

“Come, Holy Spirit: The Giver of Gifts”

Scripture: **Isaiah 11:1-5 ; 1 Corinthians 12:4-13**

Mary Margaret Porter

April 26, 2026



When preparing for this sermon and reading the passage from 1st Corinthians we just heard this morning, on how each of us is given different gifts by the same Spirit, I kept reading, and if you do so, you will find that Paul goes on to explain to us what it really looks like when those gifts are lived out together as one body. An important message for us, the church.

The passage continues in verse 14 ending in verse 27.

Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

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The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

When reading this longer passage today, I found I could not help myself from singing one of my favorite childhood songs ‘Head, shoulders, knees and toes” in my head. I cursed myself for even thinking of it because for the rest of the day that little ditty was running through my brain. And you know what – I had a hard time not standing up and doing the motions – you know – head – shoulders – knees and toes, knees and toes. I remember singing this with my boys when they were younger in the hopes that the song would help quell some of their unending energy. They would roar with laughter as the tune sped up with each singing and they had to move their little limbs faster and faster until we were a pile of arms and legs giggling on the floor and totally out of breath.

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But what would it be like if we only sang about the eyes and ears – not half as much fun – there would be no bobbing up and down to touch the knees and toes – no getting mixed up about where you should be pointing. And that’s exactly Paul’s point. A body made up of only one part isn’t just less interesting—it doesn’t work

That brings us to St. Paul’s message to the church at Corinth. The church in Corinth was a diverse group of rich and poor, important and unimportant, Jew and Gentile, slave and free. And naturally, there were some divisions in the church. To this church, Paul writes chapter 12 where he reminds the people there that, by gift of the Holy Spirit, each one is an integral part of the body of Christ. “For 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.”

Paul tells the members of the church in Corinth that they are the body of Christ, that they are responsible for ministering for Christ as Christ. Everybody, that means each and every one of us, no matter how feeble, no matter how small, no matter how seemingly insignificant or important we may think of ourselves—we all have important roles to play in the body of Christ, the church.

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Paul also reminds us that this diversity of form and function is not a bad thing. You see God, who insists on unity also insists on diversity. Not only is it okay to be different, but it is essential to the survival of the church that we not look and act just like each other.

Being the body of Christ calls us to be different and united at the same time and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must work together, in unity, each one using his or her gifts of the Spirit to realize God’s vision for the world.

Now Paul didn’t come up with this metaphor of a group of people being like a body. Many Greek philosophers used this same image as a way of telling the poor and the slaves to be content where they were in society and not to challenge the rich and powerful. Aristotle once said, “From the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.”

Where Aristotle used the body to justify hierarchy, Paul uses it to dismantle it. Paul’s intent is to radically restructure this understanding in conformity with God’s gracious love and through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The point is not that Christ’s body ought to conform to the common understanding of what parts of the body are more important, useful or powerful; on the contrary, it is God who has arranged the parts of the body “*as he chose*”

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Mary Margaret Porter

April 26, 2026



(12:18), so that “the members may have the same care for one another” (12:25). In Christ’s body, the weaker parts are acknowledged as indispensable, the less honorable parts receive greater honor.

I am sure that many of you have heard of or read Henri Nouwen, a Dutch born Catholic priest and writer. Later in his career he lived and worked at a L’Arche community in Toronto. L’Arche is an international movement that creates communities, programs, and support networks with people who have intellectual disabilities.

As a faith-based organization, L’Arche maintains, promotes, and strives to act upon the following principles:

- that whatever their strengths or their limitations, people are all bound together in a common humanity;
- that everyone has the same dignity and the same rights, including the right to life, to a home, to work, to friendship, and to a spiritual life;
- that a truly just and compassionate society is one which welcomes its most vulnerable citizens, and which provides them with opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the communities in which they live;

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First Presbyterian
CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE

Nouwen created a special relationship with one member of his L’Arche community. His name was Adam; the weakest person in his community by far. Adam could not speak, dress himself, walk alone or eat without help, He did not cry, or laugh and only made occasional eye contact. He had severe seizures and was completely dependent on his community for survival.

What role could this man play in or as the body of Christ, one may ask. He cannot be a hand, or a foot, or a mouth –

But Nouwen noticed that he, and the entire community at L’arche found themselves slow down when in Adam’s presence, become more patient, become more humble, become more giving, become more peaceful. You see, Adam’s gift of the Spirit,—his place in the body—was to bring peace.

Nouwen goes on to say that the most tangible quality of Adam’s peace was that while Adam was more rooted more in being than in doing, and more in heart than in mind, his was a peace that always called forth community. Adam in his total vulnerability called his entire L’Arche community together as family and turned everything upside down. Adam was the most broken of them all but without a doubt the strongest bond among them all.”

“Come, Holy Spirit: The Giver of Gifts”

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Mary Margaret Porter

April 26, 2026



Paul by calling the church in Corinth the body of Christ was encouraging them, whatever their gifts from the Spirit – those seen and unseen – to build a community. – to become one body- Christ’s body in the world. And he was also continuing Christ’s message of turning traditional roles of power upside down. In Christ’s body the strong serve the weak, those with strength serve those in need, and all suffer and rejoice together (12:26). When linked as a body as Paul notes, when one member suffers they all suffer and when one rejoices they all rejoice.

You see We don’t just belong to the same body—we depend on each other to be the body of Christ – the Church.

We here at First Presbyterian are the body of Christ, in our diversity of gifts from the Spirit, our interests, gifts, talents, passions and service to this church, this community and out as far as Cuba and Mexico. Yet we are also the body of Christ in our unity of vision and purpose – for Christ in the heart of Charlotte. In that unity, even when we may disagree or argue, we continue to worship together, pray together, learn together, serve together, love together and yes suffer together and rejoice together.

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Scripture: **Isaiah 11:1-5 ; 1 Corinthians 12:4-13**

Mary Margaret Porter

April 26, 2026



Being the body of Christ, whatever part each one of us is, requires that we take our gifts from the Spirit and find where our gift connects with the body and go there – those who are fingers stock the Nourish Up pantry shelves for those going through food insecurity, those who are mouths can teach Sunday school or sing in the choir, , those who are feet can go on a mission trip, those who are ears visit and minister someone in need maybe by joining our Stephen Ministry program, those who are brains – well you probably have already figured out what you can do –

Yet we need not all be hearts and brains, hands and feet, maybe you are that muscle in the hand, which squeezes just tight enough to let another know you are there. Maybe you are the smile that tells the total stranger in the grocery store that they are not alone.

So what does it mean to be the body of Christ? It means this. From a poem by St. Theresa

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good.

Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world.

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April 26, 2026



First Presbyterian
CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE

Yours are the hands

Yours are the feet

Yours are the eyes

You are His body"

Amen.

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CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE

Let us pray.

Gracious and unifying God,
you have called us together as one body in Christ,
though we are many and varied.

You have given each of us gifts by your Spirit—
not for ourselves alone, but for the good of all.

We thank you that in your wisdom, no part is unnecessary,
no person overlooked,
no gift without purpose.

Merciful God,
we confess that we do not always honor the body as you intend.

We compare ourselves to others,
we doubt the value of our own gifts,
or we fail to recognize the gifts in those around us.

At times we create divisions where you have created unity.

Forgive us, we pray.

Teach us to see one another as you see us—
essential, beloved, and connected.

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April 26, 2026



First Presbyterian
CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE

God of grace,
we give you thanks for the many gifts within your church—
for those who lead and those who serve quietly,
for those who teach and those who listen,
for those who offer care, creativity, wisdom, and generosity.
We thank you that together, through your Spirit,
we become more than we could ever be alone.

Loving God,
we lift before you the needs of your body in the world.

We pray for your church—
that it may live more fully into its calling as one body,
celebrating diversity and seeking unity in Christ.
Where there is division, bring reconciliation.
Where there is exclusion, bring belonging.
Where there is pride, bring humility.

We pray for the world you love—
for places where brokenness and suffering divide communities.
Bring healing where there is pain,

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April 26, 2026



First Presbyterian
CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE

justice where there is oppression,
and peace where there is conflict.

We pray for those who feel unseen or undervalued—
those who wonder if they matter,
those who feel disconnected or alone.

Remind them that they are indispensable in your sight.

We pray for those who suffer—
the sick, the grieving, the weary—
that as one body, we might share in their pain
and surround them with compassion and care.

We pray for this community—
that you would help us discover and use the gifts you have given us.
Show us how to serve one another with love,
to honor each part of the body,
and to rejoice together in your work among us.

For those we name aloud,
and those we hold in the quiet of our hearts...

God of unity, hear our prayer.

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First Presbyterian
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Bind us together, O Christ,
so that if one suffers, all suffer together;
and if one is honored, all rejoice together.
Make us faithful members of your body,
living not for ourselves, but for you and for one another.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ,
the head of the body, the church,
who taught us to pray, saying: