

## *gifted! a time of plenty*

Our theme builds on the previous two multicultural celebrations - '*a table for all*' (2009) and *feast! Celebrating our life together* (2011): it allows us to focus on **generosity** and **abundance**, two key aspects of moderatorial emphasis.

- In times of economic challenges and the resulting need for care and prudence over resources of all sorts, *Gifted!* comes as an interruption to the scarcity and depletion stories we are inclined to tell of ourselves. It is a counter-cultural interjection to a prevailing and often default script. It is also a timely reminder that we are more blessed than what we often care to recognise and are thankful for. Your presence here and the story of the multicultural-intercultural celebration is about a different narrative.
- The theme is not intended to conjure up images of Pharaoh's dream of the seven fattening years of abundance versus the seven lean years.
  - simply affirming something central to 'who (and whose) we are, as a house of living stones walking the way of God in Christ. **We are a diverse community of multiple colours, make-up and countless giftings!**
- '**Plenty**' (more than enough) ought to be the "orienting" image/metaphor through which we face our present and future. This is important for us - a small church, with a large heart - where the reality of the inequality of access to resources challenges our collective life together as one Church of many parts....

Briefly reflecting on the theme we will "play" with the word "gifted" to highlight some habits we need to nurture, practice and deepen...

**G** speaks of **grace, gratitude, goodness, generosity** - words and habits to improve our grammar of faith and faithfulness...

Christian life is meaningless without praise: Gratitude is a necessary attitude for the Christian. This counters our obsession with "convenience, success, security", and an insatiable love affair with "more, more & more. We have been blessed and gifted abundantly – much of which is taken for granted

How do we put on **a whole new way of thinking and relating**: allowing the compassion and grace, goodness and generosity to define our living.

There is an ancient legend of a man with a scarred face who in trying to hide his scars had a saintly looking mask made to cover his face. Years later his past is revealed, and an attempt to reveal what he really looked like was made by ripping the mask away. His face had taken on the form of the saint's face. We become what we habitually imitate. We become what we make ours... The thoughts that fill our minds, the loves that fill our souls--these make us who we are. If we fill our hearts and minds with scarcity – we diminish the full potential we embody. If we fill our hearts and minds with the way of the living bread, and attempt to love as Jesus loves and to care as he cares, we are creating we are becoming imitators of God.

**I** points us to our **identity** as a "reforming" and "uniting" Christian community  
Our story is one of diversity from our inception in 1972: a diverse group of churches (already multiple in each of its own makeup) and part of that long tradition of non-conforming, reforming, and protesting free-churches with a strong emphasis on "thinking" seriously about the faith and our faithfulness.

The tradition(s) we have been gifted with is that which shape our identity as members of the diverse body of Christ and many gifts and a rich heritage. These are not written on granite: but reflect the “living faith of the dead” – always in need of scrutiny and renewal

Ours is a dynamic invitation to counter all forms of **insularity**, taking on the cruciform shape of one standing with open and expansive arms – *inviting, welcoming, embracing, loving, being vulnerable*

This is a very important for a community gifted with diversity that desires to be **intentionally** “multicultural church, **intercultural** habit”. For around the common table that we all sit, the challenge is for each group to contribute towards re-negotiating belongingness: that is to create spaces to ensure that all are included. This demands of us mutual **inconveniencing** for something that is larger than each part. And that something is – God’s offer of full life in Christ for all.

**F** reminds us that **faith** and **faithfulness** can be **fun**, while **fearlessly** working towards the fullness of life project of the gospel

The tradition of our Reformed family, while serious – highlights enjoyment in the first question and answer in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: *What is the chief end of human beings? To glorify God and enjoy him [God] forever!* Our scarcity mantra crucifies joy. And guess what – Jesus was also crucified because he loved too much partying, sitting around tables and having fun with dodgy characters!!!

Joy (this gift), fruit of the Spirit is a counter-cultural habit (a scarce commodity) in a world full of self-indulgence, protectionism, and crass individualism. Research has shown that for the nations and people swimming in over-abundance, happiness is a scarce commodity.

When the present moment is one of unspeakable injustice, this is very hard to do... and this is why we the collective experiences (of God’s extravagance) of the whole community... and these are plenty!!!

Humour and laughter are part of the expression of joy. As we strive to walk the way of Christ we find enrichment, healing, and empowering in so many ways by humour: *hopefulness in the face of depression or despair; openings in otherwise daunting situations; breathing space and respite in conflict and criticism*

Deepening the habit of joy is one way that we feed our spirituality to sustain us on the journey towards the fullness of life project of the gospel [The Laughter Barrel]

**T** underscores the importance of **trust, thankfulness** and **treasuring** our life **together**, Our life together and the flourishing of individual and collective gifting’s will remain impoverished if we are unable to reclaim the habit of constant thankfulness.

The bottom line is as simple as it is challenging. *Do we trust God or not? Do our lives reflect that we are people of faith? In spite of the evidence, are we able to believe in, trust in and treasure a God who loves abundantly to the extent of surrendering all – including our anxieties and worries?*

This is a profoundly theological issue: *do we actually believe? Can we model our lives and share our gifts around this belief?*

**E** as a gifted community we are called to **engage** with and **encounter** the strangers in our midst –to become an **energising** and **encouraging** fellowship blessed with more than **enough**

It was the late Archbishop Romero who said: “Aspire not to **have** more, but to **be** more.” To be more means turning towards the “other” - the stranger, people we do not get along with, those strange looking people flooding our communities, the lonely and vulnerable in our communities. To be more means that “I must decrease and Christ must increase”

**D** we are not called to be a tame and “lukewarm” community! A gifted community walking the way of Jesus is a calling to **dangerous discipleship**. “Cheap grace” kills the giftings and stifles the movement of God’s Spirit

Our calling is not to hoard the oil (gift) of gladness and generosity nor its fruits. We do not fill our lamps because we are afraid we are going to get locked out of the God’s embrace. We are not called to stockpile oil, and turn everyone else away.

We are called to communicate our sense of deep joy, expansive generosity and hope in spite of cost. So we constantly stop at the Source or Well, fill our flask and journey on the way of him who has welcomed us to his banquet of “soon and very soon”. We are propelled by the oil of gladness and expansive generosity.

For gladness and generosity to work, we need to constantly tank up and drink from that well that never runs dry – from the One that deepens the habits we need for the “long haul”

We are a ‘gifted’ community – and every time will be “plenty time” – but we must be ready to receive and embody the gift of hope and of love for the whole world - gifts that ask us to loosen our grip on old ways, in order to embrace a new life of possibility and responsibility. We need to offer a word that is able to imagine a world where transformation is possible, Speaking such a word may be a challenge: but even more challenging is how to embrace this word so that it becomes a habit - living it into realising the promise. Imagine the difference it would make when our world is viewed from the perspective of God’s generosity and abundance.

I believe in a generous God who offers abundant life for all – in love that refuses to let go of humankind. I hope that you too believe and can believe in such a God. **This is what we witness to:** Grace that overflows must pour out from our thoughts and words and deeds if we wish the world to believe us.