as the person has been correctly identified, he or she acknowledges that fact, and his or her tent is put at the bottom of the pile.
5. Continue until all participants are identified. This should take less than ten minutes.
6. Now, give the tents back to their owners. Refold each tent so all that appears on the outside is the person's name.
7. The next task is to pass along each person's tent, giving each member of the small group a chance to write or draw their own assessment of each person's gifts.
8. At the end of five minutes, participants retrieve their tents and look at what others wrote or drew.

What to do next:

First path:

If you will end the festival here for now:

- Thank participants for their attendance and participation.
- Invite them to the next part of the total festival.
- Ask participants to complete at home the reverse side of the handout, "The Gifts of God among Hispanic/Latino Christians," (titled "Gifts of God for God's Purposes") and bring it to the next event.
- Say a short prayer, thanking God for these people and asking God for a safe journey home.

Second path:

If you will continue with Event 2:

- Provide a short break so that the room can be set up for the next event's activities.
- Ask participants, before the next event, to complete the reverse side of the handout, "The Gifts of God among Hispanic/Latino Christians," (titled "Gifts of God for God's Purposes").
- Turn to that section of this guide and continue there.

Third path:

If you will continue with the meal:

- See the next section of this guide.
- If needed, take a short break while the room is rearranged for serving and eating a meal.
- Ask participants to complete and keep the reverse side of the handout, "The Gifts of God among Hispanic/Latino Christians," for use later in the festival.

Take a few moments to talk about the experience in the large group, using questions such as these:

How different or similar are your ideas of your gifts, compared to what others saw in you?

How do your gifts compare with those you saw in the lives of the people in the video?

Who is the most gifted person in your group? (This is an interesting question because it has only one correct answer: All of us are gifted differently!)

What similarities of gifts did you notice among the members of your group?

Which of your gifts do you offer to God every day of your life? Which do you rarely offer? What is the difference?

What else did you notice as your group was going through this process?

Summary Thoughts

5 MINUTES

Take just a few moments before the end of this event to characterize what you have heard and seen during this time together. Some possible comments:

How overwhelmingly talented and gifted this group of God's people is!

How similar or varied are our gifts.

How children have participated and shared.

The wisdom about "gifts" that already existed among this group of God's people.

What we would see if the video's stories were made about the people here.

Some of the positive, faithful, hopeful, loving, appreciative, joyful and inspiring feelings you've noticed.

Meal:

Schedule at a glance

Shared or catered meal	30 minutes
Guided conversation	15 minutes
Visiting the Legacy Gallery	15 minutes
Entertainment	60 minutes
Total	**120 minutes**

Before the meal

You already know how to prepare and serve meals in your congregation. Use this checklist to remember what other tasks should be completed before the meal time.

Make sure you have:

- Arranged for the "Legacy Gallery" to be ready for participants' visits.
- Rearranged the room for food service and eating.
- (If this applies) Found prizes for those who "win" the "Guess Who?" contest(s).
- Arranged for special needs of guests and entertainers.

Shared or catered meal

30 MINUTES

This meal is special, because much of the value of the festival happens during this time of enjoyable conversation, eating and entertainment. You have already experienced each other as gifted people of God, and have shared some profound feelings and stories with each other.

Whether the meal is catered, prepared and served by another congregation or assembled from members' gifts of food, consider how you to:

- Thank those who have prepared and served the meal.
- Say a prayer of thanks for the food.
- Acknowledge special guests.
- Serve quickly the number of people who are attending the festival.

Guided conversation

15 MINUTES

During the meal, encourage participants to talk about matters that have come up during the first event. You might write some questions or topics on the chalkboard, or ask specific individuals to be "conversation starters." Because people will converse in their own ways, don't push this idea too hard. On the other hand, gentle suggestions about mealtime conversation will add to the depth and variety of conversational topics.

Remind those who have not done so to complete the reverse side of the handout, "The Gifts of God among Hispanic/Latino Christians," (titled "Gifts of God for God's Purposes").

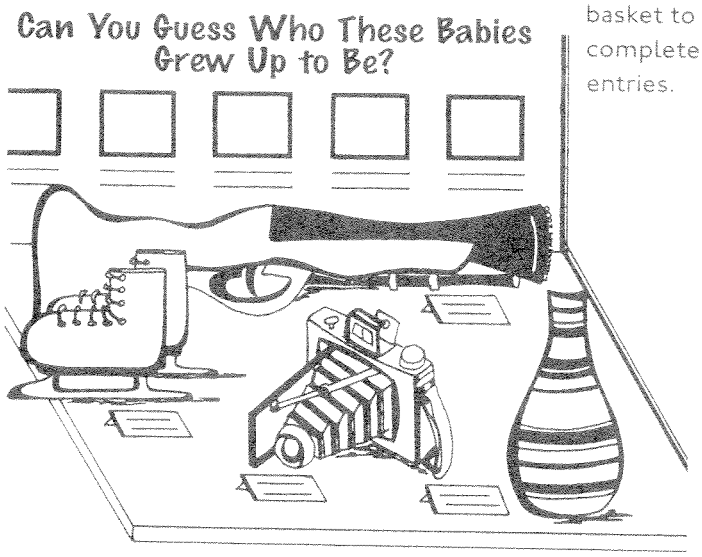
Visiting the Legacy Gallery

15 MINUTES

At dessert time or shortly before participants are finished, highlight "The Legacy Gallery" location and value. If possible, have one or two leaders present at the gallery, to invite people to spend time there, to help protect valuable photographs or artifacts, and to answer questions. (FOR FURTHER DETAILS ABOUT THE GALLERY, SEE THE PREPARATION SECTION OF THIS GUIDE.)

Allow 15 minutes of uninterrupted time for participants to visit the gallery.

If you decide to offer a "Guess Who?" contest, you will need to number each artifact or photo (using PostIt Notes®). Provide contestants a slip of paper and pencil to record the number of the photograph or artifact, the name of the person they think is in the photograph (or the use or owner of the artifact), and their own name. Provide a small basket to hold completed entries.



Outside Exercise Time

(OPTIONAL)

This would also be a good time to provide running and stretching time for children (and adults!). In that case, you might pre-designate several exercise leaders who could take interested participants outside and engage them in some fun exercises.

Entertainment

60 MINUTES

When participants are visiting the gallery, doing exercises or continuing conversations, re-arrange the room to be ready for the entertainers. Call participants back to the room and begin a time of enjoyable entertainment and fellowship. (FOR FURTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT ENTERTAINMENT, SEE THE "PREPARATION" SECTION OF THIS GUIDE.)

As the entertainment takes place, consider:

How the emcee will connect together each act or entertainer with the idea of "gifts."

How entertainers will be welcomed to stay and participate in the next part of the festival.

How participants will get to know more about the entertainers and their gifts.

At the end of the entertainment segment, provide a short break, during which time you can reset the room for the next event.

Event 2:

God's Gifts in This Church

Schedule at a glance

Presentation/activity, "Beyond Limosna"	50 minutes
Break	10 minutes
Video, Part 3	15 minutes
Activity, "Our Church, our Neighborhood, our World"	30 minutes
Getting ready for Sunday	75 minutes
Total	**180 minutes**

Supplies and materials needed

Gather the following supplies and materials before the event:

- Extra copies of the Event 1 handout, "The Gifts of God among Hispanic/Latino Christians"
- Several sets of four large magazine or poster pictures (one per group of 5-7 participants): 5-7 year old girl, "typical family" (father, mother, two or three children), older man, scene of desolation (tornado, hurricane, earthquake),
- Copies of the handout, "People in need"
- Flip chart and markers, or chalkboard and chalk
- Pens and pencils for participants
- One "gifts catcher:" 9-16 sheets of newsprint or poster board, taped together. Complete the large sheet as per the directions in the activity, "Our Church, Our Neighborhood, Our World" (page 50).
- Materials for all projects in the Preparing for Sunday activity
- Commitment forms, one per family or individual participant

Before the event

Check the Preparation section of this guide for tasks you should accomplish before this event. Be sure that you have:

- Familiarized yourself with the diagram, ideas and examples connected with the activity, "Beyond Limosna."
- Gathered all supplies and made copies of all handouts for activities.
- Determined the logistics of the wonderfully chaotic activity, "Preparing for Sunday."
- Previewed Part 3 of the video, "Construyendo para el futuro."
- Asked a few individuals to remain after the event is over, to finish items that were not completed during the activity, "Getting Ready for Sunday."

Activity/ Presentation: "Beyond Limosna"

50 MINUTES

In this event, participants see how their gifts are useful for God's purposes in your congregation. This activity, "Beyond Limosna," helps them see how the powerful emotions of instant generosity that characterize "limosna" can be a starting point for how this congregation can be funded as part of God's mission in the world.

The activity has three elements: a discovery activity, a short presentation and times of conversation.

Assemble participants into four groups of about 7 to 12. (If you have a larger number of participants, you may have eight or twelve groups.)

Give each group one of the four pictures and copies of the handout, "People in Need." The first tasks for each group are:

Study the photo carefully, imagining how the persons live, how they might feel, or what is happening in the picture.

Read the stories on the front side of the handout and determine which story fits the group's picture.

After a few moments, direct participants to turn over the handout, and to read the segment that applies to their photo. The tasks are:

As a group, agree on your answers to the questions that fit your story.

Designate one or more group members to report your decisions to the large group.

Let groups work for about five minutes. During the time, you may to want to circulate among participants, listening to the conversation.

Ask each group to report its answers. As each group reports, summarize answers on the chalkboard or flip chart, under two categories: **Feelings** and **What We Will Do To Help**. This should take about ten minutes.

Now, ask each group to reconvene to answer these questions:

How long will your feelings last?

How long will you be willing to continue helping as you have suggested?

How much money and time would you be willing to contribute?

After five minutes, ask each group to report its thoughts about these questions. Again, summarize answers on the chalkboard or flip chart, under these categories: **Duration of Feelings, Duration of Help, Amount of Time and Money.**

After the reports, ask the whole group to talk about this question:

Which of your answers (to any of the questions) would change if any of these people in need were close family members? (For example, Miguel was your father-in-law or you knew your cousins really well?)

Use a different color marker or chalk to write these responses under the appropriate categories.

Take ten minutes to note the similarities and differences in participants' responses, using questions such as:

Which of the people in need attracted the most feelings? The most help? Why?

What patterns of feelings and help did you notice?

What changes occurred when you thought of these people as family members? Why?

Save ten minutes for the following presentation about limosna and how its qualities can be a first step to help understand our giving of time and money in this congregation.

LIMOSNA
The Wonderful, Short-lived Emotions of Generosity

Emotions of Limosna
Responsibility
Gratitude
Love
Hope
Empathy
"Family" (Solidarity)
Generosity

Family
The emotions of limosna stay the same, but now "commitment" enters, lasting for more than a few moments. We are continually motivated to love and provide for our family, without waiting for great and immediate need.

Church as "Family"
The emotions of limosna continue, as the commitment to "family" transfers to our church. We want to support it with our time and money.

Use the chart here as a reference for your presentation, perhaps drawing it on the chalkboard or flip chart as you talk. These are some of the main points you might want to cover, and in this order:

- Limosna is a gift of God among Hispanic/Latino people. Because of limosna, people in need are helped quickly and personally. (In the video, limosna brought José some money as he begged.)
- The emotions of limosna—list them again or refer to what participants answered earlier—are mostly good emotions.
- A major problem with limosna, though, is how quickly the emotions fade. The emotional response is short-lived. Strong emotions are strong motivators for quick, helping actions, but sometimes do not last for a very long time. (In the video, José's begging did not enable him to live a sustainable lifestyle.)
- In our families, limosna has a different result. We do not wait for our family members to experience great or compelling need before the emotions of limosna happen inside of us. (Give examples such as feeding and clothing our children.) We continue to love our family; we continue to be generous to our children; we continue to be responsible to each other. These emotions remain intense because we love our families.
- Now limosna has commitment added to it. Most of us are committed to our family members.

How does limosna work in our congregation? If we think of our church as a family, we can see the same ideas occurring in our life together.

In this family, we take care of each other in times of great need, of course. As in our families at home, we don't wait for a disaster before we care for each other. Just like at home, we don't wait for the pastor to be starving before we contribute for the pastor's salary. We don't wait for children in our church to wander in the streets before we provide a program of Sunday school or after-school care.

We understand that our congregation is a place where good things happen, over and over again. Things God wants to happen. Things that add value to our lives every day. So we contribute our time and money.

How has limosna changed? The wonderful emotions we all feel are combined with the continuing commitment we have for our families, and emotion and commitment are directed toward our congregation.

When we come together and learn God's will for our lives, we are encouraged to be generous, kind and helpful to others. Limosna grows, then, in a cycle that strengthens itself.

Break

10 MINUTES

This is a good time to take a break, so that participants can use the rest rooms and have conversation. Stay close to the chart and the summaries of participants' answers to the "People in Need" stories; some participants may want to talk with you more about this experience.

During the break time, hang (or clear a place on the floor for) the large, taped-together sheet that will be used in the activity, "Our Church, Our Neighborhood, Our World."

Video, Part 3

15 MINUTES

Gather participants together again, and show Part 3 of the video, "Construyendo para el futuro." You can introduce the video segment by asking participants to recall the stories of each of the people in the video, or ask participants how each of these individuals' lives influences the congregation to which they belong.

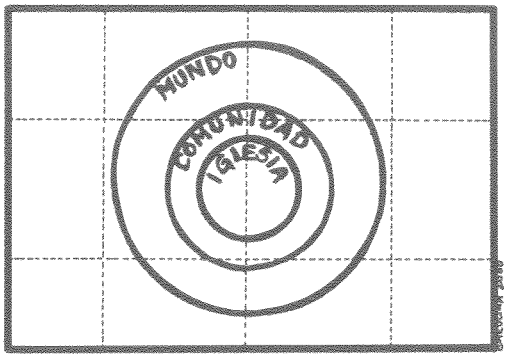
Activity, "Our Church, our Neighborhood, our World"

30 MINUTES

This activity starts to answer the question, "What about the future of our church?" It ties together much of what participants have already experienced in the festival. The results of the activity, a "gifts catcher"—a large map of congregational giftedness—can be used as the first step in a longer planning process.

Ask participants, if they have not already done so, to complete the reverse side of the handout, "The Gifts of God among Hispanic/Latino Christians," titled "Gifts of God for God's Purposes". Redistribute copies as needed.

Gifts Catcher



While they are completing or reviewing the handout, distribute felt-tip markers.

Refer participants to the large sheet of paper or poster board hung on a wall or placed on the floor. Explain that this is a "gifts catcher," a device like photographic or x-ray film that permanently captures a snapshot of reality.

In this case, the "gifts catcher" will show how the individual gifts of congregation members are put to use in God's world. Give these directions:

- Review all your gifts, including items on both sides of the handout.
- Think how the gifts God gives you are made valuable for God's purposes—how you use your gifts in the church, in the neighborhood and in the world.
- Another way to think of your gifts being useful for God's purposes: Take "God's viewpoint," as though you were God, being clever and powerful and perhaps even quiet in how you distribute each useful gift to spiritual people.
- As you discover specific places where your gifts are used for God's purposes, write on that place on the gifts catcher your name, your gift and a phrase that describes how your gift accomplishes God's purposes.
- For example, if you consider yourself tenacious, think of a place where your tenacity accomplishes good things for God's purposes. Perhaps you don't give up on your friends, or you always finish what you start in your job, or you don't let the difficulties in your native country keep you from sending money back to your relatives. These are ways God is using the one of the gifts God gave you.
- As another example, go to the gifts catcher and write in the "World" area your own name, one of your gifts from God and how your gift affects people in another part of the world.

To start participants' thinking, you might also make available copies of the tract set, "Los dones," (Concordia Publishing House No. 16-6060) that provides eight general categories of gifts.

If needed, ask other individuals, including a child or youth, to place their names and gifts on the gifts catcher, while the whole group observes the process.

Give participants 10 minutes to add their gifts to the gifts catcher. During that time, you and other leaders can circulate among participants, helping them overcome modesty or confusion or too-easy answers.

As participants work, add other comments or ideas, such as these:

Be specific about how your gift makes God's purposes happen.

Think of "God's purposes" as everything God wills. It might help to remember the commandments, the creeds, the Lord's Prayer and some stories from the Bible that show how God works. Or think about how Jesus lived his life!

Try to think beyond "being nice" or "helping other people." These are good gifts, of course, but God does a lot more than that!

For example, how does God feed the world, keep its inhabitants safe or healthy, grant wisdom or defeat evil? How do your gifts help that happen?

Don't think that your gift makes everything happen all at once everywhere. Remember that you're part of a very large church all over the world. (In Ephesians, St. Paul compares the church to a body and in John's gospel Jesus talks about being a vine that holds branches tightly.) Think of your gift as a way for one piece of God's purpose to happen, not necessarily the whole thing!

Try to imagine how some of your gifts affect people in other parts of the world. What do you make, who do you know, what do you give that changes some condition in places other than here.

Imagine how just one of your gifts has multiple uses in God's world.

If someone asks where "family" should be located on the gifts catcher, let them decide how their use of their gifts in their families could be a part of church, neighborhood or world. Remind them that their families are gifts AND places where God uses gifts.

Encourage children to write their names and gifts as well, perhaps working with an adult or teen helper.

As you look at what other people write, you may suddenly be reminded of a gift you overlooked earlier. Good! Write it on the gifts catcher now.

Jacinto	**Jacinto**	**Jacinto**	**Jacinto**
loyal friend	loyal in the church	loyal to my company	loyal to my former country
(Neighborhood)	(Church)	(World)	(World)

When about five minutes remains, ask participants to step back from the gifts catcher, which should now be filled with amazing gifts, and the amazing places God is using these gifts to get God's work done in the church and the world.

Ask participants to reflect on what they see, using questions such as:

- Where do you see patterns forming, bunching and clumping of the same gifts, or places where little has been written?
- What might that say about us as a collection of God's gifted people?
- What surprises you about what you see?
- What amazes you?
- Which among these gifts match those you saw among the people in the video segments?

Save just a minute or two for this question and conversation: Considering these gifts, if you were to visualize this congregation in the future, what would you see?

Let participants know where the gifts catcher will be displayed in the coming hours and days, because some might want to look more closely at what was written, and others might want to add more gifts to the map you've made together.

In the final five minutes, distribute commitment forms in the manner your have earlier planned. As the forms are distributed, note that they are one way for participants to move beyond limosna in their decisions about contributions to the congregation.

Other notes:

- Families and individuals should complete these forms and bring them to church tomorrow, where they will be offered to God as part of the offering during worship.
- Explain how the forms help members – and the church as an organization – estimate financial giving in the coming year.
- Encourage those unfamiliar with these forms to try keeping the commitment they make for one or two months, then reflect on the experience before recommitting themselves and their gifts.
- Remind participants of and thank them for their past generosities.

I'm encouraged.
I'm grateful for these people.

I will thank God for . . .

I would like to know more about . . .

I didn't know this.

Getting ready for Sunday

75 MINUTES

If you need to reset the room for the next activity, give participants a few moments for a break.

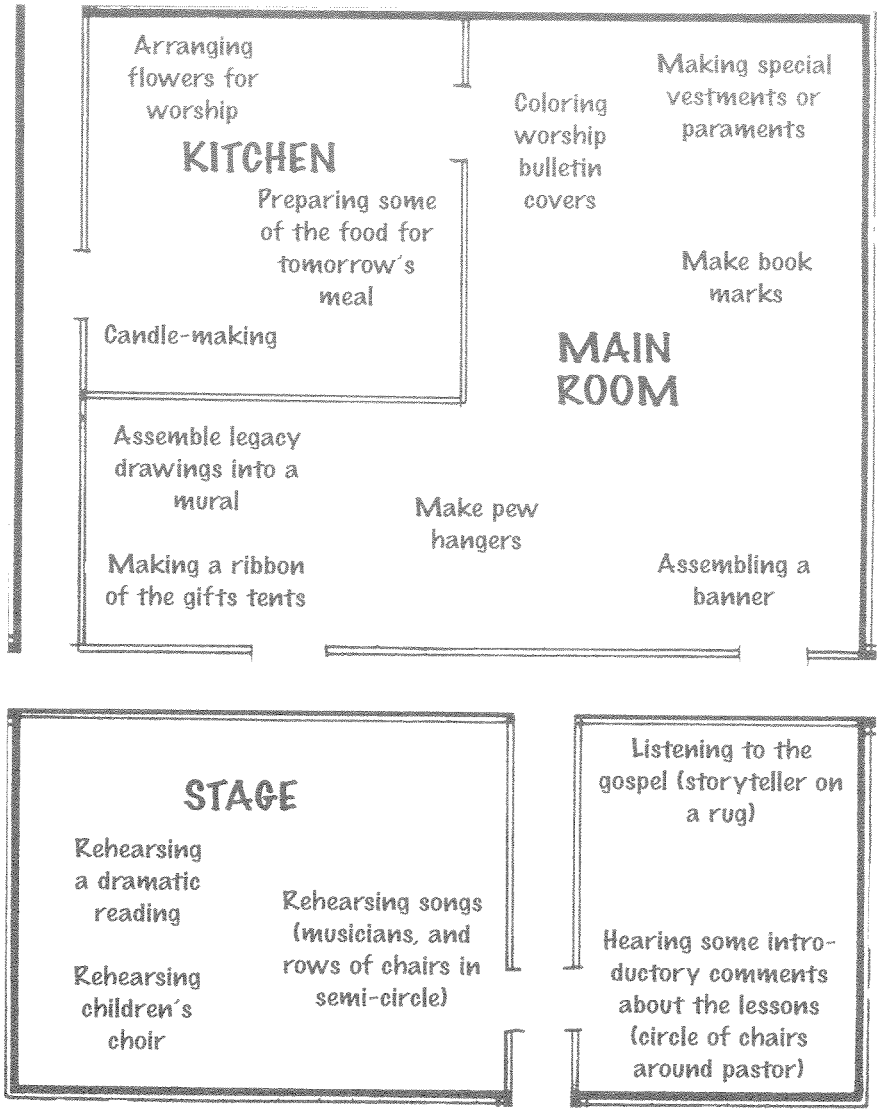
This next activity cannot be adequately described in detail here, because its richness and beauty will depend on your specific situation.

The basic intent is to prepare for Sunday's worship experience in two ways:

Prepare the items that will process into your worship space and decorate it beautifully.

Rehearse or acquaint participants with various elements of the worship, such as lessons, dramas, style of sermon, special music.

By now you should have read the "Preparation" section of this planning guide to get a glimpse of possible things to do to get ready for Sunday worship and the meal. For other ideas, you might also look forward to the description of Event 3, beginning on page 55. You can also look at the following map, that shows a "typical congregation" that has divided up its work space to prepare for Sunday morning.



One of the goals for this period of time is to generate excitement about tomorrow's worship, thus you may want to involve almost every participant in some activity or another.

Keep in mind some of the following matters as you engage participants in a wide variety of activities:

Choose activities that can be completed in the space and time available.

Make sure that the legacy drawings from Event 1 are assembled into a large rectangular mural that will fit a specific place in your sanctuary.

Let participants choose which activities they will engage in, with one reminder: Each task has to be completed for tomorrow!

Provide at least one leader for each of the activities.

This may be a good time for worship leaders to rehearse their roles in the actual worship space.

- Provide some "work anyone can do" for those not interested in any of the major activities. For example, floors can be swept; materials can be strengthened, repaired and moved; very young children taken on a walk; "audiences" or "critics" might be needed for musicians or dramatists.
- Arrange for ample supplies beforehand, as well as continual cleanup while this activity is taking place.

Save time at the end of the activity to step back and look at what participants have accomplished. Let participants know a little bit about tomorrow's service, and how each of these items or experiences will be part of that worship. If time permits, practice the special processional that will take place tomorrow.

End the event at the agreed-upon ending time, using a prayer such as:

Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the ways you have blessed us here this day. Our eyes have been opened to all the possibilities where we can serve you by using the gifts you have given us.

Send your holy angels to watch over us as we travel back home. Send the Holy Spirit to guide us as we make commitments for our giving to this congregation in the year ahead. (INCLUDE A TIME OF SPECIAL PRAYERS)

We ask this in the name of your most precious Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen

Dismiss the group with thanks for their presence, their wisdom and their sharing of themselves. Remind them of the time for worship on Sunday, and an earlier arrival time to get ready, if it is applicable.

Dedicating Our Gifts

Event 3 is comprised of a special worship focused on gifts, and a celebratory meal. Both draw together elements of the previous festival events, using items and ideals learned during those events. This section of the planning guide includes suggestions for the worship service and meal, which you can adapt to your own styles.

Schedule at a glance

Worship preparation	30 - 60 minutes
Liturgical Worship Service	75 - 90 minutes
Meal	90 minutes
Total	**195 - 240 minutes**

Supplies and materials needed

Assemble the following materials for the worship service and meal:

Special supplies for communion (home-baked bread or specially-crafted communion ware)

Items from the previous two events that will be used in this worship service

Other items that will be used in the procession

Extra commitment forms in the pew racks.

Before the event

As you prepare for worship and a celebratory meal, check to see that you have:

Selected worship options for constructing a special liturgical worship service.

Decided which items will be part of the processional

Made provisions for hanging, displaying or using items made during the festival.

If applicable, arranged for the transfer of worship decorations to the meal space, to permanent or temporary display space or to storage.

Rehearsed elements of the worship service.

Obtained ethnic or homemade bread and wine for communion, and communion ware.

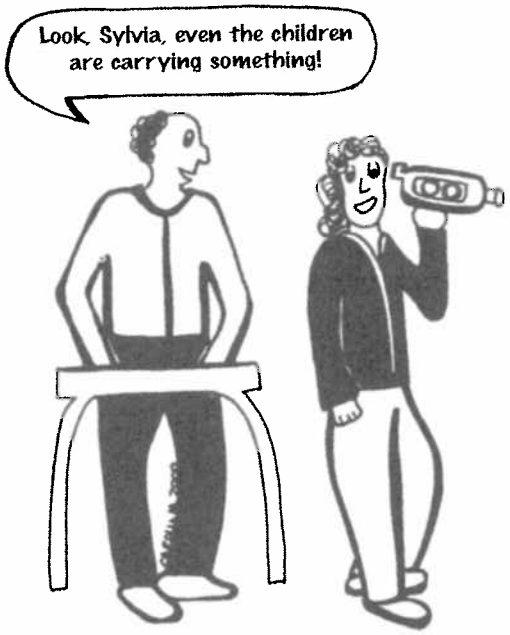
Arranged for several individuals to results of commitments.

Worship preparation

30 - 60 MINUTES

Depending on the work you did together in Event 2, you may need extra time to prepare for worship. Some possible uses of this time:

- Rehearsing the processional with key leaders. (See the following description of the procession.)
- Removing worship materials from the worship space, to be ready for the processional.
- Reinforcing or repairing items that were made in Event 2.
- Rehearsing dramatists, musicians, dancers, readers or other worship leaders.
- Spending a brief time of prayer with all worship leaders, asking for God's blessings on this day.



Liturgical Worship Service

75 - 90 MINUTES

We presume that you are fully capable of planning and carrying out a liturgical worship service. But since this worship is going to be unique, we couldn't resist adding a few of our own suggestions! We hope you find them helpful, and that you add them to your own creative ideas for this day.

Processional

The processional is specially-meaningful because its implicit intent is to make an "ordinary space" into one fit for the worship of Almighty God. In this guide, we suggest two major elements:

- All worshipers assemble OUTSIDE of the worship space until it is time for worship to begin.
- Most, if not all, of the items in the worship space have been removed, and come into the worship space during the processional.
- All worshipers process with at least one item, thus symbolizing that the gifts of every Christian can make this space ready for worshipping God.

As you consider preparing a processional, you might want to think about the following matters:

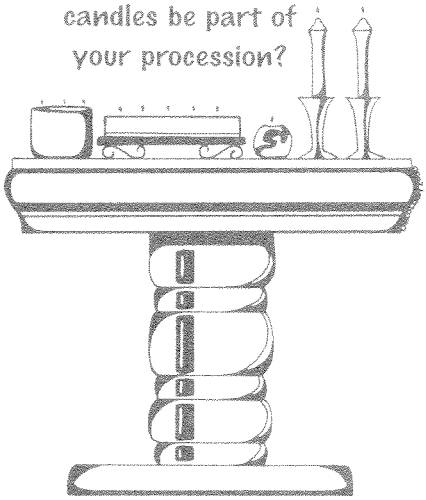
- How you will remove and safeguard worship materials —hymnals, instruments, candles, altar cloths, etc.— preparatory to the processional.
- If applicable, a route or path for the processional that does more than proceed down the aisle. (The neighborhood or other parts of the church buildings?)
- Arranging for responsible persons to carry precious items —- communion ware, Bible, vestments.
- Arranging the order of the procession, according to your tradition or what seems advisable for the maximum impact on worshipers. One possibility is to begin with individuals who have NOT been part of the festival, who carry and bring "ordinary" items such as hymnals, offering baskets, etc. In this way they get to observe the remainder of the procession from their place in the pew. Most likely the Bible and the elements of Holy Communion will be among the last items that enter the worship space.
- Making arrangements for those for whom walking is difficult.
- Deciding what singing or music will take place while the procession takes place.

Begin the procession with an Invocation or short prayer. Leaders—the musicians?—should walk at a leisurely pace so that all can keep up with this wonderful parade of gifts.

Some possible entrance hymns include: Libro de Liturgia y Cantico #113, "Qué Alegría Cuando me dijeron;" Cantad al Señor #110, "Qué Alegría Cuando me dijeron;" or Culto Cristiano #254, "Firmes y adelante."

Keep in mind that, because the large and varied items from the two previous festival events will need to be hung or otherwise placed, some of the aura of a solemn liturgical procession may not be possible here. Still, the processional will carry with it many wonderful emotions as worshippers see the space transformed from "ordinary" to "gifted" before their eyes!

How could lit or unlit candles be part of your procession?



Other ideas for processional items or behaviors include these:

Give each worshipper something special to wear, such as a colored swatch of cloth as a sash or "vestment."

Play with lighting, starting with a dark church and gradually increasing the amount of light as worshippers enter the space.

Surprise everyone by placing something beautiful in each pew rack or on each chair.

Confession

Use the traditional words of confession, perhaps adding a phrase about the sinfulness of not acknowledging or using God's gifts in our gifts. We have provided a reproducible copy of a confession especially suited to the themes of the festival, in the Original Copies section of this planning guide.

Kyrie and Gloria

The worship bulletin may include a note of explanation that names the mercy and glory of God as reminders of a supreme gift: We are freed from thinking that WE are God. Because of God's mercy and glory, God is in charge, and grants gifts out of his abundance. All of this without our deserving any of it!

First Lesson

A good lesson for the day is Deuteronomy 8:11-18. The lector can introduce the lesson with a brief word how God's promise of a bountiful and blessed land can be true in our own lives today. A hymn to follow the reading of the lesson might be Culto Cristiano #405, "Jesús es mi rey soberano" or Libro de Liturgia y Cantico #333, "Mantos y palmas."

Psalm

Consider Psalm 116: 12-14, 17-19, a kind of response to the previous lesson. Because this is a familiar text, it may be available in a musical form, and sung by a choir, or by the congregation.

Second Lesson (Epistle)

Romans 12:3-8 does a good job of summarizing the idea that each of God's people is given gifts, each uniquely given and used.

Alleluia and Gospel Processional

This might be an interesting place to sing more than one Alleluia, perhaps with different musical styles, or having different groups of worshippers sing to each other.

If a Gospel processional is included, consider bringing the whole congregation to a totally new place to hear the Gospel – like outside your church! And while you process, sing "Alleluia" to each other, over and over, to remind each other of your gratitude for the gift of God's Word.

Another option for a Gospel processional: After the Bible is brought to the center aisle, worshippers leave the pews and crowd together in the center portion of the sanctuary, including the aisles, as if crowding around the Scriptures, eager to hear what they have to say!

Gospel for the Day

Matthew 25: 31-40 presents a good word from God, and a good sermon text, too! In this passage we hear both a warning and good news. The text also celebrates the quiet, perhaps invisible acts of service that characterize a blessed use of God's gifts in our life.

Sermon

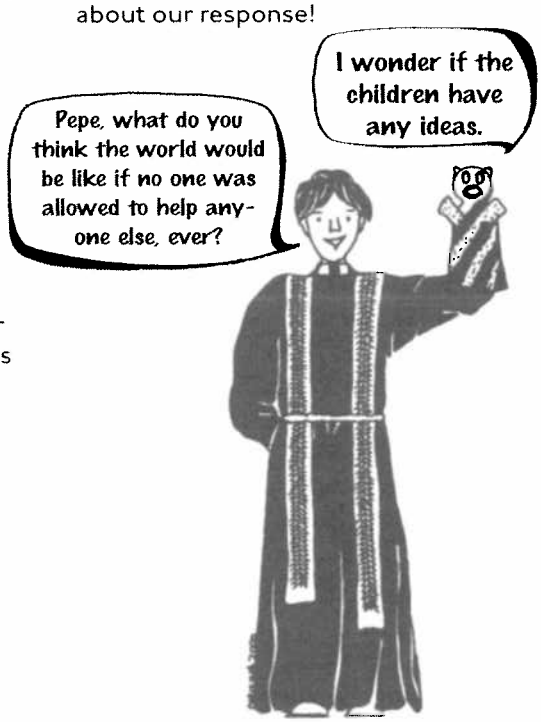
The sermon for this day presents the idea and the wonderful news that God provides each of us with a

life purpose that gives our life meaning. Consider what life would be like if our only choices were to be greedy and uncaring toward other people. Consider what quality of life we would have if there were NO opportunities to give our lives in service. Consider the burden of thinking that everyone owed US everything, that WE were the center of the universe. Instead, Almighty God blesses and requires us to be servants of each other. Even better news: We have been given the gifts to engage in that kind of life!

Other possible sermon content might include the following:

- Stories, anecdotes, comments, wisdom from the two events this weekend, perhaps from the participants themselves.
- Specific references of the ways in which this congregation's corporate gifts help make happen some of what this text presents as desirable behaviors among God's people.
- Encouragement to see how the collected gifts of members bring God's love to those in need.
- Reference to some of the items decorating the church, and what they say about our congregation of people who are gifted to serve.
- A portion of one of the videos.
- Personal testimony from one or more of the participants at the event.
- A dramatic enactment of the Gospel lesson, featuring surprised people on both sides, God's voice, and a commentator.

It is important to note that, although this text seems at first to be primarily based on warnings about bad and good behavior, there is good news embedded in it as well. Remember that the Gospel lessons, as with all of Scripture, are first about God's own nature and God's will, and only thereafter about our response!



Hymn for the Day

You might consider any of the following hymns, perhaps sung in a new way—men and women singing different verses back and forth— or sung with new accompaniment (or no accompaniment): Culto Cristiano #400, "Da lo mejor al maestro;" Libro de Liturgia y Cantico #560, "Tú has venido a la orilla;" Cantad al Señor #62, "Tú has venido a la orilla."

Creed

As you say the creed, you are confessing what you believe, both to God and to each other. For a variation, ask worshippers to face each other as they say the creed.

Prayers

Ensure that this time of prayer includes not only the needs and concerns of God's people, but specific reference to some of the gifts you have discovered during this festival. (See the reproducible bulletin insert, "Gifts Litany," in the Original Copies section of this guide for one example.

Depending on the worship traditions in your congregation, you may want to extend this time of prayer to include the spoken petitions of those who worship.

Offering and Offering Processional

The offering is always a time of giving, but today's offering can be made especially meaningful with simple changes. Consider these possibilities:

Collecting commitment forms in the offering baskets

Collecting other commitments (to live as God's people during the week, at home, school, work) on forms or certificates provided in this guide, or of your own making.

Asking whole families to serve as offering ushers.

Using larger offering baskets, perhaps unique to the cultures of the ethnic heritage of your congregation.

GIVING worshippers a gift as their gifts are collected. (The bookmarks, small candles, or small handmade crosses).

The offering processional for this service can also become a especially meaningful, using any of these suggestions:

Make the processional especially joyful, asking musicians or dancers to lead the ushers (or congregation member) to the altar.

Ushers can bring forward the offering baskets, communion elements and the personal gifts tents made during Event I.

Congregation members can also join the offering procession, bringing:

the personal gift cards made during Event I

food items for a food cupboard

their completed commitment forms

symbols of their skills and knowledge that they use during the week to God's glory.

The entire congregation can come to and remain at the altar, in a symbolic offering of themselves to God! A rite for blessing gifts would follow immediately.

You may want to sing "Padre Nuestro" during the offering processional (Cantad al Señor #109; Libro de Liturgia y Cantico # 235).

I COMMIT MYSELF THIS WEEK:

- ❑ To serve God by serving others, at home, school or work.
- ❑ To remain hopeful for the future.
- ❑ To tell others about Jesus Christ.
- ❑ To pray thankfully and earnestly.
- ❑ To live joyfully.

Name: _____

A Rite for the Blessing of Gifts

One of the important features of this festive worship can be a special rite, in which the gifts of God's people are blessed by pastor and congregation together. You can construct your own rite, adapt similar rites already available or use the reproducible bulletin insert, "A Rite for the Blessing of Gifts," found in the Original Copies section of this planning guide.

As you construct or conduct this rite, consider these matters:

- The tone of a rite is both solemn and joyful. Rites include prayer, movement, moments of silence and symbols.
- If you will encourage worshippers to bring to church special "gifts" they would like blessed, such as pets or tools or books, consider bringing the pastor (and other worship leaders) out into the pews rather than asking worshippers to come to the altar.
- Think how all gifts and all worshippers will be blessed in this rite, because all God's people are gifted!

Holy Communion

Depending on your congregation's tradition, you may want to make this sacrament a unique experience, with these possibilities:

- Ask congregation members to bake special breads, unique to their country of origin, for use in Holy Communion today.
- Provide special communion wine, perhaps made by congregation members, or made in a Hispanic country.
- Ask pastor and communion assistants to don special vestments made during Event 2 preparation time. (For example, chasubles can be constructed out of simple cloth and decorated with symbols of the gifts of congregation members.)
- Change the blessing of children who do not take communion to include a reference to their gifts, or encouragement to thank God for those gifts. You might also remember with them the great and good gift of forgiveness!
- Try a different physical arrangement for distributing the elements of Holy Communion, such as gathering all worshippers together around the altar or altar rail, or passing consecrated elements from family to family.
- Proceed the distribution with a few words about the gifts of God that come in Holy Communion: forgiveness of sins, assurance of eternal life, power to live as Christ desires, the assurance and blessing of the entire Church on earth. THIS meal is a gift!
- Sing the same verse or response over and over again, such as "Lord, have mercy," "Thanks be to you," or other familiar pieces of the liturgy or refrains. (The short Taize melodies are a good example.)

Benediction, Dismissal and Recessional

The traditional forms for the benediction and dismissal are especially meaningful in a worship service devoted to the idea of God's gifts. Honoring your worship traditions and style, you might try one or more of these variations:

After the general benediction from the pastor, worshippers offer each other a personal benediction.

You bless God by repeating the phrase "Blessings be to God!" as a kind of chant or cheer!

Worshippers call out the name of individuals, situations, events, etc. they want to bless during the week. (For example, "Bless our senator!" or "Bless the work of teachers!")

If the meal will follow directly, the pastor, assistant, musicians or choir lead the congregation to the place where the meal will be served. You may want to take down and move some of the processional items to new locations in the room where the meal will be served. In this way the recessional will mirror the excitement and unique meaning of the processional.

Meal

90 MINUTES

This meal is the culmination of the entire festival, and can consist of the following elements, in any order you wish:

Special Meal

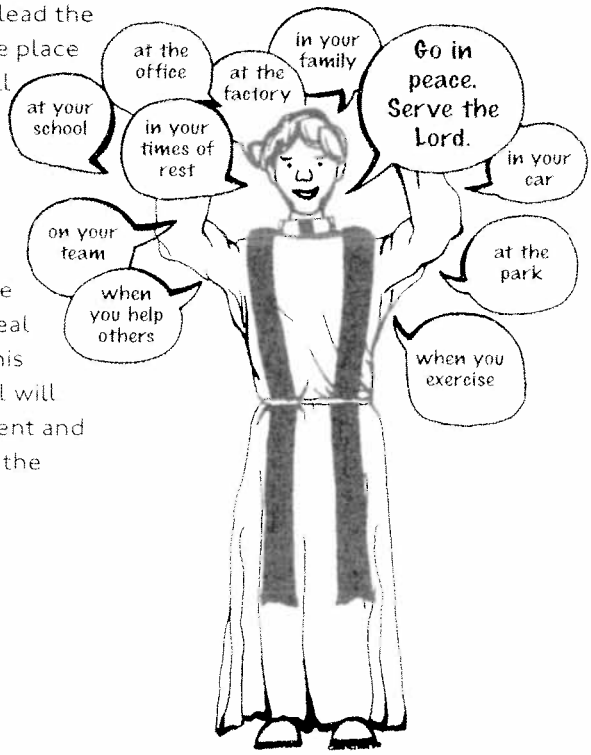
Announcement of Commitments

Entertainment

Whole Group Activity

In a way, this meal is an extension of the worship service, so it can carry some elements of the service into the meal. (For example, you may want to offer Holy Communion as the first part of your meal together, or delay the sermon until the time of the meal.)

The following paragraphs offer some of the suggestions we thought of, from our own experiences and hopes for your congregation.



Special Meal

Make this meal a special time of eating and fellowship, not only by serving special foods, but in other ways, such as:

How you decorate the room (use some of the "gifts" items from the festival events?) and the tables.

Seating arrangements that honor families, the oldest or original members of the congregation, or members with similar gifts.

Special touches such as "uniformed" servers, special dinnerware, table decorations or prizes, surprise guests.

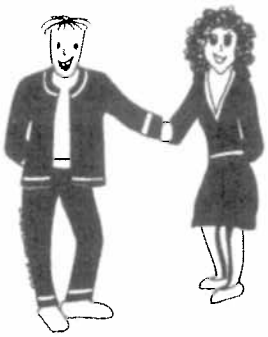
Announcement of Commitments

At some time during the meal, you can announce the cumulative total of financial commitments that have been gathered so far (in today's worship, in person or by mail). Whatever the totals, make the announcement one of excitement and energy, perhaps singing a verse of a rousing song of praise in response to this good news! Remember to thank all who have made commitments, and to encourage those still wishing to do so.

Entertainment

This meal should feature some special entertainment to give it a festive tone. Try some of these ideas:

- Repeat some of the dramas, presentations or entertainers from Event 2.
- Reserve this time for families to show their special talents, like singing or playing music.
- Have impromptu singing, by families or by tables, that finds humor in the matter of "giftedness." For example, challenge each table to sing a already-existing song with the word "give" or "gift" in it, OR change a contemporary song to include the word.
- Make up quick-skits, by table or family, with situations that find humor in "gifts." For example, two people who find their gifts getting out of control, or a series of people each of whom thinks he or she has a gift, but is woefully and humorously lacking that gift.
- Continue or complete the "Guess Who?" contest, awarding prizes for "winners." (See a description of The Legacy Gallery and this contest in the Preparation section of this guide, page 26 .)
- Tell complimentary stories about each other, recalling times when the gift of a member of this church made your life different.



- Spotlight your pastor's special gifts in a humorous and thankful format.
- Have a group singing time, including a time for youth and older members to teach the group some of the songs they know well.
- Listen to the sermon for the day, but presented as a dialogue or discussion that includes stories, disagreement, questions, and other dramatic elements.
- Feature several of the oldest members of the congregation is some appreciative interviews, where they are asked to tell about their lives of faithfulness, tenacity or hopefulness.
- Try the same "interviews" with some of the younger members of the congregation, focusing on their views of their future work, homes, families, etc.
- Tell stories about some of the enjoyable or humorous things that happened during Events 1 and 2 and the previous meal.
- Revised "game shows," in which meal participants get to be "contestants" in shows that test knowledge of trivia (about other congregation members?).
- An "awards ceremony," in which all those who helped put together the festival are given special awards—certificates, prizes, items—for their work. Of course, all the awards are slightly humorous!

Whole Group Activity

A meal time can be made special by engaging the entire group is an activity that is just plain fun! Consider some of the following possibilities:

- Make up a new dance, called The Gifts, and teach it to the whole group.
- Rename all the members of your congregation: Tape or attach sturdy sheets of paper to the back of each member's clothing. Distribute water-based and washable felt tip markers (the ones that don't bleed through paper!) and challenge everyone to write "new names" for the people here, based on their unique giftedness! (For example, a child who has lots of pets may be renamed "Noah," or an adult who is quietly helpful could be renamed "The Quiet Servant."

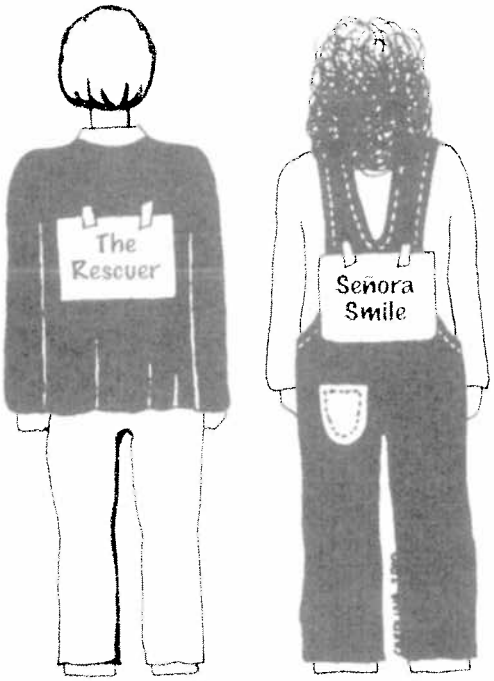
Go for a walk together in your neighborhood, pausing at several places to thank God for the gift of a specific feature of your surroundings.

Make up a short-term "time capsule" that you will open next year. Each individual writes a message to the congregation for reading one year from now. Place all the messages into a sturdy box that will be stored somewhere and opened at a special occasion one year from now. The messages could be wishes, reflections on this festival, gratitude for individuals in the congregation, prayers or even questions.

Watch a special film together, one that is entertaining, inspiring or challenging.

Construct or assemble some simple, lasting symbol of this event, such as:

- a memories book
- a videotape comprised of accumulated "interviews" made during the festival or this meal
- an outdoor pathway made up of stones, paving stones or large bricks, each laid in place by members
- a new perennial flower garden, with seeds or plants dug into the ground during this time together.



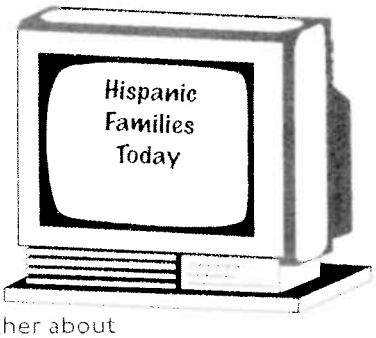
Additional Options

The festival weekend can continue into other parts of your congregation's life. In this section of the guide we offer you additional options for extending the festival into Sunday afternoon and evening. You can find ideas for longer-term options in the next section of this guide, "Follow-up."

If you want to extend the festival into a full-scale weekend—almost like an event for the entire community—consider these additional possibilities. (YOU CAN FIND SUGGESTIONS FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES IN THE MISCELLANEOUS SECTION OF THIS PLANNING GUIDE.)

Family time alone

One way to extend the festival's benefits is to provide a semi-structured time for families to spend alone. You might consider some of the following:



- Give fathers and mothers a set of simple instructions for talking together about their family gifts. They might use any of the items they have completed during the festival or other inventories of gifts or family strengths.

- Show a film about families in this time in history. Give families some time to go apart and talk about what they have experienced.
- Give each participating family a simple project to complete together, something like assembling or sorting food baskets, or writing letters to relatives in other countries. While they work, they can talk about their strengths and values.
- Send families to observe people and events in various locations in your community, with the assignment to bring back evidence of God's gifts in that part of God's world.
- Assign each family the task of writing (or drawing) an outline of their history, back at least two generations, for the purpose of re-examining their legacies.
- If you provide an opportunity for families to return to the festival—for a final presentation or devotional time?—they can summarize for the whole group what they have done, what they have learned or what they have talked about.

Outdoor Games and Activities

The festival activities are planned for indoor settings, but you may choose to expand your festival to include outdoor games and activities. You might offer:

- Traditional games from the countries of origin of your members or the community, such as piñatas.
- Simultaneous tournaments, contests or games, such as soccer, baseball, races, or contests of strength (tug-of-war)
- Cooperative games
- Hunts of various kinds: Easter eggs, scavenger, treasure or hide-and-seek.

Picnic

With some variations, the special meal can turn into an outdoor picnic, complete with other elements like barbecued food, picnic or lawn games, and a more relaxed schedule.

If you choose this model for the meal and the afternoon, you may need to re-think the kind of entertainment and whole group activities that can take place in the setting you choose.

Carnival

In some communities, a "festival" is actually like a community carnival, with additional elements. In this larger idea of "festival," you gain the advantage of inviting members of the community to join your congregation in a time of fun. You may want to expand your festival to include carnival elements such as:

- Food and game booths
- Sorteos or rifas
- Roving musicians, jugglers, clowns
- Outdoor stages or performance areas, with scheduled performers
- Display booths, showing crafts, historical or other gifts of your congregation
- Rides of various kinds

Study or planning

You might extend the festival into an evening by inviting the congregation members or leaders to return for a time of further discussion, reflection or general planning. You might:

Take the next steps in collecting further commitment forms, or building a program budget based on the commitment you have collected.

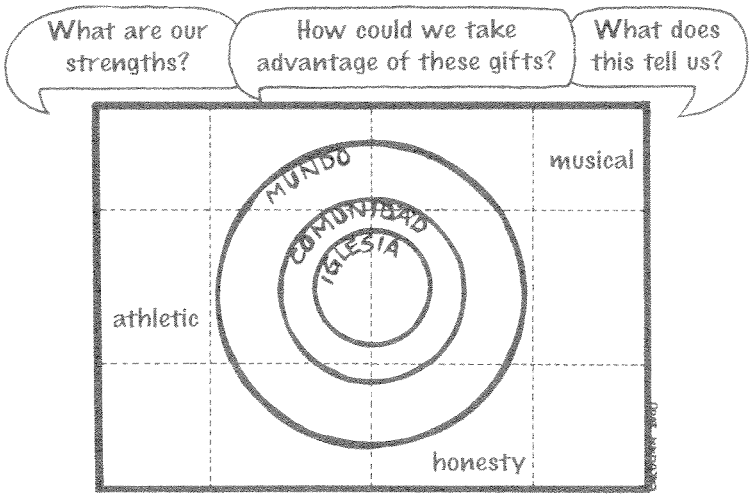
Spend some time talking about "goals," "mission" or "vision" that have come from the experiences in the festival.

Invite a community organizer familiar with the process of "asset-based planning" to dream with you about next steps you might take, based on the discovery of congregational gifts.

Engage in a study of the concept of gifts just a little bit deeper, using the tracts set, "Los dones" (Concordia Publishing House No. 16-6060). An interesting question to pose after reading each tract: Who in this congregation possesses that gift, and how can we strengthen that gift in that person?

Offer a time of quiet conversation – with dessert and beverages – reflecting on the important things you have learned about yourselves and the members of this congregation.

Bring together those with writing skills to capture in words what has happened during this festival, for use in later months.



Prayer service or informal worship

If you extend the festival into the evening, some members, guests or community members may enjoy a final time of worship, this time more informal or personal. Consider these options:

A prayer service in a quiet location outside of your sanctuary – in a nearby home, park or hall.

A service distinguished by a style of worship or music. For example, a mariachi or jazz mass, or a service with no music.

A time of prayer that focuses on specific members' gifts, as a way of calling for God's power in their lives.

A service in which brief commentary on the rich biblical witness about gifts forms the content of the service. (See the texts cited in the Bible Study in the Miscellaneous section of this guide.)

A service that prepares workers for the week to come.

A time of personal witness and faith-sharing.

Follow-up

The festival can reach into more long-term aspects of your congregation's life. Over a period of months following the festival, its effects can influence how you conduct a variety of programs, or how you think about your church. In this section of the guide, we provide you some suggestions on how you might extend the festival's benefits into other areas of congregational life and into coming months.

Commitment forms

Few congregations find that they can distribute or collect all commitment forms in one weekend event. That means that one area of follow-up will be in contacting members who, for a variety of reasons, did not complete the forms.

As you complete the process of distributing and collecting these forms, follow these general guidelines:

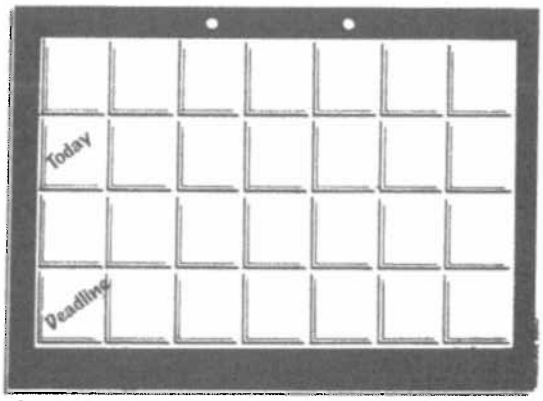
- The best way to distribute and collect anything of this value is personally, in face-to-face contact.
- Some of you will need to make personal visits or telephone calls to those who did not respond.
- There will always be some members who will not complete commitment forms, even though they will continue to contribute. Remember to thank them for their contributions even if they choose not to complete a commitment form.
- You might use first-class mail and a well-written cover letter to reach those who did not attend the festival. Be sure to tell them how and when they can return the completed form to church.
- The "Beyond Limosna" presentation might be a good way to approach the visits. (See the description of the presentation and the chart on pages 47-49 of this section of the planning guide.)
- If you have used "Mi promesa de compromiso con el Señor" (INCLUDED IN THE ORIGINAL COPIES SECTION OF THIS GUIDE) remember to have your pastor sign all the forms and return the top portion to congregation members for their use.

Building giftedness

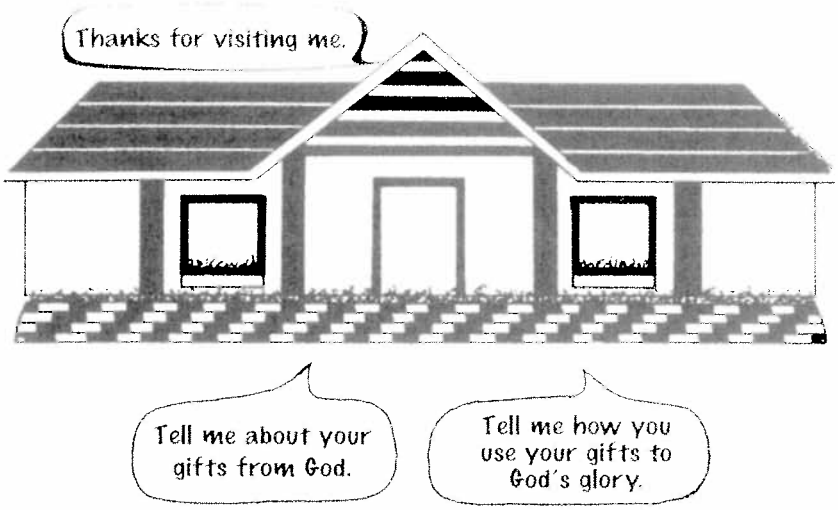
During this festival you will have discovered some amazing gifts among congregation members. Some of the gifts will be immediately useful in congregation programs and activities. Other gifts might not fit with normal congregational activities.

In either case, part of your follow-up is to continue to build up or add value to the giftedness of your members. You might consider these ideas:

- Use an extra copy of your congregation directory or data base to record a brief description of the gifts you've discovered during the festival. Fill in your ideas about members who did not attend the festival. Keep a copy of this listing close at hand, if only for your personal prayers for members.



Set a deadline of about two to three weeks after the festival for distributing and collecting all the remaining forms.



Based on the patterns of giftedness in your congregation, consider adding some skill- or knowledge-building classes or experiences as part of your programs. For example, if you have people gifted in their knowledge of finances, offer seminars in tax preparation, budgeting or living simply. Ask the gifted persons to plan and lead the seminars.

Save a place on one of your congregational bulletin boards to spotlight members whose gifts have been noted in local media. Don't forget children and youth!

Audit your own leadership and the congregation's programs to see places where you might add value to people's gifts rather than only focus on their needs. Write down your activities with congregation members in a typical month, and see how much need-filling you do, and how much gifts-building.

Provide places within the life of your congregation for individuals with similar gifts to have conversation together!

Use your congregation newsletter to spotlight, one at a time, gifts that apply specifically to Hispanic/Latino Christians. (For example, tenacity, or a deep appreciation for God's grace.) In your writing, talk about the evidences of that gift that you see, its importance in daily living and offer some observations how that gift can be strengthened.

Have lunch with some teachers, career or guidance counselors or some human relations workers. Ask them for their ideas how to build up gifts in your congregation's members.

Using the tracts sets, "Los dones"

This eight-tract set from Concordia Publishing House spotlights eight separate kinds of gifts that be seen among Hispanic/Latino Christians, including gifts of:

- Leadership
- Pastoring
- Counseling/Consoling
- Teaching
- Using money
- Providing for people in need
- Serving others
- Communicating the message

Each tract is full of engaging propositions about these gifts, including challenging questions about the use of these gifts to God's glory. You can use the tracts set as a follow-up program for the festival in any of these ways:

Read and talk about one tract each month in your committee or council meetings. Be sure to include time for personal story-telling regarding each gift.

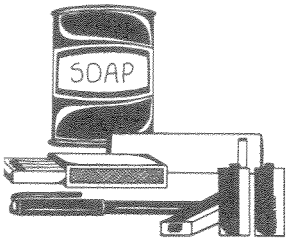
Mail specific tracts to specific members. In this way you will affirm members who have the specific gifts noted in the tracts.

- Make the growth and development of these eight gifts the focus of your congregational programming for the next year. After discussing the meaning of each gift, ask yourselves the question: "How can we help this gift grow and prosper here?"
- Find places where the lessons of the lectionary match the biblical material in the tracts. Use the thoughts in the tracts as material for a sermon study group.
- Use the cover art for each of the gifts as the key visual cue in a series of children's sermons or Sunday school openings.
- Make the subject of each of the tracts into the subjects for public and private prayer in your congregation over a period of eight weeks or months.
- Use the tract covers as material for a bulletin board that continues to grow over eight weeks or months.

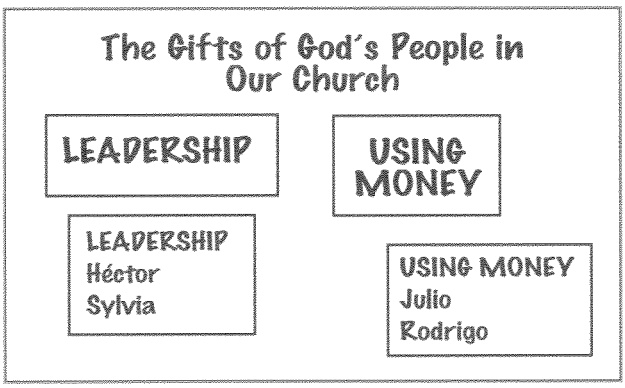
Los regalos during Advent, Christmas and Epiphany

The theme of "gifts" can have a continuing focus during these seasons of the church year. In order to keep the ideals of "giftedness" in front of your congregation during these seasons, consider some of these ideas:

- Use "gifts" language in mailings and sermons throughout these seasons.
- Plan toward another Festival of the Gifts of God close to Three Kings Day, adding the specific observances and customs of that festival.
- Ask dramatically-gifted members to write, plan and conduct a Christmas children's program around the theme, "Gifts From God."



- At the start of Advent, give each family in the congregation a seemingly-small gift. Add a challenge to the gift: At Christmas or Three Kings Day, be ready to tell how you used the gift for God's purposes. Place some of the stories in your newsletter.
- In your worship planning for these seasons, focus on hymns and songs that have the ideas of "gift" in their lyrics. Talk about the hymns and songs in the children's or adult sermon.
- Provide special service opportunities during these seasons, with the theme, "You are God's Gift to Others." Don't forget children and youth.
- If artistically-gifted individuals are members of your congregation, ask one or more of them to design a special, gifts-focused card for Christmas or Three Kings Day. Sell or give away the printed cards to congregation members.



Challenge members to write the names of individuals who use these gifts in this church or in the world.

Planning with "giftedness" as the first step

Much of our usual planning in churches is based on two steps:

What do we need to do (or what should we do)?

Who can we get to get that job done?

A gifts-based approach to congregational planning starts with a different set of questions:

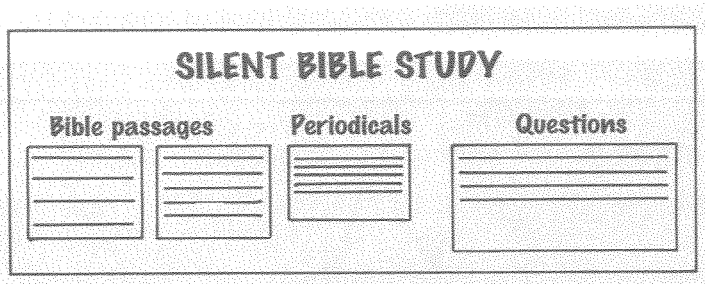
What kinds of (gifts) do we have among us here now?

How can we construct a program or activity from those gifts?

In the first approach we are usually scrambling to find enough of the "right people" to fill volunteer slots. In the second approach, we do what we're already good at, and find that we already have enough gifted people from the start of the planning.

Another difference: In the first approach we may "fill the need" or "do what we should," but work very hard at the task. In the second approach, we may not always fill the "right" need, but we will accomplish many more tasks, with much more joy and willingness to work.

Try to think and act with a gifts-based approach in one or more of your congregation's activities. Remember that the starting point is not "should" or "need." Start with something like a Christmas program or a new fellowship opportunity.



1 Post the topic, and several of the Bible passages that pertain to that topic.

2 Select a few short articles from the newspapers or magazines your congregation members read.

3 Add a few questions for viewers to consider.

4 Change the bulletin board every two weeks.

Bible study on "gifts"

In the Miscellaneous section of this guide, pages 110-113, you will find an outline and suggestions for a Bible study on the subject of gifts. Use all or part of the study to explore in depth what the Scriptures have to say about this idea. Here are some ways to use the Bible study:

- For each of the sub-categories in the study, write a short, thought-provoking essay and a few pertinent questions. Post it on your congregation's web-site, asking for e-mailed responses and questions. Change the topic every two weeks.
- Try the same idea, using your newsletter instead.
- Start a new Bible study group that is aimed at workers. Meet for breakfast at a local coffee shop once a week, and focus the Bible study's meanings on the situations that each participant might face during the week.
- Assemble an "adult vacation Bible school" that meets in the evenings during the summer. Combine the Bible study suggestions with fellowship, fun and food.

Festival de los Regalos de Dios

Original Copies

Original Copies

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Remember that the blanket permission for duplicating these materials extends to congregational use only, which means that the copyright notice on each page should be included with each copy.

A section of reproducible art is also included in this section for your use in custom-making your own festival materials, such as publicity, invitations, brochures, letterhead, etc. No copyright notice need appear on these items.

Who Are We?

Directions: Find a person who fits each of the descriptions on this page. Write the name of that person on the line. Try to fill as many of the lines as possible in the time you are given. Have fun!

The name of a person who was born in California. _____

The name of a person who plays a musical instrument. _____

The name of a person who has lost a tooth recently. _____

The name of a person who knows a famous person. _____

The name of a person who once lived in South America. _____

The name of a person who is a student now. _____

The name of a person who is generous. _____

The name of a person who rides a bicycle for more than one mile daily. _____

The name of a person who has an interesting job. _____

The name of a person who has more than three names. _____

The name of a person who is good at soccer. _____

The name of a person who studied theology. _____

The name of a person who knows an entertainer or sports hero. _____

The name of a person who has an unusual pet. _____

The name of a person who has more than ten friends. _____

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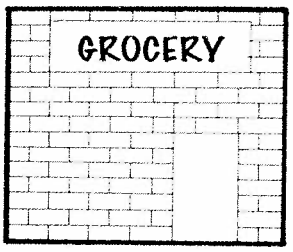
Bible Conversations

For the Lord is bringing you into a good land . . . a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing.

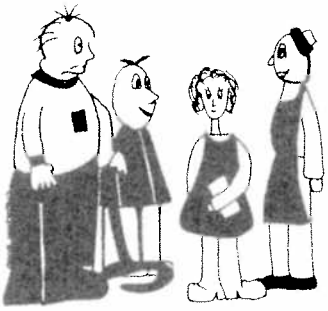
Deuteronomy 8:7-8

If you were talking to a recent immigrant from Mexico, how would this passage be true (or not true) for that person?

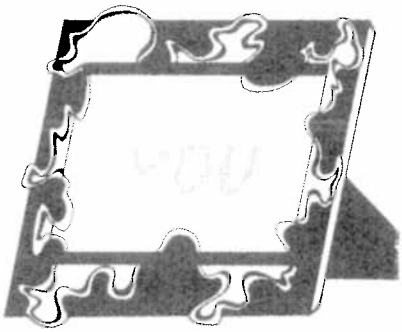


How would a store owner think about this passage?

Which of these two groups would most likely agree with the meaning of this passage in their lives?



How is this passage true (or not true) for you?



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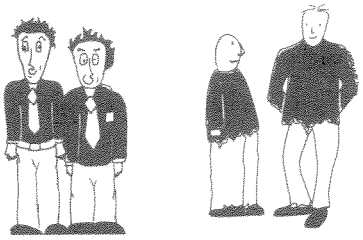
The Gifts of God
among Hispanic/Latino Christians



God has been busy all these years, giving wonderful gifts to Hispanic/Latino Christians. When you look around, and when you look inside yourself truthfully and gratefully, there they are, God's gifts! Check the words or phrases on this list that describe what God has put inside you as a gift for your whole life. Don't be too modest or you might miss something wonderful God has given you! And use the blank spaces to write gifts we forgot to ask you about!

Skills/Knowledge

- ❑ Proficient in more than one language
- ❑ Able to tell others about my faith.
- ❑ Good at making wise decisions.
- ❑ Know a lot about life.
- ❑ Good with my hands.
- ❑ Skilled in art.
- ❑ I am a good learner.
- ❑ You should see me dance!
- ❑ I am a good singer.
- ❑ Good at forgiving others.
- ❑ Good parent.
- ❑ I am a good son or daughter.
- ❑ Skilled in handling finances.
- ❑ Skilled at leading others.
- ❑ Good friend.
- ❑ I make people feel welcome and at ease.
- ❑ I know how to listen!
- ❑ Good teacher, mentor, or guide for others.
- ❑ I am easy to understand.
- ❑ Help others laugh.
- ❑ Other: _____

_____

_____

Traits/Attitudes

- ❑ Tenacious.
- ❑ Caring.
- ❑ Creative.
- ❑ Loyal
- ❑ Honest in my dealings with other people
- ❑ Grateful to God.
- ❑ Grateful to others.
- ❑ I work hard at whatever I do.
- ❑ Generous with money.
- ❑ Generous with time.
- ❑ I do what is right, according to what I have taught.
- ❑ I don't let adversity get me down for very long.
- ❑ I have high respect for myself as a person.
- ❑ Faithful to God.
- ❑ Faithful to God in my daily life.
- ❑ Responsible.
- ❑ Sensitive about others.
- ❑ Quietly powerful.
- ❑ Hopeful about the future.
- ❑ Reliable.
- ❑ Joyful person.
- ❑ Respect for other cultures.
- ❑ Other: _____

_____

Quality of Life

- ❑ Good schools and good teachers for my children.
- ❑ God's grace is everywhere I look!
- ❑ People forgive me.
- ❑ People know me as I really am.
- ❑ Safe neighborhood.
- ❑ Good friends around me.
- ❑ Wonderful church.
- ❑ Good job.
- ❑ A comfortable home.
- ❑ A comfortable income.
- ❑ A family that loves me!
- ❑ An ethnic legacy that I am proud of!
- ❑ A healthy body and mind.
- ❑ By God's grace and Jesus' death, I am saved eternally.
- ❑ I am making a difference in the world.
- ❑ Many opportunities for serving others.
- ❑ Satisfying hobbies.
- ❑ A wonderful legacy that I will pass along to my children and family.
- ❑ Other: _____

_____

_____

Gifts of God for God's Purposes

What I am good at doing

Use the space below to write your ideas about what you are "good at doing." This includes natural talents, skills you've learned in your life, skills you use at work or home every day, skills people see in you. And here's an interesting question: How does God use what you're good at for God's purposes? Just think about it . . .!

What I like to do

Use the space here to write what you like to do! Be specific about what you really enjoy doing, things your proud to be able to do, what you do that brings deep pleasure to your life. Another thought: God is also working through you to accomplish God's purposes. Amazing!

What I would like to know or do better

There are some parts of your life where you'd love to have more knowledge or skill than you already have. Use this space to write about your hopes for new or increased knowledge or skill. Here, too, God is ready to give you more than you might imagine!

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People in Need

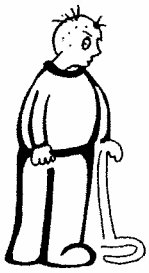
MARITZA

Maritza is a friend of your son or daughter, and she comes from a broken home. Her father left the family right after Maritza was born. She is seventh and youngest child in the family. Her older brothers have joined a neighborhood gang, and are in constant trouble.

MARITZA AND YOU

Today your child came home from school and told you that Maritza came to school with a broken shoulder, and bruises over her face and arms. She was beat up by the mother's boyfriend. Your child wants your family to help Maritza by letting her come to live with you family until it is safe for her to go back home.

What are your feelings for Maritza? What is your response to your own child's request? How will you help?



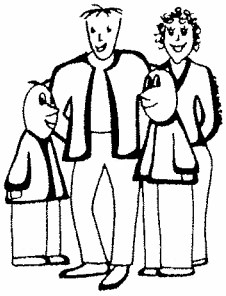
MIGUEL FLORES

Miguel is a neighbor who has lived next door to your family for as long as you can remember. Miguel's wife, Rosalinda, died last year. Since then, Miguel's health and morale have deteriorated. His family has moved away from the area and doesn't check on him very often.

MIGUEL FLORES AND YOU

You notice that he hasn't been outside for the past two days. You decide to go to his home to check on him and no one answers the door. You find a way to get in, and find Miguel lying in bed, shivering from a fever.

What are your feelings for Miguel? What will you do first? How will you help?



DAVID, MARICELA AND THEIR CHILDREN

You know David from work. He is a good worker, always on time, always working hard. Maricela stays at home with their children, baby-sitting for extra money. Today, David was shingling a roof and tripped over a bundle of shingles. He fell from the roof and hurt his back. The clinic doctors say that he won't be able to work for a month. He has no insurance and it will take awhile to get workers' compensation.

DAVID, MARICELA, THEIR CHILDREN AND YOU

Maricela comes to you, asking you to help their family.

What are your feelings for David, Maricela and their family? How will you help?

A NATURAL DISASTER

A horrible natural disaster has occurred in your home country. Thousands of people have been affected, including some of your cousins and distant relatives. People are homeless, food and drinking water are scarce, and it is possible that disease will soon spread.

A NATURAL DISASTER AND YOU

Your church has decided to help with money, food, clothing and medical supplies.

What are your feelings for the people affected by this disaster far away? How will you help?

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A Litany of God's Gifts

Leader: Dear Lord, Jesus Christ, we bring you our thanks today for the many gifts you have given to us. Without our asking and without deserving them, gifts have come into our lives.

People: We are grateful to you, merciful God.

Leader: In our prayers today, we remember with gratitude the gifts you have poured on this congregation, qualities of life, skills, knowledge and personal traits that grace our lives:

People: Kindness, honesty, sincerity, tenacity, creativity, loyalty, generosity, self-respect, and faithfulness.

Leader: Good and decent neighborhoods, good schools, good friends, family, fulfilling work, safety, and our basic freedoms.

People: The skills and knowledge we learn at school, in our neighborhoods and at our work, those that are ordinary and those that are special.

Leader: On this day when we celebrate all that you have given to us as your people, we thank you especially for the gift of your grace. In Christ Jesus you have saved us from death, destruction and our own sinfulness. You have showed us a life worth living and made us co-workers with you in your kingdom.

People: We bless your name, because you are our God and we are your people!

Leader: Today we ask your special favor on (INSERT SPECIAL PETITIONS HERE). (AFTER EACH PETITION) Lord, in your mercy,

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: In your kindness, continue to grant us a spirit of generosity, so that your gifts to us are shared with those around us, and those in need. In Christ's Holy Name we pray.

All: Amen

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A Rite for the Blessing of Gifts

Pastor: Hear this, God's people: You are a gifted people! By God's grace, you have been uniquely blessed with personal traits, skills, knowledge and a quality of life that comes from God's loving hand.

Assistant: Today we will ask God to bless the gifts each of us has been given by God. By this blessing we will see that each of us has a special place in God's order, and that each of us brings God's will to bear on the world. As a sign of God's blessing, each of us will be marked with the sign of the cross and with oil.

Pastor: Hear the Word of God: "A body is made up of many parts, and each of them has its own use., That's how it is with us. There are many of us, but we each are part of the body of Christ, as well as part of one another. God has given each of us different gifts to use. " (Romans 12:4-6a.)

(Special instructions are given for the blessing ritual.)

The Act of Blessing

As you approach the Pastor or Assistant:

- Present your gift by holding it in outstretched hands or place it in front of you.
- Say these words, "Today I ask God to bless this gift I have been given by him, (name specific attitude, skill, trait, knowledge, quality of life or item).

The Pastor or Assistant will make the sign of the cross or anoint your forehead with oil, saying these words:

May God bless this and all your gifts, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

You will respond: **Amen**

When all have been blessed, the congregation prays this prayer together:

Dear Father in Heaven,

Thank you for all your blessings. On this day, we dedicate all that you have given us, to serve you in our places in your world. Thank you for being our God and for making us your people. In Christ's Holy Name. Amen

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Confession and Absolution

Confession

Reflection:

Confession implies not only recognition of the evil we have committed before our creator, but also a recognition of where we stand before God. Generally, we forget that God is God and we are simply his creatures. We forget to recognize who we are. The following confession will help us place ourselves, again, in our place.

Congregation:

Father, we recognize that you are God, creator of all things and giver of all that is good. We recognize that we are your creatures and we owe all that we have to you. We regret that many times we do not see the many gifts you give us. We confess that we sin in not recognizing them and we sin even more when we recognize them and do not use them to your glory. You are rich and out of your richness you gave us in abundance the gift to communicate your love to others, the gift to encourage the disheartened, the gift to serve those in need, the gift to teach, the gift to lead, and many more. Many times, we use your gifts more for our benefit and less to your glory. Forgive us and help us to serve you in the midst of our family, in our congregation and our community. Amen.

Pastor:

Absolution: I have good news from God to you. King David announces that God: "forgives your sins and heals all your diseases" (Psalm 103.3). Receive the forgiveness of God and rejoice in the freedom you have today, through Christ. Amen.

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My promise of commitment to the Lord

Now there are variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are variety of services, but the same Lord; and there are variety of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

(1 Corinthians 12:4-6,11)

Lord, I thank you for all the talents and gifts with which you have blessed me. Help me understand that you have given them to me not so that I can keep them to myself, but to use them to your service and to the service of others. I promise, with your help, to use them in service to the Church, the community and my family. Amen.

IN CHURCH

Talent
Time
Possessions

IN THE COMMUNITY

Talent
Time
Possessions

AMONG MY FAMILY

Talent
Time
Possessions

Participant's signature _____ Pastor's signature _____

Date _____ Date _____

My promise of commitment to the Lord in the congregation

Talent
Time
Possessions

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Instructions

My promise of commitment to the Lord

The form, "Mi promesa de compromiso con el Señor," provides you the opportunity to indicate how you will commit your whole life to the service of God. To complete the form, follow these directions:

By yourself or with your family, read the passage from 1 Corinthians, and pray the prayer of commitment on the form.

Consider to what actions you will commit yourself (and your family) over the next year. In each area of your life – your church, your community and your family – consider how you will commit to God your gifts, your time and your money.

In the space provided, write what, with God's help, you promise to do in the coming year. Be specific where possible. Sign and date the promises you have made.

Copy the commitments you have made regarding your church in the spaces at the bottom of the form.

Bring the signed and completed form to the Los regalos worship service, where you will place it in the offering basket as part of your offering that day.

After the festival is over, your pastor will sign the form and return the top portion to you as a record of your commitments for the coming year. Consider framing or displaying this form in your home as a reminder of what you have promised to God.

Commitment forms, "Called by the Spirit"

The following pages contain seven whole- and half-sheet commitment forms that you can reproduce or otherwise adapt to fit your needs. Each commitment form focuses on a specific area of commitment for Christian stewards who are "called by the Spirit." Taken together, the forms help congregation members think about the whole range of commitments they might make as part of the Festival de los regalos de Dios.

As you make your decisions about using these forms, consider these ideas:

You might use several of the forms as preparation for the festival, asking worshipers on successive Sundays to complete and offer each kind of commitment.

You might use the forms on Sundays following the festival, as a continuing follow-up for the themes of the festival.

You might ask leaders of the congregation to complete all the forms, and to spend prayerful time together talking about their commitments.

Consider the entire set as a way of defining "leadership" among God's people, as a kind of orientation for congregational leaders.

Mail the forms to all members, and ask them to bring all the completed forms to the festival worship service.

The commitment forms are not numbered so that you can use them in the order you choose.

My promise of commitment to the Lord. Copyright © 2001 Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Permission is given to duplicate this page for congregational use only, provided this copyright notice is included.

Called by the Spirit

"I believe . . . in the Holy Spirit"

Asking the Holy Spirit to bless and empower me/us in the work of calling, gathering and enlightening others through the Gospel, I/we intend to:

- ❑ Continually acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord of my/our life, and honor Him as I/we manage life.
- ❑ Give God the first fruits of my/our income, which amounts to $ _____ weekly/monthly/yearly as my/our regular church offering in support of my/our congregation's mission locally and world-wide. (This is an increase of $____ or _____% of what I/we have been giving.)
- ❑ Over and above my/our regular church offering, I/we hope to support with gifts of love various other local and world-wide ministries, such as: _____

_____

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

(RETURN THIS FORM AS DIRECTED)

Called by the Spirit

"I believe . . . in the Holy Christian Church"

As I/we consider my/our role within the church, I/we believe the Holy Spirit is calling me/us to:

- ❑ Commit to regular, focused prayer.
- ❑ Pray for a person of another culture or race. His/her name is _____
- ❑ Pray for a person in another place. His/her name is _____
- ❑ Pray that the Holy Spirit equips me/us for my/our specific tasks in ministry, using God's gifts to me/us.
- ❑ Pray for every member of my/our congregation.

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

(RETURN THIS FORM AS DIRECTED)

Called by the Spirit

"I believe . . . in the Holy Spirit"

Celebrating the work of the Holy Spirit, who calls me/us to faith by the Gospel and continually strengthens me/us, I/we believe the Holy Spirit is urging me/us to:

❑ Give thanks for God's grace and mercy, expressing it by: _____

_____

❑ Participate in regular Bible study to strengthen my/our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I/we will study: _____

❑ Exercise my/our belief by rejoicing in the fruits of the Spirit. I/we will celebrate and share each fruit of the Spirit listed below with the name(s) I/we write:

Hope: _____ Love: _____

Peace: _____ Joy: _____

Kindness: _____ Patience: _____

Goodness: _____ Gentleness: _____

Faithfulness: _____ Self-control: _____

❑ Live and walk by the Spirit as a good steward of the gifts and blessings God has given me/us.

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

(RETURN THIS FORM AS DIRECTED)

Called by the Spirit

"I believe . . . in the Communion of Saints"

Consider my/our faith-relationship with Christ, and the fellowship I/we have with other forgiven sinners, I/we believe the Holy Spirit is calling me/us in the Scriptures to:

- ☐ Celebrate the Communion of Saints as the fellowship of forgiven sinners.
- ☐ Commit to regular weekly worship and Holy Communion as offered.
- ☐ Daily remembrance of Baptism.
- ☐ Take up the task of serving by getting involved in: _____, including the joys and/or sacrifices that accompany this task.
- ☐ Daily meditation and study of the Bible.
- ☐ Spend more quality time with my/our family and friends.

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

(RETURN THIS FORM AS DIRECTED)

Called by the Spirit

"I believe . . . in the Forgiveness of Sins"

Celebrating the treasure I/we have in the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ, I/we believe the Holy Spirit is calling and empowering me/us to:

- ☐ Pray for a heart that more often shares, accepts and celebrates forgiveness.
- ☐ Apply the renewing effect of forgiveness in my/our home and family life by: _____

  _____
- ☐ Practice forgiveness at my/our work or leisure time by: _____

  _____
- ☐ Forgive the "unforgivable ones," those who bother me/us the most.
- ☐ Actively work at forgiveness as a way of life.

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

(RETURN THIS FORM AS DIRECTED)

Called by the Spirit

"I believe . . . in the Resurrection of the Body"

Considering the stewardship of my/our body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, and as I/we anticipate my/our own bodily resurrection in Christ, I/we believe the Holy Spirit calls me/us today to:

- ❑ Eating less or more
- ❑ Exercising regularly
- ❑ Stop smoking
- ❑ Slowing down
- ❑ Lessening stress
- ❑ Other: _____
- ❑ Eating healthier foods
- ❑ Getting proper rest
- ❑ Stop misusing drugs
- ❑ Getting regular medical check-ups
- ❑ Living safely

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

(RETURN THIS FORM AS DIRECTED)

Called by the Spirit

"I believe . . . in the Life Everlasting"

In touch with the everlasting quality of my/our life in the Spirit, I/we believe that I/we are called by the Spirit today to:

❑ Writing some thoughts concerning my/our funeral service that witnesses to the Good News of life everlasting, such as: _____

❑ Praying daily for the "long view of life"—one that reaches into heaven and spends a lifetime on earth grateful for the gift of everlasting life. I/we will show that gratitude by:

_____

❑ Honor the Lord and His work in the world with prayerful and careful estate planning that remembers my/our loved ones and the work of the church in my/our Christian Will.

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

(RETURN THIS FORM AS DIRECTED)

Bible Study

"You are a pneumatikon"

A what? Is a pnuematikon some kind of new robot toy? Maybe a video game?

No. You have a soul, and you're alive, so YOU couldn't be a machine or a toy.

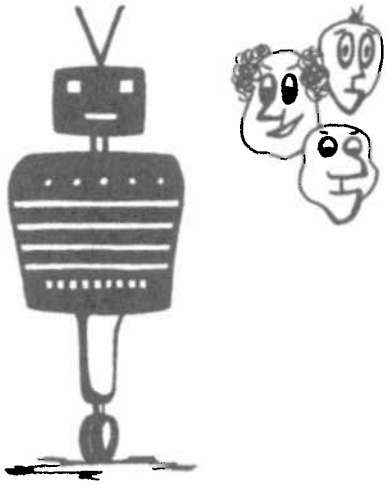
Being alive, though, doesn't mean that you are in a living relationship with God. Your natural relationships is with the natural world. Paul writes, **"An unspiritual person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God. He thinks they are foolish, and he cannot know them because one must have the Spirit to judge them correctly."** 1 CORINTHIANS 2:14

In chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, Paul uses a Greek word that identifies the spiritual person: PNEUMATIKOS (new-MAT-ih-kos). The broadest sense of this word, applying to men and women, comes out as PNEUMATIKON. But what does it mean?

PNEU (new) means "air," and PNEUMA (NEW-mah) means "air in motion" or "wind." The word is also used in the Scriptures to mean "spirit." Therefore, PNEUMATIKON means "spirit-driven ones." And when it appears in 1 Corinthians 12:1, it reads this way, "Now concerning the spirit-driven ones, fellow Christians . . ." An interesting translation!

But how does that concern you?

You are a pneumatikon if you are a person whose life is now driven by the power of God's Holy Spirit through your baptism, the Lord's Supper and as you feed your soul on Scripture.



The Spirit-powered person:

- is doubly alive (1 JOHN 5:1).
- has been given an added dimension of living (ROMANS 8:1-17).
- has the ability to be independent and spontaneous (ACTS 17:28).
- is truly free (1 CORINTHIANS 2:15).
- has power to withstand the influence of Satan and the world (1 JOHN 5:4-5).
- discerns the underlying meaning of things with a spiritual eye (PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11; 1 CORINTHIANS 2:14).

Most important, Spirit-powered people do Spirit-generated works that are able to touch both the spiritual and physical in others.

So, you ARE a pneumatikon, by God's grace. And with the wind of the Holy Spirit in your life, you can be God's gift to others around you, to your congregation and to the world.

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Planning the festival

Festival Preparation

Leader: _____

Activities:

First Event

Leader: _____

Activities:

Meal

Leader: _____

Activities:

Second Event

Leader: _____

Activities:

Third Event

Leader: _____

Worship Celebration
Lunch:

Activities:

After the Festival

Leader: _____

Activities:

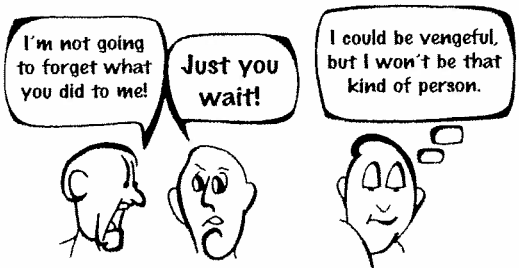
Clip Art

Use the clip art here to develop your own materials for publicity, program folders, invitations, awards or stationery. All art shown here is available for reproduction in your congregation, with permission from the copyright holders.

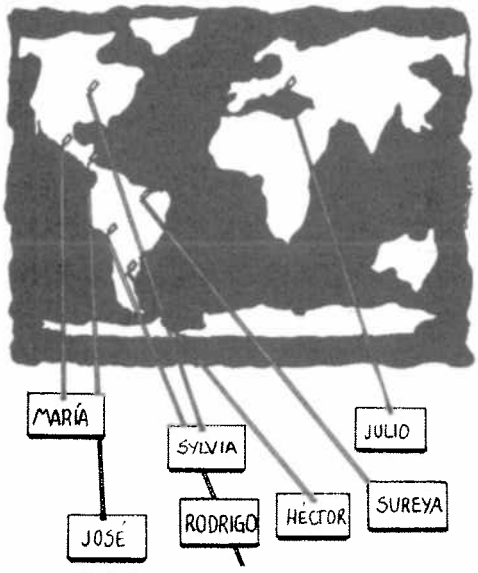
Festival de los Regalos de Dios

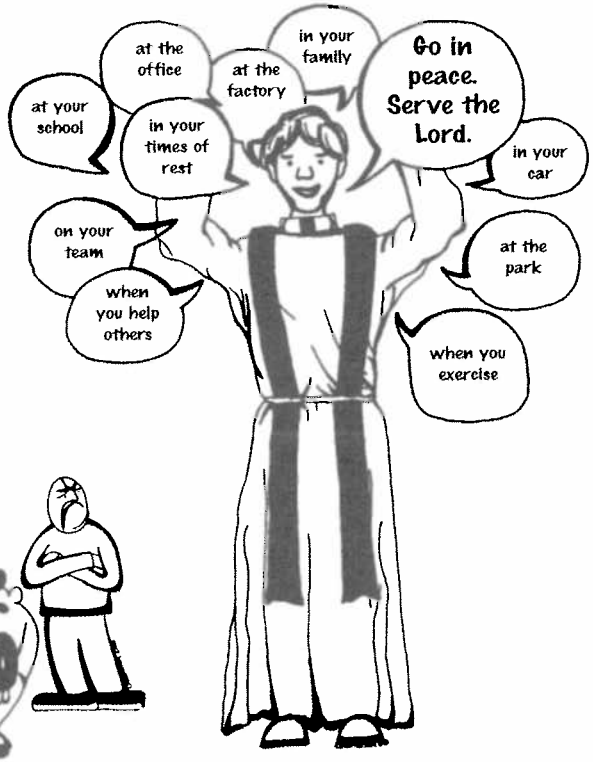
Festival de los Regalos de Dios

Festival de los Regalos de Dios



At that moment, Roberto realized his gift in being a forgiving person





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Festival de los Regalos de Dios

Miscellaneous

Festival de los regalos de Dios

Introduction

This section of the planning guide is the place to find all the "extras" that can spark new ideas for the festival. Some of the materials are background readings, some practical suggestions. This is a good place to poke around in, so that you can get excited about making your festival an energetic and fun way to inspire the people you serve.

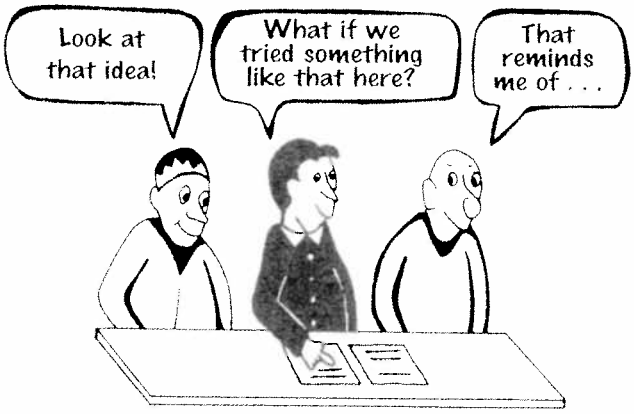
This is also a good place to store your own notes about the kind of festival you might offer to your congregation. Use notebook paper, plastic sleeves or pouches that can hold your ideas for future reference.

Stewardship among Hispanics

To begin with . . .

These pages present the beginning thoughts about some elements of stewardship theology that might become building blocks for a uniquely-Hispanic understanding of this part of the Christian life.

The propositions in this essay come from the work of a team of Lutherans who have developed the Hispanic/Latino stewardship program, "Los regalos de Dios."



What about "mayordomo?"

For several decades at least, this word has been used for the English term "steward." The thought process for the translation seemed logical:

> Both the "mayordomo" and the "steward"—in the Anglo-Saxon original, literally "sty-warden"—were servants, workers whose loyalty was beyond question.
>
> Both "mayordomo" and "steward" were titles given as a reward for years of faithful service.
>
> Both "mayordomo" and "steward" connected with an owner, with fellow workers, to a life of service.

The logic began to unravel in the late 1990s, when biblical scholarship began to question the use of "steward" in Jesus' teaching. In Parables as Subversive Speech, New Testament scholar William Herzog suggested that in the first century rural settings of

Jesus' ministry, "steward" meant something different. This author suggests that the steward:

- Worked as a middleman or broker between perpetually-poor peasants and perpetually-greedy oppressors.
- Took advantage of this position by cheating both peasants and owners.

Thus, in Herzog's opinion, Jesus' references to "steward" in his teaching and parables are always offered with the presumption that the first hearers and readers of the Gospel accounts would already know that the steward was NOT a character to be admired or respected. Although Paul's later use of the same term seems to indicate a different kind of "steward" in his part of the first century world, for Jesus' followers, "mayordomo" is NOT a preferred example for the godly life.

What does this have to do with Hispanic understandings of "steward?"

Follow these few pieces of logic:

- Many Hispanic/Latino cultures are strongly rooted in agrarian social systems. For some immigrant populations, notably Central American and Mexican immigrants, the rural qualities of life have continued into their emigration to the United States. Many have continued working as field workers in agricultural states. Many of the continuing values and gifts of Hispanic/Latino culture are similar to those of rural people in any part of the world
- For these immigrants and their descendants, the "mayordomo" is, in their experience, the same kind of person that Jesus' followers knew—and hated—so thoroughly in their day.
- Thus today's Hispanic culture loops back to the culture of Jesus' first hearers, and Hispanic/Latino Christians can understandably be more than puzzled when they are encouraged to live their Christian lives "like mayordomos." The contradiction seems too great.

Therefore, in the continuing development of Hispanic/Latino Christian stewardship, the term "administrator" will be used to mean "steward," so that Hispanic/Latino Christians understand themselves as responsible servants of God's entire realm.

A side note: It is curious that what Hispanic/Latino Christians have intuitively known for years has now become a part of the most current edge of Christian theology. Another side note: This "mistranslation" over so many years may account, in part, for the reluctance of Hispanic/Latino Christians to embrace their denominational programs of "stewardship," especially those too-easily translated from original writings in English.

Some theological threads

Because Hispanic/Latino Christians live inside cultural realities that closely resemble the lives of Jesus' first audiences and followers, there may be other aspects of contemporary Hispanic/Latino sociology that also contain other elements of emerging stewardship theology. In other words, the leaders of mainline Christian stewardship programs may find Hispanic and Latinos already capable and knowledgeable regarding Christian stewardship at its fundamental level. These threads of possibly-new stewardship theology may be examples:

Whole-life stewardship is the proper way to understand stewardship.

Anglo Christians, because of their relative prosperity and (false) sense of self-determination, may have narrowed their understanding of "stewardship" to the smallest fraction of their lives: giving of money to support charitable causes. But among Hispanic/Latino Christians, the concept of "administration" matches Paul's teachings about stewardship: In all of our lives, we who are stewards work to fulfill God's "stewardship," literally, God's plan for the world. No part of life, whether in or out of the church, is exempt from the requirement and privilege of fulfilling God's will.

Stewardship is not primarily about money.

Although all economies in contemporary Western cultures operate with money as their core value, "stewardship," broadly defined, does not. Because stewardship always has to do with fulfilling God's plan for the world, to confine it to money—or even financial matters—so delimits stewardship that its wider implications can be diminished. Because they have for so many generations lived at lower socio-economic levels, Hispanic/Latino Christians may not have easily yielded to the temptation to compartmentalize "stewardship" into one small area of life, "giving money to the church."

At the same time, because money is perhaps more precious to them, Hispanic/Latino Christians can understand deeply the significance of their contributions to fund God's mission through their churches.

Faith and life always connect in stewardship.

Among Hispanic/Latino Christians, there is a blending of faith and life into a seamless whole. Again, not able to live under the mistaken notion that they control their own well-being, minority cultures—among them Hispanic/Latino peoples—know that only God rules the world. As God's subjects and children, they are bound to a loving God by faith, and they live their lives in gratitude for any and all of God's gifts.

Service is seen as a privilege, not only a duty.

In a culture in which servanthood is not only faded memories of previous generations, Hispanic/Latino Christians know instinctively that the status of "servant" is not only one of obedience and duty, but one of privilege. In both Jesus' and Paul's understanding of "steward," this person is, after all, at the highest stage of servanthood: operating with enormous personal freedom within the context of service to a powerful owner/ruler.

Teaching older Anglo meanings of "stewardship" may be retrogressive.

It would be a cultural travesty and arrogant to suggest to Hispanic/Latino Christians that they must somehow come through an evolving process of understanding "stewardship" that is similar to that developed over decades by well-meaning Anglo Christians, only to find themselves back where they started. It is possible that Hispanic/Latino Christians understand "stewardship" more closely to its original meaning, and thus deserve to be models and teachers of what, only now, Anglo Christians are discovering.

Some elements of Hispanic stewardship

From what we know about Hispanic/Latino piety and practice, we can derive some strengths on which to build congregational programs. They may include the following elements:

- Stewardship in service to evangelism. For the most part, Hispanic/Latino Christians have chosen to join specific denominations. Their sense of stewardship naturally includes a joyful appreciation of God's grace in their lives. Hence, invitational and hospitality evangelism are part of stewardship.
- Thankfulness for God's many blessings. Although the economic and physical well-being of Hispanics in the United States is growing, the realities of poverty, prejudice and oppression are still close at hand. Thus, gratitude to God for undeserved gifts still serves as a strong motivator in Hispanic/Latino piety.
- De-institutionalized faith. Hispanic/Latino Christians still honor the church as the bearer of Good News. In some cases, they still see the church as a place of refuge or rest. At the same time, they remain detached from the church as an institution, in many ways similar to the "post-modern" tendencies of the majority culture. Shallow institutionalism or subtle clericalism will not serve well as motivators for giving to the church.
- Intergenerational relationships. The continuing strength of Hispanic/Latino family life requires any methodology for increasing stewardship to include family-based activities, especially among several generations of congregational members. Effective stewardship programs will not separate generations from each other.
- A sense of legacy received and legacy delivered. Hispanic/Latino Christians have a strong sense of identity, by ethnicity or country of origin. This suggests that stewardship programs emphasize the inherited gifts and blessings received from one's predecessors, as well as the responsibility and privilege to pass on those gifts to others. Among Hispanic/Latino Christians, "legacy" always includes more than possessions or money, and is broadly understood to include values, personal traits and the message of the Gospel itself!
- Bi-lingual and bi-cultural capabilities. It is increasingly obvious that Hispanic/Latino Christians are highly capable of living in both their own and the majority cultures. This affords both a solid base and a broad application for stewardship programs in congregations.
- Affirmation of relationships and piety. Familial and ethnic identity are strongly relational. Hispanic/Latino Christians are also gifted in their capability to intertwine their piety—visible signs of their devotion to God—with their sense of family and ethnicity.
- Asset-based attitudes and practices. Hispanic/Latino Christians do NOT operate with low self-esteem, regardless of the mythologies that suggest otherwise. Hence, gifts-based planning or programming can be easily applied to stewardship ministry among Hispanics.
- Care for others in time of need. Hispanic/Latino Christians continue to see the giving of money and possessions in times of critical need as a necessary requirement of their faithfulness to God. These immediate emotional responses—sometimes described as "limosna"—will remain a part of Hispanic/Latino stewardship. (In the "Los regalos" program, limosna is seen as the essential building-block for an increased sense of responsibility for funding God's mission through local congregations.)

Strong stewardship-related personal traits. Hispanic/Latino Christians live their lives hopefully and joyfully. They understand and practice the values of hard-work and tenacity in the face of adversity. They exhibit personal generosity in many ways. They value loyalty and honesty in their personal relationships. They understand that God rules their lives.

Suggestions for Additional Activities

This is the place where we have collected together some of the good activities that didn't fit into the plans for the weekend festival. We think they may still have some value for you, and so we've included them here.

You can use these activities to extend, preface or follow the festival. These activities all fit the theme of giftedness. We have given you an indication of the approximate time it will take for the activity to be completed.

The web of interdependence

30 MINUTES

This activity illustrates in a powerful way the strength of interdependent relationships in a congregation, and how easily the strength can be eroded when just a few people are not present or committed. The activity works best with a group of between 25 and 30 individuals. You will need a large ball of colored string or yarn, probably in excess of 150 feet in total length.

Ask participants to form a circle, facing into the center of the circle. If there are more participants than comfortably stand in the circle, have family members stand behind one another.

Hand the ball of colored string or yarn to the first person. Ask that person to find the end of the string and grip it tightly. That person should now toss the ball to another person directly across from them in the circle while still gripping tightly the end of the string or yarn.

The second person grabs the string tightly and throws the ball to another person, more or less directly across from them.

Continue in this manner until all the people in the circle have received the ball or yarn or string and are holding tightly to their part of this growing web of string or yarn.

Ask participants to step back and adjust their posture so that this web becomes very tight and strong. (You may want to illustrate its strength by throwing a large ball or flat object—like an air mattress—into the center and seeing how the web can hold this increased weight.)

Offer these observations and connections:

The church is like this web. Each one of us is part of this web, helping to hold it together by what we contribute to its well-being.

But when some of us drop out (here you can call on one or two individuals to drop the string they are holding and to take a step back), the web becomes weaker and loses is shape.

This illustrates how important each of us is in God's kingdom, and in this church. Our unique gifts are all necessary for the strength and usefulness of this congregation.

That is why we are so pleased that each of you is part of this congregation, and excited to know how your gifts contribute to its well-being.

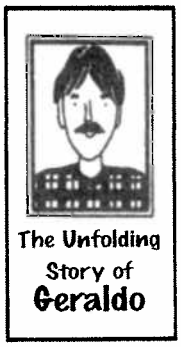
Our unfolding stories

60 MINUTES

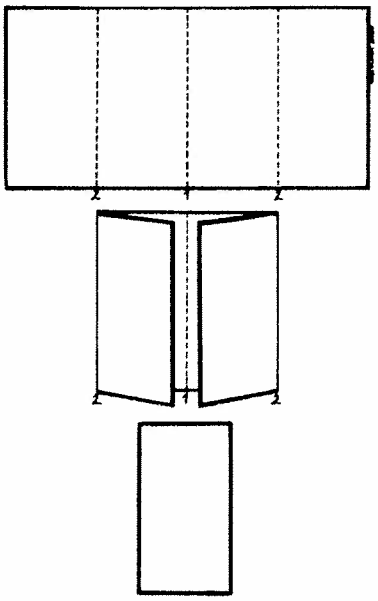
In this activity you give participants a chance to tell their stories in three stages. The activity illustrates how easily we can become comfortable in seeing only "the front cover" of each other's lives, and how we can be inspired by others' stories of faith and hope. It is a good way to acquaint participants with the depth of each others lives in a non-threatening and interesting way.

This activity works in any size group, and requires 8 1/2 x 14 inch (legal size) pape, pre-folded to half-page size, and felt-tip markers.

- Give each participant a pre-folded sheet of paper and access to several colored felt tip markers.



- Explain that they will write or draw on the pages to make this piece of paper tell some of the stories of their life. They should follow these directions:



1 On the front cover of the folded page, participants should write or draw about themselves as they appear to those who see them only at church on Sundays. (Hint: This would be things like their name, their physical appearance, their age, etc.) They should title the page, THE UNFOLDING STORY OF (their name).

2 Unfolding the page one level, participants now use the two inside panels to write or draw about themselves as they would be known to people who see them at church programs and activities but nowhere else.

3 Unfolding the page the final level—now we see an entire 8 1/2 x 11" page in front of us horizontally—participants now fill that space with words or drawings that show them as they are known by those who see them every day of the week, whether as worker, family member or neighbor.

Provide about four or five minutes for each of the three folds to be completed. As they work, walk among the participants, answering questions and offering suggestions.

When participants have completed their writing and drawing, ask them to find two or three other persons who they do not know that well. Each person in these groups should describe themselves by literally "unfolding their stories:"

- Show the other members of your group the "cover" of your story, the things that they would know about you if the only time you saw each other was on Sunday morning worship.
- Unfold your story now to tell them what they would know about you if you worked together on some church projects, but didn't see or hear from you at any other time or place than church.
- Unfold your story one more time to show the members of your group what you are really like, how you are known by those who know you best.

Provide about 15 to 20 minutes for this part of the activity, again circulating among the groups to listen to the kinds of conversations that occur.

Provide about 10 minutes for a final sharing of thoughts about questions such as these:

What are the major differences between the stories you heard at each of the folds?

What differences did you hear from the "cover stories" and the "real stories?"

Is it true that you can "judge a book by its cover?" Why or why not?

What parts of ourselves is it hard for people at church to see or know? Why?

What might help "church" to be a place where our stories could be completely unfolded?

You might display these story pages—in folded on unfolded forms—as a kind of "gallery" during the festival.

Activities to follow the festival videotape

The three segments of the videotape call for extensive discussion and sharing. You had the chance to experience some of the power of the videos at the festival, but you may want to use the video at other times, for new audiences or purposes. Here are some other activities, specific to each of the segments:

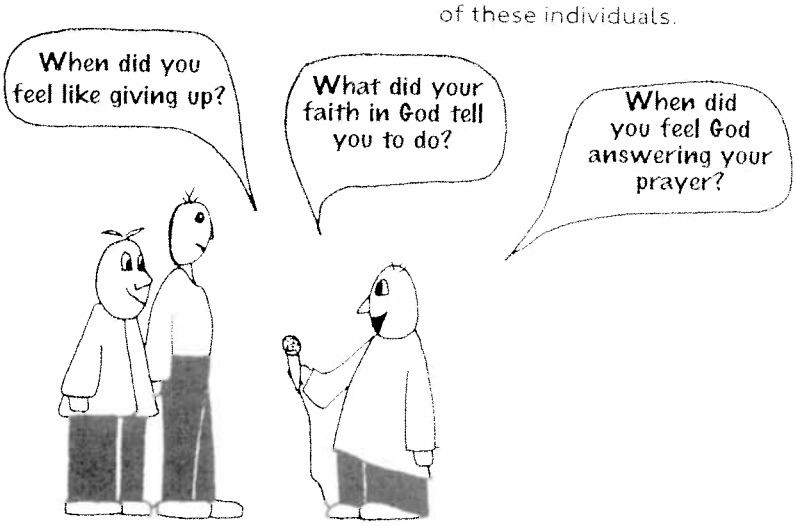
Part One

En búsqueda de una vida con sentido

You can follow the viewing of this videotape with activities such as these:

Ask more questions of comparison, such as, "Which of these individuals is most like you?" or "Whose life story matches you own most closely?"

After the video, ask viewers to write down the subjects and questions they'd like to cover if they could have a conversation with any of these individuals.



On the chalkboard or flip chart, write each of the video characters' names. Record viewers' reaction to this question: What was the moment this person's life started to change for the better? (Or what single factor caused the change?) For your reference, we have included a brief description of each of the individuals here.

Mónica Muñoz Baigorri, a single mother from Chile who lost everything, and emigrated to the United States with hopes for a good future.

Joe Curbelo, a Uruguayan/Norwegian artisan, struggling with his ethnic identity and his sense of life purpose.

Juan Aspurú and Silvia Paz, Guatemalans who came to this country, and sensed the need to fill their spiritual void.

Jose Estrada, whose life in Mexico and the United States was at first filled with continuing addiction and lack of life purpose.

Conduct role-play "interviews" with group members willing to assume the persona of each of these of these individuals. Ask them questions about their gifts, their sense of self-worth, the things they appreciate about each other, or how they hold their lives together.

Part Two

Descubriendo los dones de Dios

After viewing this segment of the video, try variations of any of the activities above or some of these:

- Construct a chart, "How the Church Helps Us Discover Our Gifts," by asking viewers to think how each of these individuals' gifts was discovered by someone or something that happened at church. Once the list has been developed, go back and circle or star any activity or kind of person in your congregation that helps people realize their gifts in the same way. Talk about what you see (or don't see).
- In teams—two or three persons assigned to each of the video characters—draw some "multiplier charts" that show how one small event, idea or quality kept growing and multiplying into a greater good. Show each other the charts and talk about how God has done similar things in your lives.

Small Event

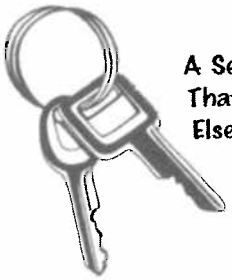
▼

What Happened Next

▼

How It Grew and Grew

- Challenge viewers to be "Details Detectives," people who see what others miss, to discover the answer to the question, "Why/how did this wonderful gift get discovered and used?" Form four groups, and assign each one to one of the video characters. They should view the video with their roles—details detectives—in mind. They are looking for the little clues that answer the question, "How did each person find his or her gifts and decide to put them to use for God's purposes?"
- Ask each viewer to respond to these questions for each of the characters in the video: First, "If you had god-like powers, what gift would you give to each of these individuals?" Second, "How would you give that gift?" Talk about viewers' ideas about these questions.



A Secret Clue That No One Else Noticed

Part Three

Construyendo para el futuro

In this last segment, you see how each of these individuals is making a difference in his or her church and community, and how each person contributes to the life of this congregation, financially and with their time. You can follow this final segment with adaptations of any of the previous activities, or some of these:

Ask viewers to perform an unrehearsed drama, as though they were the characters in the video. The setting: Monica's home. The characters: All the people in this segment (including Acxa, Monica's daughter). The situation: These people are trying to determine how to motivate other members of their congregation to take part in the leadership and support of the congregation.

Viewers write letters as though they were seeking advice from their friends—who are any of the characters in the video segment(s) they have seen. Collect the letters, and then tell viewers that THEY have to answer each other's letters! This could be fun.

Write the names of each of the video characters on a chart, leaving space under or around each name. Here's the challenge for viewers: Name all the people you know in our congregation who have the same kinds of gifts as each of these video characters. You can use a name more than once. Be ready to talk about the reasons for your choices. When participants are finished with the naming, reflect on what the chart shows about your congregation's giftedness!

The following activity can be a good one to conclude the viewing of all three segments. In a hallway or on the walls of a meeting room, hang several pieces of newsprint or chart paper. Write on each page a single category from among these possibilities:

The Video Character I Would Like as a Friend

The Video Character Who Most Inspired Me

The Video Character I Would Like to Work With

The Video Character Most Like Me

The Video Character I Would Like to Pray For

The Video Character Who Most Saddened Me

The Video Character Whose Hopes are Strongest

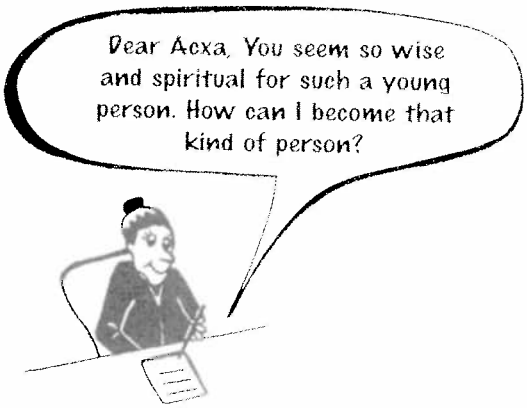
How Our Church is Most Like Their Church

Why We Didn't Meet the Pastor of Their Church

What Else I Want to Know About Their Church

What Their Church Will be Like Five Years From Now

Give participants water-based felt-tip markers and ask them to write their reactions to each of the questions directly onto the newsprint sheets. When time is finished, look at the sheets together and see what you learn from the responses.



The gifts of God in the Lord's Prayer

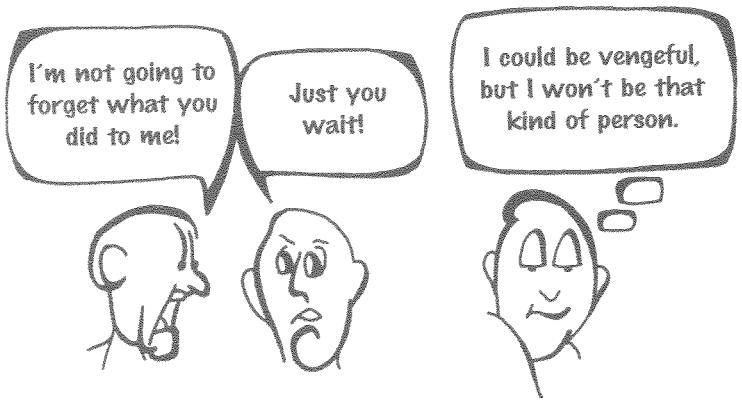
Every Sunday—and perhaps every day—you pray the Our Father, alone and with others. Use some of these ideas to make this prayer more meaningful, as a time of "gifts discovery." It may be helpful to have copies of Luther's Small Catechism available for participants.

- Look at each petition to find the answers to this question, "What 'gifts' are we praying for God to bring or give us?" Write your answers on the chalkboard or flip chart. (15 MINUTES)
- Pick out key words or phrases in Luther's explanation and talk together about what they might say about "gifts by God." (For example, "without our prayer" or "fields and cattle.") (10 MINUTES)
- Pray the Lord's Prayer in "slow motion," by pausing for a full minute at the end of each segment or petition before continuing. Before beginning, instruct participants to let their minds and hearts roam during the time of silence, with the prompt, "How will God's answer to this part of the prayer be a gift to you?" When each time of meditation has elapsed, begin again by saying, "We pray, . . . " (10 MINUTES)
- Break the Lord's Prayer apart into its petitions and phrases. Write each one on a piece of chart paper or newsprint. Place them on tables or the floor, and ask participants to add to each page a symbol, drawing or words which describe a gift of God embedded in that petition. (They might also write a short description of a time when God's answer to that petition was a gift.) (30 MINUTES)

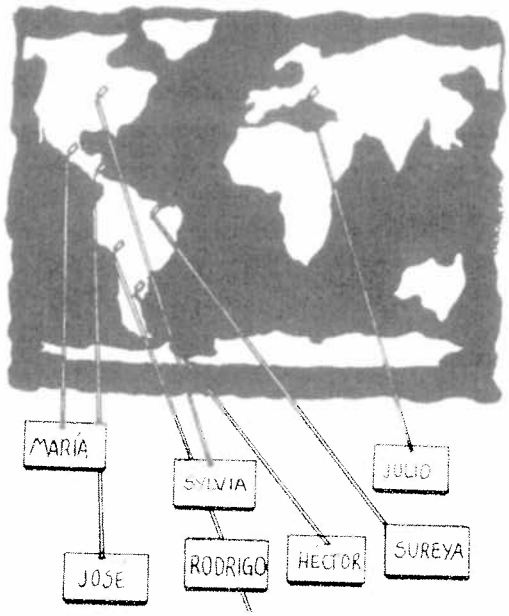
Gifts from the world

People in your congregation have brought legacies of faith and hope from their countries of origin. Use a map of the world and a bulletin board to spotlight the gifts of God that come from national or ethnic legacies:

- As an engaging activity that can build over a period of time, place pins in the map to indicate where members' families have emigrated from. For each member or family, string a piece of colored yarn from the pin to a card that includes the name of the person(s) and a few phrases about the gifts they have brought with them from that country. (30 MINUTES)



At that moment, Roberto realized his gift in being a forgiving person



To build excitement and anticipation, add several names each week until the bulletin board is full.

Using materials available over the Internet, spotlight the countries of origin of your members, one country per month. You can have a tabletop display or bulletin board of news, facts, and history of the countries. Ask members who have come from those countries to write or tell about their sense of the gifts that have come from their heritage; make that writing part of the display.

In your worship bulletin or newsletter, include stories about the national origin, composer, lyricist or arranger of the hymns or songs you sing.

Use fables, folk-sayings or stories from each of the cultures represented in your congregation as material for children's sermons, newsletter articles or sermon illustrations.

Three scripts

The scripts on the pages that follow can be used in a variety of ways, especially if you adapt them to fit your setting. Some possible uses:

Pre-event publicity

Extra activities during the event

Review or recall of the event for evaluation or planning purposes

Entertainment

The three scripts can be easily staged, rehearsed and performed. (They can be used as reader's theater, as well, with no lines memorized.) Each lasts only about 3-5 minutes.

The three scripts include:

More Than Food

Sandro and his friends recall how the Festival de los Regalos was about more than food, although Sandro thinks the food was good, too!

Digging in the Dark

The same friends find themselves in the dark, but not about what they learned at the festival.

Looking Back by Looking Forward

Many years later, the friends recall how this festival started changes in their church that have continued to be amazing gifts from God.

Staging notes

All three scripts feature the same characters, and require minimal props. Duplicate enough copies of the scripts for all characters, and consider some minimal costumes to differentiate the characters from each other. Look for places to insert local names, places and other cues.

More Than **Food**

LIGHTS GO DIM IN THE ROOM. A TABLE AND THREE CHAIRS HAVE BEEN PLACED IN THE CENTER OF THE STAGE. FOUR PEOPLE WALK OUT OF THE AUDIENCE TO THE CHAIRS, GREETING EACH OTHER LOUDLY AS THEY WALK TO THE FRONT. THREE SIT DOWN, AND THE FOURTH PERSON GETS READY TO TAKE THEIR ORDERS. THEY BEGIN TALKING:

MARTA: Hi, guys! Will you be having the special today?

THE THREE SITTING AT THE TABLE RESPOND AT THE SAME TIME: Of course! I'm starved! What's the special

SANDRO: The combination plate is (DESCRIBES LOCAL FARE)—It's the best meal in town!

JOSE LUIS: Three specials, then?

RODRIGO: Sounds good to me!

MARTA LEAVES TO GET THEIR ORDER.

JOSE LUIS: So what do you think, Rodrigo? Are you planning to go to the Festival next weekend?

RODRIGO: My wife wants me to go. She says we'll have a good time. But there's a soccer game on Telemundo, and you know how I hate to miss soccer. It's Mexico against Brazil.

JOSE LUIS: I know. I didn't want to miss the game, either. But Pastor is so excited about the program. He's going to miss the game, too!

RODRIGO: Yes, but he doesn't have my problem: My friends Efren from Mexico and Derlys from Brazil are coming over. They always go back and forth about "Who's the best striker." We have a great time.

JOSE LUIS: I was supposed to work, but I traded hours with a friend of mine. I'm excited about the program. Did you see all the materials about "gifts?" My wife and I are curious.

SANDRO: Well, I'm coming because I heard that Comadre Garcia is making her tamales for the dinner. I love the way she cooks her tamales!

RODRIGO: Way to go, Sandro. Always thinking about food! With your luck, they won't serve tamales, and you'll be there all weekend, waiting.

SANDRO: That's okay. I heard that Maria Alvarez is bringing her flan, and Sra. Aguilera is making her paella.

JOSE LUIS TAKES A GOOD-NATURED PUNCH AT SANDRO, AND CONTINUES:

You and your food! The festival is about more than food! This idea of being "gifted" fascinates me. I'd like to learn more what that means.

MARTA: (RETURNING WITH THE APPETIZER AND DRINKS) Me, too...especially since I can't think of any "gifts" that I have. Maybe I'll find out what I'm supposed to be in life. I read what the publicity said about leadership. Maybe I'm a leader.

JOSE LUIS: Maybe you are. Being a leader means helping people to good decisions, being a good listener. It's more than telling people what to do. That only makes them NOT want to do anything!

RODRIGO: I read the publicity, too, Marta. I think your gift is communicating the message. You are really good at talking about Jesus Christ. You know how put the right words together.

SANDRO: I think my gift is the gift of tasting food! All those different foods in one place! If I go to the festival, I don't think I'll eat for a week!

MARTA: Well, Pastor said that the weekend would be "a life-changing experience." Maybe your life-change will be fifty extra pounds!

JOSE LUIS: What interests me is the music and the feeling of "fiesta." Carlos Rodriguez is going to play. Remember how we heard about him when he came to this country?

SANDRO: That would be worth it. When he was young, he was supposed to have been one of the best classical guitarists in Puerto Rico.

JOSE LUIS: So, what do you say, Rodrigo, Sandro? Are you going to come?

RODRIGO: Okay, you convinced me. It sounds like fun. If you all come, I will, too. Maybe I'll get Efren and Derlys to come, too. We can tape the soccer match and watch it Sunday night.

SANDRO: The food would be enough for me. But all these other ideas could be interesting, too. Besides, I really like the people at _____ Church. And not just the ones who cook good food!

MARTA: So, it's about more than food after all!

ALL EXIT. LIGHTS UP FOR ADDITIONAL ANNOUNCEMENTS OR DETAILS ABOUT THE FESTIVAL.

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Digging in the Dark

LIGHTS DIM. THREE PERSONS APPEAR FROM DIFFERENT AREAS OF ROOM, CARRYING FLASHLIGHTS.

SANDRO: Rodrigo, Jose Luis? Where are you?

RODRIGO: Here. What happened to the lights?

JOSE LUIS: Who knows? Maybe someone forgot to pay the electric company? (ALL LAUGH.)

RODRIGO: Whose idea was it to volunteer for clean-up? I could be home right now, watching my favorite telenovella on my VCR!

SANDRO: You watch telenovellas?

RODRIGO: Some times, when they're really good, like tonight's episode, where the evil oil baron and his girlfriend the computer expert are plotting to steal the home of his ex-wive's poor mother. Revenge, lust, greed...

SANDRO: You have to be kidding!

RODRIGO: Of course, I'm kidding. I didn't have anything else to do, and besides, you told us this would be a good idea, Sandro.

SANDRO: (RUSTLING THROUGH A BAG OR CONTAINER OF FOOD) It WAS a good idea. Look at the pastelitos I found! This makes up for not getting any of Sra. Garcia's tamales.

MARTA: (ENTERS, CARRYING A BROOM AND DUSTPAN, TURNS ON THE LIGHTS) What are you three doing in the dark?

SANDRO: (HIDING BEHIND HIS BACK THE FOOD HE'S FOUND) Nothing! We volunteered to help with clean-up, and hadn't found the light switch yet!

MARTA: (LAUGHING AT THE IDEA) So you decided to start by cleaning Sra. Hernandez's pastelitos first? Maybe this broom will work better than what you're holding. (HANDS HIM BROOM AND DUSTPAN.)

SANDRO: Don't anyone touch those pastelitos, okay? I found them first!

RODRIGO: (PUTTING AWAY A FEW CHAIRS) So what did you think about the festival so far?

JOSE LUIS: (HELPING WITH CHAIRS) It was really fun. And interesting. I really enjoyed the people in that video.

RODRIGO: Me, too. I was in a group with Raul and Maria Sanchez. I knew they were from Guatemala, but I didn't know all the terror they went through before they came to the U.S. That video made me look at them in a different way.

JOSE LUIS: They're a good family. I sat with their kids during supper. They told me how hard their parents work, how they send money back home. Those kids really admire their parents!

MARTA: Those kids are doing well in school, too. I heard that the oldest—Maricela, I think, is her name—is going to graduate at the top of her class at Central High. She wants to be a bi-lingual special education teacher.

SANDRO: With parents like that, she'll make a good teacher.

RODRIGO: So, Sandro, what did you write about your "gifts?" That you like to eat?

SANDRO: No, actually I didn't. I wrote "good cabinet builder"—just like that guy in the video, and about playing the trumpet. In fact, I was thinking how I could find some guitarróns and mandolins and guitars, maybe some violins, too. We could do a mariachi service some time.

JOSE LUIS: Well, Sandro—and you don't even know this about me, I'll bet—I play the guitarrón pretty good. My friend at work, Francisco, plays the violin and the guitar. If we found a couple more people, we could start practicing right away!

RODRIGO: (NOTICING WHAT'S HAPPENING) Wait! Do you see what's happening here? It's like we were talking about yesterday. One "gift"—and it's NOT Sandro's eating!—and suddenly we're starting to think about new ideas.

SANDRO: That's how it works, I think. We take our gifts, like the little boy with the fishes and loaves. And Jesus does a miracle, and there we are, full of food and happy about our gifts!

MARTA: So we're back to food again, aren't we? I think we should leave now, the way we came in, before Sandro goes back to "cleaning up pastelitos." (SHE SHUTS OUT THE LIGHTS.)

OTHERS: (STUMBLING IN THE DARK AND BUMPING INTO EACH OTHER CLUMSILY) Hey! Who turned out the lights? How are going to get out of here now? Marta?

MARTA: Friends, it's time to stop digging in the dark. Let's go home. You have flashlights, don't you?

ALL FIND FLASHLIGHTS, TURN THEM ON AND LEAVE INTO THE AUDIENCE.

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Looking Back by **Looking Forward**

ALL FOUR OF THE CHARACTERS ARE SITTING AROUND A TABLE, DRINKING COFFEE. THEY HAVE AGED ABOUT TEN YEARS. SANDRO IS ALSO A LOT HEAVIER.

JOSE LUIS: Do you all remember that first "Gifts Festival" we had ten years ago? It's amazing that time has passed so quickly.

MARTA: It sure does. Each year the festival seems to get better. This year's was the best ever, though.

RODRIGO: Yes. The mariachi band is getting better, too. Strange how it turned out to be so important to our church.

JOSE LUIS: You're right. First we started it for our church, then it turned into a big attraction for the neighborhood. Now we play at other churches and schools. Teaching kids to play the instruments of their heritage. A couple of families have joined our church just because of that band.

MARTA: And out of that came the after-school program that Rodrigo and Sra. Vargas started a couple of years later. Then the bilingual pre-school that Maricela Sanchez put together when she got out of college. One thing led to another.

RODRIGO: And don't forget the ESL and GED classes we've been running for the past three years. Without them I'd never have gotten my citizenship!

SANDRO: That first festival really got everyone excited. I remember when we talked about "limosna," how everyone here was part of a family that was committed to each other. I remember thinking right then, "Wait, these people are my family! And all the Christians in other places, they're family, too!" It was a big thing for me to think about.

RODRIGO: And I remember when Sandro talked us into cleaning the kitchen so that he could get the pastelitos. (AS THOUGH SUDDENLY NOTICING SANDRO IS A LITTLE HEAVIER.) Looks like you haven't stopped with your "gift of eating," Sandro.

SANDRO: What? A couple of pounds, maybe. I keep my weight down by coaching the girls' soccer team, running up and down the field with them. But it's those church council meetings, with all the refreshments; that's what puts the pounds on!

JOSE LUIS: I'm glad you're on the council, now, Sandro. Your ideas and your work were so exciting to the rest of us. Now most of the people here feel like they're gifted people, that they do what they think God wants them to do here. Like they feel called.

SANDRO: I've noticed that, too. People started all sorts of programs because they wanted to, because they felt able to. Not because they were waiting to be asked to do something they didn't want to do, or weren't good at doing.

MARTA: And this building. Look at this building, would you? Who would have thought that we could be in our own church building? All painted, nice cabinets—thanks to you, Sandro—good lighting, nice signs outside. We're fortunate.

RODRIGO: It is amazing, when you think of it. How a small group of people were able to accomplish all of this in just ten years.

JOSE LUIS: It was the Holy Spirit guiding us, I'm sure. Who else could have inspired our members to change the way they contributed to this church?

SANDRO: It was the Holy Spirit, too, who persuaded so many people to accept our invitation to worship here, to be part of this family.

MARTA: I think all of this helped Pastor _____, too. "More people excited about the congregation"—that meant that Pastor didn't have to do it all.

SANDRO: This has been a wonderful ten years, hasn't it?

MARTA: (PICKING UP HER THINGS TO LEAVE) It sure has. Who knows what the future will bring, hmm?

RODRIGO: God knows, Marta. God knows.

ALL: Thanks be to God!

(ALL LEAVE.)

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Bible study about gifts

This section of the planning guide gives you material from which you can construct a series of Bible study sessions devoted to the subject of "gifts." The material here has been arranged by topical statements, with supporting biblical material, questions and activities. (An additional, reproducible Bible study, "You are a pneumatikon," can be found in the Original Copies section of this guide.)

You can assemble this material into your own schedule in any order that fits your congregation.

All gifts are a result of God's grace, which is always active in the lives of God's people.

Bible references:

Ephesians 2:8-9 or
1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Questions/activities:

- Where do "gifts" come at you in surprising ways in these texts?
- What word or phrase could you display at your work place, to remind you of your unique gifts in God's world? How about at home, or at church?
- Write a prayer, based on the idea that "grace is the starting point for all gifts." Send it to someone you love as a way of thanking God for that person.

The New Testament has lists of "gifts."

Bible references:

Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4; Hebrews 5:14; and 1 Corinthians 7

Questions/activities:

- Every time you hear a "gift" that matches some of your personal traits or values, write it down. Look at the completed list, and see what it says about you.
- Translate this list into words that would make sense to children, teens or new Christians.
- Which of the gifts seem to be most basic or most desired in your life?

God's people are gifts to one another.

Bible reference:

1 Corinthians 12:1

Questions/Activities:

How would the meaning of this passage change for you if you knew that the word "gifts" here really means "the spirit-driven ones?"

How are you a "gift" to other people around you?

Use simple drawings and arrows to construct a diagram that shows how the people here with you now are gifts from God to each other.

Part of God's work is to put gifted people right here, in your congregation.

Bible references:

Deuteronomy 8:11-18 or
Acts 17:26-27

Questions/activities:

What similarities and differences do you notice between your congregation and the situations in these passages? Are you sure?

What sense of "giftedness" do you think these people felt at that time?

Imagine yourself with God's enjoyable work at hand; what kind of gifted people would you put in your congregation? Besides the ones already here?

One of our responsibilities as God's people is to use the gifts we've been given.

Bible references:

Ephesians 2:10 or
Hebrews 12:1-2

Questions/activities:

Why did these writers want their readers to know these truths about God and themselves?

What part of these texts is especially true for your congregation?

Imagine yourself writing thoughts like this for your grandchild to read fifteen years from now. What would you say?

It is a joyful thing to use the gifts God gives, and we can always celebrate the results.

Bible references:

Psalm 102:18; Psalm 146; or
Philippians 4:4-7

Questions/activities:

So what right did these writers have to be so joyful?

How, really, do God's people "celebrate results?"

Look over the most recent issue of your church newsletter or annual report. What small or large result of God's giving would you like to celebrate? How would you do it?

One good way to use God's gifts is to share them with others.

Bible references:

Galatians 6:10 or
2 Corinthians 9:12-15

Questions/activities:

What special qualities of "sharing" do these passages suggest?

What's child-like about "sharing gifts?" What's "mature?" What's the difference?

Talk together about a time you helped someone else learn about "sharing gifts."

We can encourage each other to use our gifts.

Bible references:

ROMANS 12:8 or HEBREWS 3:13

Questions/activities:

- If you were to encourage someone else on the basis of these texts, which words or phrases would be the most encouraging? Why?
- Can you give an example of how the people around you encourage you to use your gifts?
- Write a note to your pastor that is full of gratitude for your pastor's encouragement to use your gifts.

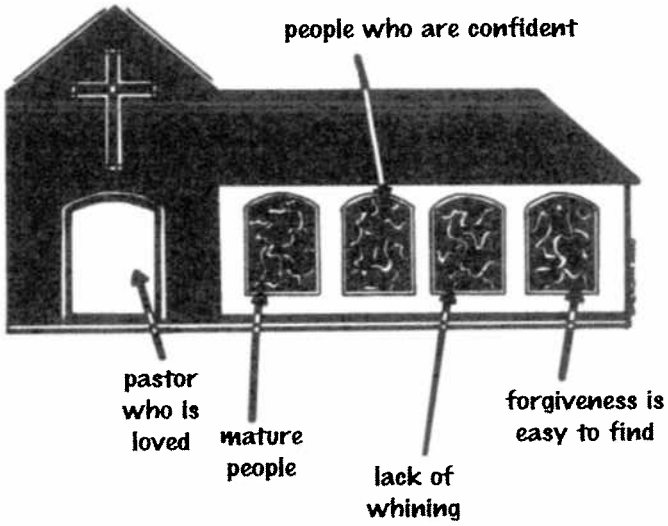
When we identify and share gifts, and encourage each other in their use, we build up our congregations as families of faith, right now and into the future.

Bible references:

3 JOHN 3-4; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:7, 7:7; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12; 1 PETER 4:10; GALATIANS 6:10; or EPHESIANS 2:13

Questions/activities:

- List all the words and phrases that feel like "building up" ideas. Which describe the way your congregation treats people?
- On the basis of these texts, what's the first step in this "building up" process?
- Draw the figure of your church building, and use circles and arrows to indicate the qualities of a "built-up congregation." (In other words, what would you or anyone else see or feel in a "built-up congregation?")



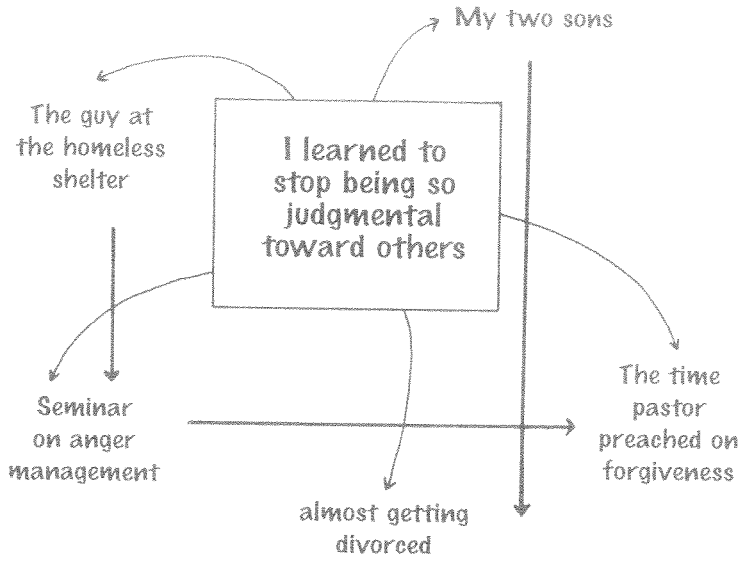
Another way to think of "being gifted people" is to think of ourselves as people whose lives have been changed by the Holy Spirit.

Bible references:

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17; EPHESIANS 4:23; or ROMANS 5:7

Questions/activities:

- Which of the changes in your life come close to the changes these passages seem to suggest?
- How, really, does the Holy Spirit change people?
- In the middle of a piece of paper, write down one significant way in the Holy Spirit has changed your life at one time or another. Put a circle around the description. Around the outside of the circle, write all the small and large factors that helped that change to happen. Now use circles and arrows to connect those factors together to each other and to the center circle. What do you notice?



We can expect to see growth in ourselves and our congregation as a result of these gifts.

Bible references:

1 Corinthians 14:12; or
2 Corinthians 3:3

Questions/activities:

What do these texts suggest "growth" means?

What would you name as one sign of "growth" in your congregation in the past six months?

Phone the most "growing" person you know, and thank him or her for being a joyful example in your life.

If God asks the question, "So what are you going to do with all my gifts to you," we answer by living our lives in service to others. We're responding to God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Bible references:

Psalm 116:12-14, 17-19; or
2 Corinthians 9:12-15

Questions/activities:

What do these texts say about the idea of "giving ourselves away?"

What worries you about the prospect of living your life in service to others? What gives you deep and lasting pleasure? How does one affect the other?

Look through today's newspaper to see examples of people who are publicly or quietly serving other people. Thank God in prayer for these people!

God commends proper use of the gifts we have been given.

Bible references:

Ephesians 6:7-8; or
Colossians 3:23-24

Questions/activities:

What do these passages suggest makes our use of God's gifts "proper?"

How do you feel thanked or commended by God for your use of God's gifts?

Tell a story about a time you were surprised by the commendation you received for using God's gifts.

Other resources

The following Spanish resources may be helpful in the preparation of your Festival of Gifts. All the following resources can be found in the Spanish Resource Catalog, available from the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Evangelism resources

Spanish Evangelism Door Hanger

Intended to be used for your door-to-door visits in your community. A colorful cross with art representing the church is on the front, and the back contains the Lord's Prayer with an invitation to your church's activities. Space is provided for your congregational stamp and customization.

6-0000-6565-5
PACKAGE OF 100 FOR $10.00

Leaflet ministry

"El niño Jesús ha nacido" (The Child Jesus Has Been Born) Tells the story of the holy family's search for shelter and God's gift to us in Christ. 6 pages

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