

"Act with Generosity"

ACT UP - Small Group Campaign Fall 2017

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North East United Methodist Church

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7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

-Acts 4:7-13

31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. 32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

-Acts 4:31-35

27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

-Acts 5:27-32

6 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. 7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

-Acts 6: 1-7

In the movie *Field of Dreams*, the main character, Ray Kinsella, hears a voice while he is out in his cornfield, checking his crop.



The voice says, “*If you build it, he will come.*” Kinsella ends up plowing down a portion of his crop and building a baseball field.

This action is just the beginning of a fantastical adventure as he meets famous Shoeless Joe Jackson and follows other mysterious signs to Fenway Park and Chisholm, Minnesota. It is in Minnesota that Kinsella meets Archibald “Moonlight” Graham...

Graham confesses to Kinsella that his dream had been to play in the majors. When he was younger he got the opportunity to move up and was able to play one game with the New York Giants in 1922 before being sent back down to the minors. He played ½ an inning, didn’t touch the ball, and never had a turn at bat.

After being sent back to the minors, he decided to leave baseball and became a small town doctor where he helped hundreds of people, cared for children, and saved lives.

As the fantastical adventure of *Field of Dreams* continues, Graham gets the chance to play in a ballgame...gets the chance to come up against a Major League pitcher...but it is only for a moment and then he has to move on...

Kinsella is very upset and tells Graham that he is so sorry he only got to play for five minutes...only got up to bat once...that the fact he was unable to live his dream was tragic...

Graham replies, ***“If I had only been a doctor for five minutes...that would have been a tragedy.”***

In my research I discovered that the movie character, Archibald “Moonlight” Graham, was a real person...



In 1904, Archibald “Moonlight” Graham was a .323 hitter with Manchester of the New England League. He was then purchased by the National League champion New York Giants and joined them on May 23, 1905.

And for reasons lost to history, he didn’t play a game until June 29. That day, with the Giants leading 10-0 in the eighth inning, manager John McGraw finally put him in right field. Nobody hit the ball near him.

With two out in the top of the ninth inning, Moonlight Graham was on deck. He would have been the next hitter, his first time up in the big leagues. But Claude Elliott flied out to end the inning. The Giants sold him to Scranton 16 days later.

He never got his chance in baseball. But, he did get the chance to help people.

For 54 years, Graham served as a doctor in the small town of Chisholm, Minnesota...In his obituary it was written of him...*“And there were times when children could not afford eyeglasses or milk or clothing. Yet no child was ever denied these essentials because in the background there was*

always Dr. Graham. Without any fanfare or publicity, the glasses or the milk or the ticket to the ballgame found their way into the child's pocket."

"If I had only been a doctor for five minutes...that would have been a tragedy."

We must understand...God wants us to understand...a tragic life is not one in which we don't achieve our dreams. A tragic life is one in which we do not follow our calling. Each of us have been given special gifts to be invested in humanity, in the church. The true tragedy will be if we live our life without using the gifts God has blessed us with.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth...I Corinthians 12: 4-7 - ***"Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work throughout all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church."***

Henry Blackaby in Experiencing God writes, *"When God builds a local church as the body of Christ, He adds members to the body and trains them to match the assignment He has for that body..."*



...He builds a local church body in a way that enables that body to respond to Him. Then God can accomplish an assignment through that body."

Remember in the Book of Acts, the apostles, the church, needs help caring for the widows. The apostles speak to the congregation..."*Therefore,*

brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task." These men are found, the widows are cared for, the apostles are able to focus on preaching and prayer, and the scripture tells us, "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem."

You and I must work to discover and fulfill our God-given purpose, finding our match, our position in the body...the ligament we are to play...

Galatians 6: 4-5 (The Message) - ***"Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life."***

This is the purpose of the Spiritual Gifts Assessment many of you completed this last week for the small group study. It will give you an idea of the gifts God has given you so that you can plug into ministries at North East UMC and reach out in ways to your community and world using those gifts.

There are three ways God wants to use your gifts...wants you to ACT WITH GENEROSITY...

First, God wants to use your gifts not to tear down but **To Build Up God's Church...**

1 Peter 4:10-11 - ***"God has given gifts to each of you from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Manage them well so that God's generosity can flow through you. Are you called to be a speaker? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Are you called to help others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then God will be given glory in everything through Jesus Christ. All glory and power belong to him forever and ever. Amen."***

North East UMC needs people who are ready to Act with Generosity...generous with their time and resources...prepared to use their

God-given gifts to serve in countless ways...from sharpening the pencils in the pews, greeting people on Sunday mornings, helping in the nursery, teaching Sunday school, giving financially to the ministries of the church, singing in the choir, serving in leadership positions...

Secondly, God wants to use your gifts not to tear down but **To Build Up Others...**

I Thessalonians 5:11 (The Message)- ***"So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind."***

Isaiah 1:17 (The Message) - ***"God says, 'Learn to do good. Work for justice. Help the down-and-out. Stand up for the homeless. Go to bat for the defenseless.'"***

Several years ago, two students graduated from the Chicago-Kent College of Law. The highest ranking student in the class was a blind man named Overton and, when he received his honor, he insisted that half the credit should go to his friend, Kaspryzak. They had met one another in school when the armless Mr. Kaspryzak had guided the blind Mr. Overton down a flight of stairs. This acquaintance ripened into friendship and a beautiful example of interdependence. The blind man carried the books which the armless man read aloud in their common study, and thus the individual deficiency of each was compensated for by the other. After their graduation, they planned to practice law together.

North East UMC needs people who are ready to Act with Generosity...using their gifts to lift people up...generous with compassion and love...coming alongside someone who needs help and together making the ministry succeed...intentionally looking for people in our congregation who are struggling, who are new, who are in need, and reaching out to them...visiting the sick and the homebound...volunteering on a mission trip, helping with the Boys & Girls Club or Crop Walk or packing a shoebox for Operation Christmas Child, serving on the Missions Team, helping raise money so others can go and help people who are struggling HOPE...

And thirdly...our highest calling...God wants you to use your gifts to not point people toward yourself, an organization, or a church, but **To Point People To, Help People Know, A Savior...Jesus Christ...**

Ken Houts, in his book, Maximize Your Influence, writes about two cultures that are found in churches, in the workplace, and in individual lives. There is the Maintenance Culture. In the Maintenance Culture the church, workplace, or person works hard to maintain what they have built. They fear losing what they have. Their focus is not on what God has for them next or even the mission that God has expressly given them in His book; instead, their focus is on maintain their comfort level, to maintain what they have.

The other culture that one will find in churches, workplaces and people who are growing, in whose lives the world is being impacted, is the Kingdom Culture. Houts writes, *“King Jesus assigned the mission for the Church: to ‘go and make disciples.’ The Church is not an institution, nor is it a building, but the Church is the people; therefore, your individual and personal mission is to go and make disciples.”*

Houts goes on to ask, *“Do you excuse yourself from the mission King Jesus commanded you to obey because it is outside your comfort zone? Has anyone discovered the love and mercy of God because of you?”*

Matthew 28: 19-20 (NKJV) - ***“Jesus said, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”***

North East UMC needs people who are ready to Act with Generosity...using their gifts to help others know Jesus...People who are willing to serve on the Outreach Team, helping us put together events in which we can connect with our community...people who are willing to serve on the Hospitality Team...taking time to greet and to build relationships with those who visit with us...People who are generous with their testimony...sharing the story of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for them...

Rick Warren, in The Purpose-Driven Life, writes, *"One day you will stand before God, and he will do an audit of your life, a final exam, before you enter eternity. Fortunately, God wants us to pass this test, so he has given us the questions in advance. From the Bible we can surmise that God will ask us two crucial questions:*

First, "What did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ?" God won't ask about your religious background or doctrinal views. The only thing that will matter is, *did you accept what Jesus did for you and did you learn to love and trust him? Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Second, "What did you do with what I gave you?" What did you do with your life – all your gifts, talents, opportunities, energy, relationships, and resources God gave you? *Did you spend them on yourself, or did you use them for the purposes God made for you?"*

And what we must never forget is that we do not take these gifts into the world...we do not go forth to serve...alone. We do not need to be afraid or feel unqualified because the Holy Spirit goes with us...we just need to tap into the Spirit, allow the Spirit to take over.

Remember, Peter...one who denied Jesus three times...afraid...After Pentecost and receiving the Holy Spirit he stands up and preaches to the very people who crucified Jesus, he heals the sick, he stands as a leader and helps the church be born...Look at the early church itself...filled with the Holy Spirit...their lives overflowed with generosity and love for others...and the scripture tells us, *"For there was not a needy person among them."* Peter, the apostles, the early church, could not have done what they did without the power of God, without the Holy Spirit...neither can we...

The story is told that one day a beggar by the roadside asked for alms from Alexander the Great as he passed by. The man was poor and wretched and had no claim upon the ruler, no right even to lift a solicitous hand. Yet the Emperor threw him several gold coins. A courtier was astonished at his generosity and commented, *"Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?"* Alexander responded in royal fashion,



"Cooper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's giving."

Alexander the Great was royalty...what we often forget is that those of us who have accepted Christ are also royalty...The Bible tells us that we...you and I...all who believe...have *"received the spirit of adoption as sons of God"*...are *"a royal priesthood," "heirs of God," "heirs with Christ," "children of God"*...And as His Children, created in His image, we are royalty...and only the very best...extravagant generosity of our time, our resources, our gifts...will suit our giving...



"And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul...And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all...For there was not a needy person among them...The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem..."

May we call out to and rely on the Holy Spirit...may we use our gifts...our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness...in such a way that the same may be said of the church today...