



Three steps to a charism-based parish ministry fair

by Mary Sharon Moore, “Called and Gifted” workshop teacher

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So now you’ve gone through the Called and Gifted workshop, and you’ve discerned what charisms seem to be at work in your life. Maybe there’s still a buzz in the parish about what you and some of your fellow parishioners have learned, and you might be feeling restless to take this “Called and Gifted” experience beyond discovery to real action.

Now imagine your parish’s liturgical, catechetical, and outreach ministries filled with the parishioners who actually are called and gifted to carry them out. Even if you’re not on the parish staff, you can set this vision in motion with a **charism-based parish Ministry Fair**. Here are three helpful steps to get you there: Sketch, Talk, Act.

1. Sketch

First, get a list of all of your parish’s ministries—either from a staff member, or from the Sunday bulletin or your parish’s website. You’ll find it helpful to cluster the ministries into three major categories: *Liturgical* (lectors, eucharistic ministers, greeters, ushers, sacristans, environment and art, cantors, musicians, etc.), *Catechetical* (adult, youth, and children’s catechists, RCIA team, returning Catholics team, sacramental catechists—including marriage and infant baptism, etc.), and *Outreach* (homeless shelter, food and clothing drives, sister parish activities, environmental stewardship, migrant family support, evangelizing, ecumenical and interfaith collaboration, etc.). List not only the ministries that already exist in

your parish but the ones that may be waiting to be named and set in motion.

2. Talk

Next, in a brainstorming session with a parish staff member and others who really have a finger on the pulse of the parish, come up with a clear, honest, and simple description of what each ministry entails, including (1) time commitments, (2) skill sets, (3) formation or training which the parish will provide, and (4) charisms most desirable to fulfill that particular ministry. Talk through the descriptions, keeping them uniform so that parishioners can easily “comparison shop” to discern what ministries they may be called to fulfill and how much involvement they can commit to. Imagine greeters at Mass who exude hospitality, and ushers passionate about service. Imagine catechists with a real capacity to encourage, evangelize, and teach the faith. Imagine outreach organizers graced with mercy, wisdom, and a proven “knack” for organizing, motivating, and following through. Imagine parishioners engaged in ministries that actually animate their gifts and unleash God’s abundant good for those whose lives they touch!

Pay attention, though, to the quality and depth of formation the parish actually offers for each ministry. Formation in the various ministries—and I mean formation beyond merely “how to do things”—is a serious though often overlooked pastoral obligation. Vibrant parish ministries come about not merely because enough people signed up, but because the faith

community has called forth their gifts, commissioned them, and pledged its support through ongoing spiritual formation and skill development. Well-formed and spiritually nourished ministries enable competent and gifted lay men and women to carry out the parish's internal and external mission.

After your team has brainstormed on each of the ministries, create an advance “wish list” for each ministry, listing people who come to mind for the ways they already seem to be particularly gifted and well suited to that ministry. In consultation with parish staff, and with their blessing, personally approach these key people. Urge them to continue, or invite them to consider, participating in that particular ministry. If they are involved in other ministries where they seem not to be aptly gifted, this fresh invitation gives them a way to transition without the pain of feeling rejected or “not good enough.” These advance teams may serve as magnets to attract others who also are appropriately gifted.

3. Act

The fun part comes with the actual parishwide Ministry Fair. Oftentimes this event occurs in the fall when programs come back to life after the summer months. Particularly for the catechetical and liturgical ministries, a fall Ministry Fair is an effective way to bring people on board for the new teaching season and to

prepare for the Advent and Christmas liturgies.

Pentecost is another “high energy” time for a Ministry Fair, especially if the parish has galvanized around discipleship, apostleship, and service through the Lent-to-Pentecost journey. New Catholics, returning Catholics, and youth and young adults now anointed and fully initiated into the life of the Christian community often respond with fresh-found gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially in the parish's outreach ministries.

How do you put a parishwide Ministry Fair together? With the help of parish staff, personally approach those people who are particularly gifted in charisms such as *Leadership* (setting a compelling vision for a Ministry Fair), *Administration* (seeing the whole and getting all the parts working together), *Craftsmanship* (setting a visually energizing Ministry Fair environment), *Hospitality* (welcoming people in to the fair—especially those who would rather head for their cars right after Mass), and other charisms that will help to make your Ministry Fair fun, educational, and fruitful.

Sketching, talking through, and carrying out your first charism-based Ministry Fair will require plenty of work. But once you capture the vision and follow the Sketch-Talk-Act formula, subsequent Ministry Fairs will become a welcome annual event which the whole parish will eagerly await.

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