

Connections

A monthly letter calling the church to faithful new life

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God creates us with differences

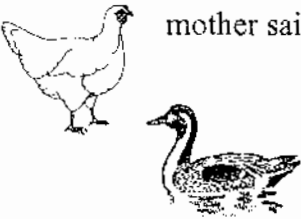
No two people are alike, and the church and the world need each person's distinctive gifts. Surprisingly, it took me about 45 years to realize this.

For years I had the vague feeling that I was odd somehow. Many things that other people seemed to enjoy were tiresome and uninteresting to me. In addition, some widely accepted customs and beliefs seemed senseless to me, yet I saw no one questioning them. That baffled me, but I wasn't willing to be the lone questioner. I simply assumed that everyone else was right and I was wrong, since there were so many of them and apparently only one of me.

Then in midlife I came across a system of classifying personality types, which helped me to better understand myself and the people around me. I found not only that personality types might be innate, but also that they were unevenly distributed and that my type was the least common, occurring in less than 1% of the U.S. population. No wonder I sometimes felt odd and alone! But what a relief—I realized that it was okay to be the way I really was. Realizing this was like having a huge burden lifted, which I had been needlessly carrying for years.

A hen that gave birth to a duck

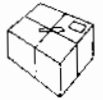
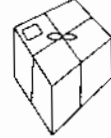
When I shared my discovery with my parents, to whom I had always been close, I was dismayed to find that they did not share my enthusiasm. They felt that I was rejecting what they had spent their lives teaching me—to be *like them*. My mother said, "I feel like a hen who has found that she gave birth to a duck!" And the tone of her voice clearly said that she considered a duck a very undesirable thing to be.



It seemed undesirable to her mainly because it was different from her and my father. I later learned that they were both the same personality type, a

(continued on page 2)

Gifts from God



Besides giving us a unique assortment of physical characteristics, talents, personality traits, and other innate features, God gives us special abilities that we need for carrying out the ministries to which God calls us. The Bible calls these spiritual gifts. Several are specifically mentioned in the Bible, but there are undoubtedly many others, maybe an infinite number. They're not always

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.
Romans 12:6



permanent like physical characteristics and personality traits. They often show up only when we need them, for particular situations into which God calls us.

Spiritual gifts remind me of electrical and electronic devices. Some are flashy like music videos, while others are like microchips, hidden and tiny but potent. Some are obviously useful, like kitchen stoves, while others seem trivial, like computer games. But they all have their use, and the same huge, mysterious power—electricity—makes them all work.

There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Each of us has some spiritual gifts, and they all are important. We don't get to choose which ones we get, and God gives them to us for the benefit of the community

. . . All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11

of Christians, the church. This means that when we as individuals don't identify our gifts and make them available to the church for use, or when we as the church body prevent any of our members from using their gifts, we're failing to carry out God's will.

(A hen that gave birth to a duck, continued from page 1)

type quite different from mine in important ways. Since they were the same type, which is unusual for married couples, they constantly reassured each



other that their way of seeing things was the only right way, and I grew up assuming that it was.

Fortunately my mother eventually became more or less resigned to my strange insistence on acting like a duck, and I gradually saw that being a duck was just as good as being a hen, but the process was slow and painful for both of us.

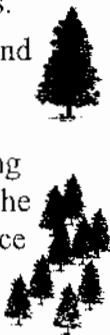
Families need all types

Besides helping me see that God didn't create me as a carbon copy of my parents, learning about personality types helped me make sense out of ways in which my husband, our daughter, and I were all different even though we had many similar interests and characteristics.

In each of the four basic aspects of personality that the most-used method measures, my husband and I are opposites. And his type, unlike mine, is very plentiful in the U.S. population, so he rarely feels alone in his way of looking at things.



- Like about 75% of the U.S. population, my husband's main focus is on the outer world of people, places, and things. Mine is on the inner world of ideas and feelings. He likes to experience and learn about a wide variety of things, while I prefer to delve deeply into the few that interest me most. As a result, he reads articles in *Business Week* and *National Geographic* and a jillion other magazines while I read books about subjects like theology and personality types.
- Like about 75% of the population, my husband mainly sees concrete, specific details (the trees), beginning at the beginning and progressing in order to the end without skipping anything. I tend to see the overall picture (the forest) and the patterns in it, in an all-at-once way. This means that at a restaurant he's still in the upper left-hand corner of the menu reading about the shrimp cocktail and figuring the cost per shrimp, when I've seen the whole menu at a glance but haven't noticed many individual dishes or prices.



One way to describe personality types

Two American women, Katharine Briggs and her daughter Isabel Myers, developed the method of identifying personality types that is used most often today. Much of their research was motivated by Katharine's noticing that Isabel's fiancé, though he was an admirable person, was quite different from everyone in their family.

Their research confirmed earlier observations by the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates and others through the centuries, and matched later findings by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung and others. For more on this subject, try one of these books (all easy-to-read paperbacks):

Please Understand Me, by David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates (includes a short questionnaire for identifying your own type)

Type Talk, by Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen

Life Types, by Sandra Hirsh & Jean Kummerow

People Types & Tiger Stripes: A Practical Guide to Learning Styles, by Gordon Lawrence

Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types, by Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrissey

- Like about 60% of U.S. women and 40% of the men, my husband evaluates situations mainly on the basis of how they affect him and other people personally. In contrast, I feel a need to be objective and impersonal in making decisions.
- Like about 50% of the population I prefer to make decisions rather quickly and then move on. My husband prefers to consider as many choices as possible and to wait for every bit of information that might become available. So when a waiter comes to take our order, I've decided, laid the menu aside, and thought of three ideas for next month's *Connections*, but my husband is still comparing the advantages of the pork loin with those of the prime rib.

This may sound as if he and I don't see eye-to-eye on anything, but actually we see eye-to-eye on a lot and like many of the same things, even though we sometimes feel we're speaking different languages. We're an ideal team for accomplishing things. Each of us likes some jobs that the other hates, and each does some things well that the other is hopeless at. Each notices things that the other tends to overlook. We fill in each other's blanks.

Other types bug us, but we need them

Few of us *enjoy* working with people of other personality types as much as with those of our own type, because other types bug us about things we'd rather ignore. But a group that includes several types *gets the job done* much more effectively than

Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . .

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable . . .

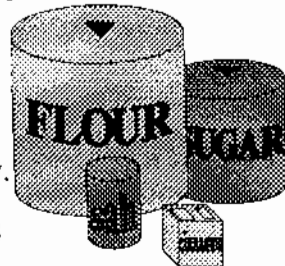
1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 21-22

one whose members are alike. My husband's insistence on waiting and searching for more information is valuable in many situations, but I often see it as a nuisance and a needless delay.

Each type has its own strengths to contribute, and its weaknesses for which others' strengths must compensate. But often

we mistakenly consider others' strengths weaknesses simply because they differ from our own.

The different personality types remind me of ingredients in recipes. A cookie recipe usually includes much less cinnamon than flour, but that doesn't mean cinnamon is less important than flour. And even though oil doesn't mix easily with milk, both are necessary. All these ingredients are needed for good cookies. Their differences make them necessary.



The church needs all types

In the church we need to deliberately include different types of people, not only because it's the loving thing to do but also because it helps us accomplish our God-given mission more effectively. We need all personality types in our programming, planning, and decision-making groups, from the Council of Bishops to local-church councils, and they won't just appear automatically. Every occupation and organization, because of its nature, attracts more of some personality types than others.

The pastoral ministry mainly attracts types who are people-oriented, reflective, and interested in the search for life's meaning. Few pastors have a strong

interest in managing money and property, and few are good at making impersonal decisions when they are needed. So an all-clergy group has dangerous blind spots, as does a group composed entirely of members of any other occupation.

The institutional church mainly attracts people who give top priority to tradition, stability, safety, and predictability. Innovators, brainstormers, riskers, and visionaries shy away from this kind of institution, yet the church urgently needs them.

To accomplish the church's God-given mission we must make constant, deliberate efforts to include and consult the personality types that don't just show up automatically. They'll often seem like troublemakers, boat-rockers, and nutty nonconformists whose ideas are out in left field somewhere, just because they're different from the majority of our present members, but the church needs them.

God wants all types to hear the Gospel

People of some personality types see God best through imagery and metaphor. Others see God best through literal statements and historical events. Some use words for prayer, while others pray mainly through action. Some find God in silence, while others need talk and others trumpets. Music leads some people to God but doesn't touch others. An intellectual search leads some to faith, while experiences of nature or human relationships lead others.

As the church we must provide all these avenues to God, because God undoubtedly wants the Gospel

communicated to people of all personality types, not just to those who are the majority of our present church membership.



God created each of us the way we are, with widely differing personality traits, spiritual gifts, and many other features that contribute to making us unique individuals. God speaks to each of us in the way we understand best, and calls each one of us to the ministry that best fits our God-given gifts.

We can't afford to reject anyone's gifts or to declare anyone's way of seeing God wrong just because they happen to be different from our own.

How can we reach the missing people?

How could you help the church reach the people it is now missing? By helping your congregation start a worship service or class whose style is different from the ones you now offer? By starting some new ways of communicating with your members and with outsiders? By starting some new ministries designed to meet the needs of people who are unlike your present members?

It's not easy, but God calls us to do it. And God will provide the necessary resources if we're serious about wanting them. Let's work on it together.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara".

(a grain of cinnamon in the church cookie?)