

Administration

The charism of **Administration** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God's wisdom by providing the planning and coordination needed to accomplish good things.

Sometimes Christians think of administration as dry and boring and of administrators as impersonal bureaucrats more interested in shuffling papers than in ministering to people. The truth is that some of the most effective people-helpers in history were administrators. Although both St. Vincent de Paul and Florence Nightingale are famous for their works of mercy, neither of them spent the majority of their time personally ministering to others. What made them so effective? They both had phenomenal charisms of **administration**. They were organizational geniuses who cut through the chaos, lethargy, and indifference around them like a hot knife through butter – they designed and carried out efficient programs which enabled the needs of large numbers of the poor and sick to be met.

The charism of **administration** is sometimes confused with either the charism of leadership or the charism of service. Leaders come up with and share the vision of what *could be* in a way that makes others want to be a part of it. Administrators make and execute the logistical plans that will make the vision *happen*. Leaders are usually *problem-discoverers* – they tend to look on the world about them with new eyes that see the unrecognized needs and then visualize new ways to meet those needs. Administrators specialize in *problem solving*, in efficiently meeting the needs that are already recognized. Leaders call us to God's purposes and set our direction; administrators get us there.

Christians with the charism of service are very sensitive to unmet needs or organizational gaps, but they are strongly motivated to meet the needs *themselves*. In contrast, someone with the charism of **administration** finds it easy to delegate portions of the overall task to others and to coordinate the work of a number of people toward a single goal.

God has designed a world in which most of His love reaches us via human means. An enormous portion of God's goodness, love, truth and provision comes to us through the structures and organizations that the gifted administrators around us create and sustain.

A person with the charism of **administration** is like *“the Swiss army knife in God's pocket. You can almost always get the job done if you have one around.”*

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Celibacy

The charism of **Celibacy** empowers a Christian to be most fulfilled and spiritually fruitful by remaining unmarried and celibate for the sake of Christ.

In the teaching of the Catholic Church, there is a difference between celibacy and chastity. To be chaste according to one's state in life is required of all Christians. This includes lifelong sexual faithfulness for married Christians and sexual abstinence for unmarried Christians until such time as they are married. The grace and strength necessary to live a chaste life is available to all who seek it from God.

Celibacy refers to the state of those who never marry and is a discipline freely undertaken by those who answer the call to religious life or to the priesthood in the Western Church. Not every priest or religious who is living the *discipline* of celibacy has the *charism* of **celibacy**. Those who do not have the charism of **celibacy** are able to live the discipline of celibacy as a Christian role for which God will provide the grace necessary. Some lay Christians have a charism of **celibacy** which they live joyfully although they may never take a vow of celibacy.

The charism of **celibacy** never stands on its own. Christians with this gift are being "freed up" for something else. Since the life of a celibate is not shaped nearly so much by the demands of family life, there is a greater need and freedom to shape one's life according to one's charism and call or vocation. The discernment of God's call and overall life direction is of critical importance for someone with the gift of **celibacy**.

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Craftsmanship

The charism of **Craftsmanship** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God's goodness to others through artistic or creative work that beautifies and/or orders the physical world.

When the Second Person of the Trinity became incarnate in the man Jesus of Nazareth, the relationship between heaven and earth, spirit and matter, creation and the Creator, was forever changed. God created matter and God has saved us through matter – and so matter, the physical creation, is precious and sacred. How we regard and deal with the physical world is a matter of Christian discipleship.

There is powerful relationship between holiness and creativity. Saints do not simply fulfill the duties that the rest of us avoid; saints are far more creative than that. They do things that the rest of us never think of. The charism of **craftsmanship** is the gift of Spirit-empowered creativity in dealing with the material world. This definition includes both the arts of living (cooking, sewing, construction, and so on) and the arts of recreation (painting, sculpture, and similar pursuits). It is sometimes hard for us to look upon anything so “ordinary” as being a good cook or gardener as a spiritual gift, partly because we all know “handy” people who have absolutely no interest in serving God.

A charism, however, is always deeply connected with our faith and is an expression of our relationship with God. Ask yourself the following questions to tell the difference between a natural artistic or “handy” ability and the charism of **craftsmanship**: Have I noticed any increase in or deepening of my creative ability as my relationship with God has grown? When I most desire to live my love of God, does craftsmanship seem one of the most natural and obvious ways to express my faith? Do I experience working creatively with my hands as a kind of prayer or contemplation? If the answer to all three questions is “yes,” it is probably that a charism of **craftsmanship** is involved.

Even if we don't have a charism of **craftsmanship**, when any human being is creative, we are collaborating with God the Creator who delights in beauty and in the creation for its own sake. We are also being a channel through which God's material provision and beauty can reach our neighbor. Without the ceaseless creativity of craftsmen and women, the whole immense structure of human society, which channels so much of God's provision to us, would come tumbling down.

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Discernment of Spirits

The charism of **Discernment of Spirits** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God's wisdom by accurately perceiving a divine or demonic presence in certain people, places or things.

Catholic spirituality has a long and well-developed tradition of discernment. It is important to distinguish between the charism of **discernment of spirits**, and the charism of wisdom, and the *role* of discernment that every Christian exercises. All Christians must exercise a role of discernment: making the best life decisions possible based on their knowledge of Christian revelation and of God's will written in their personalities, gifts, and charisms, while also considering the input of wise, loving friends and the nature and needs of the times in which they live. Some Christians are given the charism of wisdom, the special ability to receive unusual insight as to how certain truths or knowledge may best be applied in specific situations, resulting in good decisions that benefit others and reflect the will of God (see **Wisdom**).

The charism of **discernment of spirits** seems to be relatively rare. **Discernment of spirits** is the ability to immediately and intuitively "grasp" the spiritual source of certain behavior or ideas or the nature of a spiritual presence in people, places or things. Exercising ordinary discernment is usually a process involving extended prayer, the gathering and contemplation of facts, and the consultation of others. A Christian with a charism of **discernment of spirits** usually "knows what he/she knows" very quickly and may not be able to explain how he/she knows it. He or she may recognize a demonic or divine presence immediately upon first encountering the person or place that houses it.

Discernment of spirits may happen quickly, but discernment of the charism must be conducted over a long period of time and requires wise pastoral oversight. This is for the sake of the discerner as well as that of the Church. Some may confuse normal human intuition, the ability to read body language, or the working of other charisms like wisdom or encouragement with **discernment of spirits**. Immature Christians who do have this charism may be overwhelmed by the insights they receive, and become emotionally and spiritually disoriented by their unusual sensitivity to the spiritual realm. They may not know how to test their perceptions or how to properly handle this knowledge – which is intended to benefit the larger Church and not the discerner alone. Even experienced discerners must always remain open to the possibility that they might be mistaken. Early recognition and extensive pastoral care is especially critical for the full development and mature use of this charism.

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Encouragement

The charism of **Encouragement** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God's love – nurturing others through his or her presence and words of comfort, encouragement and counsel.

The charism of **encouragement** is the classic counseling or spiritual direction gift. Christians with this gift are exceptional nurturers of the personal and spiritual lives of individuals. Encouragers are more interested in the unique needs of individuals than in those of a group. By simply listening to and talking to others, encouragers become catalysts of remarkable personal healing and growth in others. Encouragers may feel most alive and most in contact with God when they have been admitted into other's inner world. But the ultimate criterion for discerning the charism of **encouragement** is what happens in the lives of those who share with the encourager. If you receive strong, continuous feedback that new freedom, well-being, or personal growth is the result of your time with others, you may have been given the charism. Formal training in counseling, although certainly helpful, is not required to be effective in the use of this gift.

More people who take the Catholic Spiritual Gifts Inventory score high in **encouragement** than in any other single gift; yet **encouragement** is the single most difficult charism to discern for many Catholics. To discern the presence or absence of a charism in the presence of strong natural tendencies and extensive life experience is a challenge. Our own expectations and those of others can make it difficult for a serious Christian to acknowledge that he or she is not particularly gifted in this area. But when we see a mature charism of **encouragement** in operation, the difference in effectiveness between an empowered gift and mere listening skills can become painfully obvious. We can inadvertently hurt others and can set ourselves up for unnecessary failure if we are not willing to become clear about the ways in which God usually works through us.

Wrestling with the discernment of a gift like **encouragement** is worth the struggle. To discern clearly that we don't possess any particular charism is not failure, but success! It sets us free to concentrate our energies in those areas where God has truly gifted us and to which we are called. The good news is that there are many other charisms through which we can help and nurture others; the charism of **encouragement** is simply one way among many.

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Evangelism

The charism of **Evangelism** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God's love by sharing the faith with others in a way that draws them to become disciples of Jesus and responsible members of His Church.

Catholics who take the inventory and score high for the charism of **evangelism** are usually startled by and uneasy with their results. In the US, the word "evangelism" is popularly associated with TV preachers, door-to-door evangelism, and other methods commonly used by evangelical Protestants. Most lay Catholics can't imagine themselves doing anything so aggressive and public – and so they fail to recognize the ways in which God's love has been communicated through their lies. Numerous family and friends may have discovered the Christian faith and entered the Church through their witness, and yet Catholics will still be reluctant to think of what they were doing as "evangelism."

The fact is that the simple personal sharing (sometimes called "lifestyle" evangelism) common among Catholics is the most effective type of Christian evangelism. Those with a gift of **evangelism** are often drawn to non-Christians and befriend them. All evangelizers long to help others move a bit further along the path toward a deep and loving relationship with God, but may do so in quite different ways. Some evangelizers are apologists who remove roadblocks to belief by explaining the truth about Catholic teaching. Others eagerly share their own personal experiences of having their lives transformed by the love of God. Still others witness most clearly to Christ primarily through deeds, rather than words.

The true test of an evangelizer is not how one shares, but what happens when one does. Are others intrigued? Do they desire to know more? Do they begin to find the person and love of Jesus compelling? Is the beauty, truth, or goodness of the Church and the Catholic faith becoming clearer to them? Are they drawn to become disciples of Christ and part of His Body, the Church? If those with whom you are seeking to share the faith often respond in this way, there is a good chance that you have the charism of **evangelism**.

Exercising the charism of **evangelism** as a lay Catholic can be a challenge at present. There is a great need for support and developmental opportunities for evangelizers in our local parishes. Those with a charism of **evangelism** can sometimes feel guilty because they spend so much time with people "outside church." In fact, it is the Church's teaching that all lay Catholics are "missionaries by Baptism". All Catholics are called to use their various charisms to help fulfill the greatest mission of the Church: proclaiming the love of Jesus to the world.

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Faith

The charism of **Faith** empowers a Christian to be an effective agent of God's purposes through an unusual trust in the love, power, and provision of God and a remarkable freedom to act on this trust.

The charism of **faith** given to some Christians is not the same as the virtue of faith required of all Christians. In Catholic understanding, "Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that He has said and revealed to us, and that the Holy Church proposes for our belief, because He [God] is truth itself." (CCC, 1814). All Christians enter into and live out their relationship with God on the basis of faith. Faith in Jesus Christ and the One who sent Him is both an "entirely free gift that God makes to man" (CCC, 162) and "necessary for obtaining that salvation" (CCC, 161).

The charism of **faith** enables some Christians to live joyful lifestyles of exceptional trust in God's provision and care. Most Christians will work for their living, and that is God's provision for them. On the other hand, Mother Teresa of Calcutta refused to do fund-raising of any kind. She serenely trusted for decades that God's providence would provide for the needs of the hundreds of sisters and brothers in her order and the thousands of people that they continue to care for all over the world. Mother Teresa was not foolhardy, but neither are Christians faith-less who seek to meet the needs of their families in a more ordinary fashion. Mother Teresa simply lived the sort of lifestyle characteristic of Christians who possess a well-developed charism of **faith**. Those with a charism of **faith** routinely tackle big visions with little or no visible means of support because they are confident that God will provide all that they need – and He does!

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Giving

The charism of **Giving** empowers a Christian to be a cheerful channel of God's provision by giving with exceptional generosity to those in need.

Giving has always been recognized as one of the fundamental acts of Christian discipleship. Traditionally, such concrete expressions of our faith have been called the "works of mercy." The corporal works of mercy include feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Giving is one of the most important witnesses of our love for others and is a work of justice that pleases God. Giving (almsgiving is a traditional Catholic term for the same thing) is a normal part of the Christian life.

But there are those among us who have a special charism in this area. St. Paul observed that God "loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7) and Christians with the charism of **giving** certainly match that description. For them, generosity is not merely a duty or responsibility; it's their idea of a really good time! Unlike man of the rest of us, they aren't anxiously wondering, "How much can I keep?" but eagerly asking, "How much can I give away?"

Christians with this charism seem to have a remarkable, carefree confidence that God will provide all that they need to live, so they are able to focus on the needs about them. This does not mean that people with this charism necessarily live a life of voluntary poverty. It is important not to confuse the empowered act of **giving** and the call to a particular lifestyle. Certainly, lavish giving and voluntary poverty have often been combined in the lives of the saints. But not all are called to live in poverty in order to give abundantly. God seems to grant some "givers" a special ability to make money, or provides them with unexpected resources in often surprising ways. He can entrust them with greater resources because they are such faithful channels of His provision and love to others.

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Healing

The charism of **Healing** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's love through whom God cures illness and restores health, when healing is unlikely to occur quickly or to happen at all.

It is important to distinguish between the Christian ministry of healing and the charism of **healing**. Most charisms can be used to facilitate the healing process. For example, the charism of encouragement can be a powerful source of restoration in a counseling situation, or the charism of hospitality a source of healing for someone who has been rejected or abused. The ministry of healing is very broad, is exercised by a large number of Christians, and could include the work of confessors and spiritual directors, parents and peacemakers, healthcare workers, and all who engage in activities that require compassion and nurture. Many who are used powerfully in a ministry of healing do not possess the charism of **healing** and are effectively using other charism in their work. For instance, an effective hospice nurse might possess a charism of mercy through which those she/he works with are comforted and experience God's love and hope, but are not physically healed.

The charism of **healing**, on the other hand, is relative rare, narrow, and specific and is not the same as care-giving. Those given the charism of **healing** are used by God to bring discernible, even remarkable, healing or healing with unusual speed in situations where healing would not normally be expected to occur or to occur with this speed. Some with the charism heal primarily through prayer, others through various forms of treatment and care (often professional) which may be combined with prayer. Like all charisms, the charism of **healing** must be exercised in the context of the Christian's overall discipleship, in submission to Jesus Christ and His Church.

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Helps

The charism of **Helps** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's goodness by using his or her talents and charisms to enable other individuals to serve God and people more effectively.

Christians with the charism of **helps** are supernaturally-empowered enablers who are deeply fulfilled by helping someone else successfully serve others and glorify God. Helpers effectively use their own varied charisms and talents to help another individual succeed at a task or work to which he or she has been called by God. Those with this gift prefer to work in the background, but not out of any sense of personal inadequacy. That which we tend to dismiss as merely the "background" is a helper's domain, a place of personal authority and greatest creativity.

When a Christian is operating out of a charism, there is a calm, unforced authority and sense of direction that is very compelling. Others instinctively recognize this authority and respond to it. The inner assurance and clarity that characterize people exercising well-developed charisms make them natural leaders in their specific areas of giftedness. This is true even for charisms like **helps** or service that we may be tempted to look upon as too "ordinary" or "low-key" to really count as gifts of the Holy Spirit. A **helper** will offer assistance with a confidence (not a pushiness) that tends to get our attention – and we would be wise to accept the offer!

The charism of **helps** is very personal. A helper is committed primarily to enabling the individual being helped, rather than to the particular task being done. In contrast, the charism of service (which can look like **helps**) is focused around the organizational "gaps" or undone tasks. The fastest way to "squash" a charism of **helps** is to insist that the helper focus on tasks in isolation rather than on immediate personal assistance to a person. Helpers can quickly lose momentum if they can't see how what they are doing is making a difference in the life of the person they are seeking to help. They are especially drawn to assist those with a charism or role of leadership.

The difference that an "empowered" helper can make in the life and work of a leader can scarcely be overestimated. People with the gift of **helps** often work as particularly effective support staff. They are also found engaging in all kinds of pastoral work or helping professions and in leadership in organizations dedicated to assisting those in need. The charism of **helps** is also a wonderful resource for the critical task of parenting.

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Hospitality

The charism of **Hospitality** empowers a Christian to be a generous channel of God's love by warmly welcoming and caring for those in need of food, shelter and friendship.

Throughout Christian history, hospitality has been regarded as a sacred responsibility. Whoever welcomes the stranger, welcomes Jesus. The charism of **hospitality** is one of the important "communal" charisms, along with leadership, administration, pastoring and teaching. These gifts are critical to the health of any Christian community. Hospitality can be a powerful source of communal healing and an effective means by which those outside the Church can first experience the love of God.

All Christians have a role of welcoming the stranger, but some among us are empowered to do so in a special way. Christians with this charism are usually sensitive to the presence and needs of the stranger or newcomer among us. They are energized rather than put-out by the appearance of unexpected company – nor will they worry because the house isn't tidy enough. They are delighted to welcome total strangers and wouldn't dream of limiting the guest list to just family or close friends. Guests feel unusually comfortable in the home or community of those with a gift of hospitality and tend to drop by frequently.

Ex: One well-known Christian family exercised an astonishing ministry of evangelistic hospitality from a tiny village in the Swiss Alps. They routinely welcomed hundreds of young adults from all over the world who came in search of spiritual truth, and they did so for decades. The floor of every room was filled with sleeping bags. The only privacy available was their own bedroom. They never knew from day to day who would turn up or how many would be present at dinner. A way of life that would have reduced many of the rest of us to quivering wrecks was possible because this family was supernaturally empowered for the task. Those who visited their home said that the warmth of the charism of **hospitality** permeated everything.

But a Christian with this charism doesn't need a home of his or her own in which to practice it. The local parish or Christian community is a wonderful place to exercise this gift. From ushering to healing teams, from small Christian communities to parish-wide social events, so much of the human warmth through which human beings experience God's love is dependent upon the exercise of this charism. Studies have shown that people are first attracted to a church because of preaching or worship, but they stay because of the friendships they have built there.

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Intercessory Prayer

The charism of **Intercessory Prayer** empowers the intense prayer of a Christian for others to be the means by which God's love and deliverance reaches those in need.

Many different kinds of prayer have been practiced and taught by devout Catholics throughout the centuries – meditative, contemplative, scriptural, the prayer of quiet, and so on. Much prayer is focused inwardly – on the union with God that is our ultimate destiny.

But there is a form of prayer known as intercessory prayer, which is directed primarily to the needs of the world. God seldom acts unilaterally. He delights in achieving His purposes through delegation, by means of the assent and conscious collaborations of His sons and daughters. In **intercessory prayer**, the pray-er offers one's self and one's prayer as a channel through which God's deliverance can reach those in need. The intercessor becomes a link between heaven and earth, between God and His creation.

Of course, all Christians are called to pray for the needs of others. Prayer for others is a normal part of following Jesus; God hears and answers all prayers. But some among us have a call to intercede for the needs of the world in a way that is particularly focused, intense, and effective. Christians with a charism of **intercessory prayer** love to pray for others and can do so for hours without tiring. Intercessors do not tell God what to do, but seek first to discern God's will in the matter and then pray that God's purposes be done in that situation. Intercessors often receive specific insights or guidance from the Holy Spirit as to who to pray for and how to pray for them. It is not uncommon for those with a charism of **intercessory prayer** to wake up in the middle of the night and sense an urgent need to pray for a specific person, even for someone they do not know.

Intercessors frequently receive remarkable, even miraculous, answers to their prayers for others. To others, their ministry of prayer may appear hidden or indirect. But intercessors know that praying for others is one of the most direct, effective, and practical things that they can do for those in need.

The power of intercession is magnified many times when intercessors pray together. Catholics have prayed together for others through the liturgy and the rosary for hundreds of years. Now the Church around the world is rediscovering the power of organized, corporate intercession. Over the years, millions of Christians have taken part in immense, worldwide "concerts of prayer" for the most needy peoples of the world. The result has seen astonishing evangelistic breakthroughs among people who have been deeply resistant to the spread of the Gospel for centuries. Local Christian communities that undertake corporate intercession for the needs of their people are experiencing spiritual renewal and growth. We can all contribute to the renewal of our own local community through prayer, whether or not we have a charism in this area. But those among us with the gift of **intercessory prayer** have been empowered to be unique agents of God's purposes through their prayers on our behalf.

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Knowledge

The charism of **Knowledge** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's truth through diligent study and intellectual activity that enables us to better understand God, the universe and ourselves.

In a society where universal literacy is the norm and where a large percentage of the population receives some college-level education, it can be harder to discern a charism like **knowledge**. But many who consider themselves educated have little interest in ideas or the intellectual life once they leave school. Not so those Christians who are given the gift of **knowledge**. They are not just indulging a natural love of learning. Their Christian faith is nurtured by and expressed through the inspired pursuit of understanding. For those with a charism of **knowledge**, ideas aren't irrelevant abstractions, but fascinating, living realities that are critical to Christian discipleship and the mission of the Church. These Christians would heartily agree that "all truth is God's truth."

Those with a charism of **knowledge** usually love to learn through books. The book-lover's motto, "So many books, so little time," could have been written just for them. But they can also deduce principles and ideas from relationship with others and from all kinds of life experience. Christians with this gift are constantly aware of the "big picture," of the concepts or truths underlying individual actions or situations. If you want to broaden your mind, just hang around someone with this gift!

The truth and wisdom that Christians with a charism of **knowledge** uncover is not their personal property. All charisms are ways in which God's provision reaches the world and so the fruits of all charisms really belong to our neighbors. It is very important that those drawn by the Holy Spirit to the life of the mind find ways to share their insights with the Church and the world. The whole Church is deeply indebted to great Christians like St. Thomas Aquinas, whose intellectual creativity renewed Catholic thought in a way that still makes a difference 750 years after his death. Christians with this gift are usually given other charisms, such as teaching, writing, prophecy, encouragement, or leadership, which enable the "know-er" to effectively share the knowledge that he or she has been empowered to acquire.

Some Christians have experienced what is called "a word of knowledge," a sudden intuitive insight or idea through which the Holy Spirit reveals what He is doing (such as a healing) in the life of an individual or community. A "word of knowledge" is one way that the Holy Spirit reveals truth to us, but it is quite different from a charism of **knowledge**, which involves sustained intellectual work.

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Leadership

The charism of **Leadership** empowers a Christian to be an agent of God's purposes by sharing a compelling vision of a better future with others and by directing the overall efforts of a group as they work together to make the vision a reality.

People with the gift of **leadership** are God's catalysts. It is strange but true that a group of highly intelligent and competent people concerned about a serious problem can find themselves just milling about hopelessly. But if someone with the charism of **leadership** is present and says, "We can change this – and here's how," an amazing transformation can sweep the group. Pessimism is replaced by energy and hope, and suddenly people are moving into decisive action. That ability to communicate a compelling vision of a better future in a way that motivates a group of people to work with you to make the vision happen is the essence of the charism of **leadership**.

Leaders are usually *problem-discoverers* – they tend to look on the world about them with new eyes that see the unrecognized needs and then visualize new ways to meet those needs. Leaders come up with and share the vision of *what could be* in a way that makes others want to be a part. Leaders don't necessarily immerse themselves in all the details, but they do monitor the overall effort to make sure that the group's efforts are staying on course.

Like any other human talent, natural leadership ability can be used for either good or evil. Adolf Hitler communicated a vision to the German people that they found compelling, but his leadership left Germany in darkness and ruin. A charism of the Holy Spirit can never be misused so completely. It is designed for only one purpose – to be a channel of God's loving purposes and provision. Although the expression of a charism can certainly be seriously distorted by our own sin or unresolved personal needs, it can never be turned to evil. If we try to use a charism for evil purposes, it will simply wither and die.

The closer we come to God, the clearer a channel we will be for God's purposes and the more God can give to the world through us. Although a lay Catholic often exercises his or her charism of **leadership** in a secular setting, he or she always does so as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Christian leaders call those about them to implement visions that honor God, foster all that is truly human, and respect the goodness of the creation.

The charism of **leadership** should not be confused with the charism of administration. Administrators specialize in problem solving, in efficiently meeting the needs that are already recognized. Administrators can make and execute the logistical plans that will make the vision happen. **Leaders** call us to God's purposes and set our overall direction; administrators get us there.

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Mercy

The charism of **Mercy** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's love through practical deeds of compassion that relieve the distress of those who suffer, and help them experience God's love.

Catholic history is filled with innumerable men and women of great compassion who expressed their love of Christ primarily through their love of the poor and needy. The Catholic spiritual tradition has always taken the 25th Chapter of Matthew to heart. Every Christian is expected to undertake the corporal works of mercy – feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Practical compassion is a way of discipleship open to all, no matter what their situation in life. Like Mother Teresa, they recognize that their neighbor in need is Christ in a distressing disguise and that when they care for others, they are caring for Jesus.

Although all Christians are called to be merciful, some are especially gifted and effective in this area. Those with a charism of **mercy** are deeply sensitive to the needs of the marginalized and oppressed in our midst. They have a remarkable ability to identify with the suffering of others, even though their own lives may have been untouched by misfortune. Their assistance is cheerful and effective. As many of us can attest, it is not always easy to know how to really help and comfort someone who is suffering; sometimes we become painfully aware that our well-meaning but clumsy efforts may have actually made the situation worse. One of the signs of the charism of **mercy** is a remarkable ability to bring genuine comfort and a sense of God's love to those who suffer.

Christians with this gift are careful to respect the dignity of those among whom they work. Although those with the charism of **mercy** feel the pain of others deeply, they do not find working with the needy depressing or draining; but rather mysteriously compelling, renewing, and fulfilling. They feel privileged to be allowed to minister to the poor and readily see and delight in the greatness of heart and soul that those who suffer often possess.

The charisms of encouragement and **mercy** are often confused because they both involve great sensitivity to the feelings of others. But Christians with these two charisms respond to the needs of people in quite different ways. The first instinct of those with a charism of encouragement is to comfort a person in pain by means of listening and talking. For someone with the charism of **mercy**, talking is usually not enough. They want to do something concrete and practical to help. Deeds, not words, are the primary means by which God's love reaches the world through Christians with the charism of **mercy**,

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Missionary

The charism of **Missionary** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's goodness to others by effectively and joyfully using their charisms in a second culture.

Like the charism of celibacy, the charism of **missionary** never stands alone. This gift enables a Christian to use his or her other charisms and talents in a different culture than the one in which he or she was raised. The culture and language of our childhood usually remains our "heart" culture and language for life; after early childhood, it can be very difficult to master a second language or a new way of living and relating. Although some people have a natural talent for learning languages, most people living in a foreign country or among people of another culture never feel fully at home, despite their best efforts. However long they have been there, they remain cultural "outsiders" and are regarded as such by those about them.

But for those Christians who have been given a charism of **missionary**, they are able to enter into the hearts and minds of those from another culture with remarkable ease and grace. They do so in order to follow Jesus and be an agent of some good thing. Not only are they able to learn another language well, they also personally identify with the people of the second culture in remarkable ways.

To exercise this charism, you certainly don't have to move to another country. It is now possible for most of us to relate to people of another language or ethnic background without straying far from our back door. Visitors, immigrants, and foreign students are all people whom Christians with the charism of **missionary** would like to get to know. They can get restless if forced to relate only to those of their own background. Men and women with this gift love to live cross-culturally and are remarkably effective channels of the love of Jesus when they do so.

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Music

The charism of **Music** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's creative goodness to others through writing or performing music for the delight of others and the praise of God.

Throughout Christian history, music has played a critical role in Christian worship, culture, evangelization, and community life. "The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art" (CCC, 1156). Although liturgical music has played such an important part in the life of the Church, music does not have to be explicitly religious in nature to reflect the goodness and beauty of God. Any kind of music that fosters human dignity, delights and refreshes the heart and soul, or expresses a truth about our lives as men and women brings glory to the God who loves us.

Of course, some people are born with a natural musical talent, which can be used for either good or bad. For Christians with a charism of **music**, on the other hand, music is always a powerful expression of their faith and an important way to nurture their relationship with God. As St. Augustine cheerfully observed, "He who sings well, prays twice." Singing, writing, or performing music is one of the most fruitful forms of prayer for those with this gift. The music that flows from a charism, even if it is not religious in content, tends to call forth prayer and a spiritual hunger in those who hear it.

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Pastoring

The charism of **Pastoring** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God's love and build Christian community by nurturing the relationships and long-term spiritual growth of a group.

In Catholic understanding, the term *pastor* is used first of the Pope, who is "supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful" (CCC, 981), and of the bishops who share his shepherding responsibilities and the ultimate pastoral charism of infallibility. The term pastor is also used in canon law to refer to a priest who has canonical responsibility for a parish.

But in addition to the hierarchical *office* of pastor, there is the *charism* of **pastoring**, a charism that the Holy Spirit distributes to both lay people and priests, women and men, and which may be powerfully exercised without clerical status. The charism of **pastoring** enables Christians to effectively nurture the inter-relationships and the spiritual growth of a group of Christians. Many effective lay pastoral associates and leaders of small Christian communities, Bible studies, and prayer groups have this charism.

The pastoral charism is very personally focused – those with this charism often feel frustrated when forced to care for more people than they can relate to at a significant level. Studies of pastors indicate that their effectiveness drops off dramatically when they have to care for more than 200 people. Since the average American Catholic parish has about 2500 members, it is essentially impossible for any single priest, no matter how gifted and hard-working, to provide all the care that is needed by the community. Good pastoral care for Catholics in the pews requires that most parishes have a number of individuals functioning in a pastoral fashion in addition to the pastor-priest. The wonderful charism of **pastoring** is a significant part of God's provision to meet this reality. Discerning and nurturing the giftedness of the considerable number of lay Catholics with the charism of **pastoring** will enable parishes to effectively nurture the spiritual growth of the average person in our increasingly large congregations.

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Prophecy

The charism of **Prophecy** empowers a Christian to be a channel of divine truth and wisdom by communicating a word or call of God to individuals or a group, through inspired words or actions.

When we hear the word “prophet” today, we may think of someone like John the Baptist, wearing goatskins and “crying out in the wilderness” (Luke 3:4); or perhaps Isaiah or Jeremiah writing books, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that became part of Scripture. God is no longer adding to the deposit of faith (which includes both Scripture and Tradition), but God is still speaking to His Church. “God who spoke in the past, continues to converse with the spouse of His beloved Son. And the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church – and through her, in the world – leads believers to the full truth, and makes the Word of Christ dwell in them in all its richness” (CCC, 79).

There is a great deal of evidence from both the New Testament and Christian history that the charism of **prophecy** has continued to be given to individual Christians throughout the life of the Church. The charism of **prophecy** empowers a Christian to be a channel of divine truth and wisdom by communicating a word or call of God to individuals or a group through inspired words or actions. This does not mean that a prophetic word is infallibly true (its divine origin and truthfulness must be discerned by the Christian community in the light of revelation), or that its meaning will be obvious (it often isn’t and can take a long time to understand), or that it will be concerned with predicting the future (it usually isn’t).

Christians with the charism of **prophecy** are not ecstatic visionaries. They are quite ordinary people who know that it is vital that God’s people respond to His call *today* with their whole hearts and will do everything they can to make this clear to others. Through the charism of **prophecy**, God awakens His people to hear His word and unleashes the power of the Holy Spirit. Prophecy can take many forms: a prophetic exhortation that calls people to action; a “word of knowledge” or “word of wisdom” through which God reveals what He is doing (such as a healing) in the life of an individual or community; a prophetic prayer or song which is received from the Holy Spirit rather than composed; an interior vision (not an apparition); prophetic actions through which God’s word is dramatized; or a message delivered in tongues and then interpreted.

Christians with a charism of **prophecy** require a great deal of emotional and spiritual maturity and disinterested discipline if they are to be fruitful and effective. It is possible to unintentionally offer our own ideas as a prophetic word, or to act in a prophetic manner out of anger, or in order to meet unconscious personal needs. Those with this charism must communicate the message that they have been given and then leave the results to God and the discernment of the Christian community. Like the charism of discernment of spirits, the charism of **prophecy** requires a great deal of on-going pastoral discernment and nurture if the community is going to fully benefit from this gift of God.

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Service

The charism of **Service** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's purposes by recognizing the logistical gaps or unmet needs that can prevent good things from happening, and by personally doing whatever it takes to solve the problem and meet the need.

One of the most undervalued charisms is that of **service**. Christians with this charism see what the rest of us can so often miss – the organizational roadblocks and practical gaps that keep good things from happening. They are gifted with a kind of radar that seeks out and anticipates potential logistical problems. Those with a gift of **service** are also energized by the challenge of taking personal action to solve the problem they have recognized. These are the people who will set up chairs without being asked when the facilitator of a meeting falls sick, or will spot a vacancy in the schedule of ushers and voluntarily fill in for the missing person.

People with the gift of **service** really know what it takes to get a job done and are personally willing to do whatever is necessary. Usually able to turn their hands to almost any practical task, servers are the hard-working backbone of any community. They are usually deeply involved in their local parish or Christian community because they find it intolerable that things should not get done for want of a little “common sense” and elbow grease.

Of course, their sense is anything but common. When we exercise any charism, it can seem so natural to see what we see and do what we do, that we may find it difficult to believe that other Christians can be honestly unaware of what looms so large to us. But they are! Our different charisms help determine the different needs we see, and color the way we go about meeting them.

The eagerness of servers to move in and solve problems that others have not yet recognized can sometimes irritate others – who may feel that the server is exaggerating the need. Those around a person with a charism of **service** can also resent the eager confidence with which the server tackles the task at hand. The authority that comes with the gift may even be mistaken for an attempt to take over leadership of a situation or group. The bewildered server, who only wanted to help, can find him-or herself perceived as a pushy busybody. One way to prevent this misunderstanding is for the server to first quietly alert those about them to the problem they see. When people have been first “sold” on the problem, they tend to appreciate rather than resent a solution.

A server's energy can be mistaken for a charism of leadership or administration. While an administrator can happily delegate parts of a task to others, those with a charism of **service** find delegation frustrating. They don't want to coordinate some one else's work; they want to do it themselves. Servers tend to be practical rather than visionary. They should not be expected to come up with new visions or create new programs, but should be given free reign to do that at which they are so gifted: identifying and eliminating the logistical roadblocks that keep good things from happening.

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Teaching

The charism of **Teaching** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's truth and wisdom by enabling others to learn information and skills that help them reach their fullest spiritual and personal potential.

The joy of those with a charism of **teaching** is knowing that they have been a catalyst for the "ah-ha" experience in those they teach. Teachers are not only highly motivated to learn new ideas or skills; they are also constantly looking for effective ways to pass on what they learn to others. Teachers love to explain things and answer questions. Teachers have a remarkable ability to explain complex matters in clear, interesting, and memorable ways.

Most of all, if you have a charism of **teaching**, others will learn. Of course, no one, no matter how gifted, hits a home run every time they get to bat. If you have a charism of leadership, not everyone will follow you, but many will. If you have a charism of **teaching**, not everyone you teach will learn everything you teach, but most will learn many things of real value. If others are not learning, you are not teaching, no matter how hard you are working or to what elaborate lengths you go to explain things.

Christian teachers always exercise a charism of **teaching** as disciples of Jesus, but that does not necessarily mean that they must teach on only religious topics. All sorts of knowledge, arts, or skills that foster the full development or dignity of human beings, and respect for the creation are proper material for the charism of **teaching**. Even when teaching seemingly "secular" topics, those with this charism can experience teaching and preparing to teach as a deeply prayerful act. It can be awe-inspiring to watch the Holy Spirit descend upon a class as you teach and to realize that once again something far more wonderful than anything you have prepared is reaching your students through the power of God.

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Voluntary Poverty

The charism of **Voluntary Poverty** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's loving presence by living a life of cheerful, voluntary simplicity or poverty in order to identify with Jesus and the poor.

It is the doctrine of the Incarnation that lies at the root of the Christian practice of living in voluntary poverty. God had voluntarily stripped Himself of infinite glory and power in order to become a mortal human being in Jesus, a wandering preacher who died a terrible death, abandoned by nearly everyone who knew Him. Motivated entirely by the love of lost and wounded humanity, "He did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, He emptied Himself and took the form of a slave" (Philippians 2:6b-7a). In the light of Jesus' life, the early Christians felt that the total embrace of poverty for love's sake was a sure sign of Christ-likeness.

And so voluntary poverty became one of the most common signs of devotion throughout Christian history. From St. Francis, who looked upon Lady Poverty as his beautiful bride, to Dorothy Day living with the abandoned poor in urban America, the Catholic spiritual tradition has always venerated those who answer the call to live in poverty in order to follow Jesus.

The terrible evil of involuntary poverty was also clearly understood; the saints and Christian leaders throughout history have always sought to help and heal the lives of the oppressed poor. In many of the saints, voluntary poverty and heroic service to the oppressed, the sick, orphans, prisoners, or the homeless went hand-in-hand. Never keeping anything for themselves, they were sources of lavish charity to others.

Giving of our abundance to the poor is considered simple justice, not charity, in Catholic teaching. All Christians have a responsibility to live simply so as to free up resources to give to others. But some among us have been gifted for and called to a lifestyle of freely chosen poverty. This is not at all some kind of grim rejection of the goodness of the material world, but a joyful embracing of a positive good. For both St. Francis and Mother Teresa, living in poverty for love of God and the poor was a beautiful, joyful thing. For some, the focus of such a lifestyle is identification with Christ; for others, it is a doorway to particularly effective service of the poor.

It is important not to confuse the charisms of giving and of **voluntary poverty**. There is a significant difference between empowered acts of giving, which can be done by Christians with access to great wealth, and the call to a particular lifestyle. We need to also distinguish between the *vow* of poverty taken by members of religious orders and the *charism* of **voluntary poverty**. Just as with the charism of celibacy, not every religious who is living the *discipline* of poverty has the charism of **voluntary poverty**. Members of religious orders who do not have a charism of poverty are able to live the discipline of poverty as a Christian role for which God will provide the grace necessary. Some lay Christians have a charism of **voluntary poverty** which they live joyfully, although they may never take a vow of poverty.

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Wisdom

The charism of **Wisdom** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's goodness through remarkable insight that enables him or her to come up with creative solutions to specific problems and make good decisions.

In both Jewish and Christian traditions, Wisdom is regarded as one of the most important gifts that God can bestow. Wisdom is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in Isaiah 11:1-2. There are gifts of the Holy Spirit that we are given to *keep* and gifts we are given to *give away*. The traditional "seven gifts of the Holy Spirit" as well as the "fruits" of the Spirit are gifts given to us to keep. They are part of our inner transformations as Christians and provide the inner "Christ-likeness" necessary for the effective use of our charisms (CCC, 1830-1832). In the Catholic understanding, wisdom is one of the seven gifts; along with understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. These gifts perfect the virtues of those who receive them, making Christians able to quickly obey the leading of the Holy Spirit (CCC, 1831).

All Christians must exercise a *role* of discernment: making the best life decisions possible based on their knowledge of Christian revelation and of God's will written in their personalities, gifts, and charisms, while also considering the input of wise, loving friends and the nature and needs of the times in which they live. It is important to distinguish between the charism of the discernment of spirits, the charism of **wisdom**, and the *role* of discernment that every Christian exercises.

The charism of **wisdom** is the special ability to receive inspired insights that enables a Christian to come up with creative solutions to specified problems and to make good decisions. The practical application of knowledge or principles in a specific situation is their forte. "Wisdom" people tend to make good decisions and are able to help others do the same. Christians with this gift are very appreciative of the spiritual wisdom of the Catholic tradition and enjoy solving practical problems by applying spiritual insights in creative ways. A Christian with this charism will usually be recognized as very perceptive by others – who will often seek to talk over problems or decisions with him or her.

The charism of **wisdom** is more than normal human intuition, which is, itself, a wonderful creative force. Like all other charisms, **wisdom** is empowered by the Holy Spirit and the insights received will always reflect the loving purposes of God. **Wisdom** is also different from the charism of knowledge. Those with the gift of knowledge are very focused on the big picture; the larger concepts and ideas. Christians with the charism of **wisdom** are much more interested in the specific and practical application of those big ideas. Know-ers see the whole forest ecosystem, while "wisdom people" are fascinated with its implications for a particular tree. Some Christians are given both charisms of **wisdom** and of knowledge, which make them unusually able to grapple with both fundamental ideas and their implications.

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Writing

The charism of **Writing** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's creativity by using words to create works of truth or beauty that reflect the fullness of human experience and bring glory to God.

Because we live in a time of nearly universal literacy, it is sometimes hard for us to see how writing can be a charism. Almost all of us are taught how to write as young children because it is an absolutely necessary life skill in our heavily verbal culture. How can we tell the difference between a skill that we have acquired and a spiritual gift given by the Holy Spirit? In our actual lived experience, it can be difficult to tease apart our skills, our natural abilities and our charisms, but God has not left us without clues.

Because charisms are intended to be vehicles of God's love and provision for the world, they cannot be used to serve ends that are in fundamental opposition to God's will. You can't use a charism of **writing** to create hate literature, for instance. If our writing is an expression of a charism, the purposes of God will be served by our words and there will be a lingering spiritual quality about the prose or poetry produced. However, this does not mean that a charism of **writing** can be used only to produce explicitly religious literature.

J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, was a devout Catholic as well as a famous professor of English literature at Oxford. There is nothing overtly Christian about *The Lord of the Rings*, and yet a deeply Christian worldview permeates the story. There are stories of readers being converted to Christianity just by reading Tolkien's masterpiece, although the name of Christ is never mentioned. The hope, goodness, and spiritual depth of the faith are communicated indirectly by a piece of fiction and yet can touch the imaginations and spirits of some readers with a power that a straightforward essay or sermon could never achieve.

Those of us who are seeking to discern between a charism of **writing** and a skill or natural ability might ask ourselves the following questions: Is writing a form of prayer or contemplation for me? Is it one of my favorite spiritual exercises? When I seek to express my love for God or serve the Kingdom of God, is writing one of the first activities that I turn to? Do others tell me that my writing has nurtured their faith, encouraged them to seek out the good and the true, brought them closer to God, or enabled them to live a more truly human life? There will always be a deep connection between our spiritual life and our charisms, and often a prayer-like or contemplative quality to the exercise of our spiritual gifts. If that is missing, then we have reason to believe that however skilled we may be as a writer, we might not have a charism of **writing**.

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