

Acts of the Apostles
Ninth “Think About”
St Philip’s United Church of Christ

Reading for the week: Acts 8:14-17

The act of the “laying on of hands” is not a casual thing. It is the bestowal of a gift.

Many of us remember this act being performed on us, perhaps on Palm Sunday for those of us who are older, or Pentecost Sunday in more recent years, when we were young people who had reached the age of Confirmation. The pastor laid his/her hand on our head or shoulder, but did not do this on his/her own, but as a representative of the whole congregation and the worldwide fellowship of Christ. The rite represented our affirmation for ourselves of the acceptance of Christ that was symbolized by our Baptism.

In a similar way, the church is often gathered to celebrate the calling of a person into ministry through the Rite of Ordination. When this occurs in our denomination, it is a celebration of the church where the new pastor was nurtured, joined by the neighboring congregations in the local Association, who come together to affirm and recognize the gifts the person brings for ministry in Christ’s name. The area clergy, and often all members of the church as well, are invited to touch the new pastor both physically and spiritually, to share with her/him the spiritual presence that is held in each of our hearts and shared among us. We are reminded by this that the gifts we have to offer, though they are deeply imbedded within us, do not belong to us but come from God. Thus all of us who share our gifts, despite our differences of appearance, attitude and belief, are nonetheless one in the Spirit of God, who is our unifying Source.

Now think about this remarkable passage of Scripture. The word has come to the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem that Samaria has received the Word of God, and many have been baptized in the name of Jesus there. These Samaritans are strangers to the apostles, in culture, ethnicity and religious heritage. So what did the apostles do? They sent two of their company, Peter and John, to see for themselves how the Gospel message had opened the minds of the Samaritans and led them to faith in Jesus. When they arrived, they saw in this alien community a belief in the Way of Jesus that they immediately recognized as being like their own. There was still, however, a spiritual need among these new believers. The apostles realized it right away. It was the need to be fully affirmed by their new Christian family. So Peter and John reached out and touched them, and in doing so unlocked the spiritual gifts of the Samaritans for the ministry of the church.

As we will see in the coming weeks, the mission to Samaria was only the first step among many taken by the early church to remove traditional barriers among people and to learn about the gifts that others bring to us as God touches them.

The laying on of hands is an affirmation, a gift, and a spiritual gesture of enablement that carries with it the promise that God’s Spirit in each member is multiplied upon us all. This week, let’s think about the growth, the learning, and the deepening of our own spiritual journey as companions in the church have ministered to us. How has the sharing of our different paths on life’s journey enriched our Christian experience?

(This weekly “think about” is printed as an attachment to our Sunday bulletin at St Philip’s United Church of Christ, 10708 Lavinia Drive, St Louis, MO 63123. It may also be found on our website. We

encourage you to make comments and also to share the page with any one you feel may enjoy seeing it. We are a congregation of the United Church of Christ, a progressive Christian denomination that is committed to inclusive ministry in the spirit of Christ's prayer "that all God's people may be one." Allen M. Fluent, Transitional Pastor)