

How to Practice Communal Discernment



Provided by Portico Benefit Services. Adapted from Practice of Discernment, Spiritual Formation Program of the Grace Institute, luther.edu/graceinstitute, Aug. 2013.

Steps

1. Dwell in the Word

- Light a candle in the center of your meeting space and enter into a moment of silence. Reflect on seeing participants through the Light of Christ.
- Listen openly and attentively to Matthew 11:28-30 or Philippians 2:1-11. Be open to stirrings within as the text is read aloud two times. Pause between the two readings and allow a time of silence afterward.

2. Sharing Time

What happened in the prayer time? What part of the text did you spend time with? How does it speak to you and your life? How did God meet you?

3. Enter Into a Silent Time of Prayer

Prayerfully seek wisdom; let go of preconceived options or solutions.

4. Listen to the Presentation and Frame the Question for Communal Discernment

Discuss what you noticed and felt in response to the presentation. Share questions of clarification.

5. Discern God's Desire for Us and Our Community

- Begin with five minutes of prayerful silence. As you then begin your discussion, listen to the wisdom of everyone in the group. Don't immediately lean toward one option over the other. Rather, take a step back, and detach yourself from anything that would influence your decision prematurely.
- Rely on God; be open, prayerful, and confident that we can seek God's will for us and strive to achieve consensus on the question. Check in with participants in the group; be sure all have been given the opportunity to be heard.

6. Enter Again Into a Silent Time of Prayer

Prayerfully seek wisdom together; avoid advocating for options or solutions.

7. Determine if There Is Consensus

Share what is noticed, discuss ideas and thoughts, and determine where consensus might be emerging. Test if there is consensus; if there is no consensus, repeat steps 4, 5, and 6.

8. If Unable to Reach Consensus During the Meeting Time

The leader may suggest adjourning and establishing a date to continue the communal discernment process.

Communal Discernment Guidelines



Maintain an Attitude of Prayerful Listening

- Be still and centered in God's presence.
- Don't be afraid to allow periods of silence between questions and comments.

Engage in Thoughtful Reflection on the Facts

- Ask questions that are simple and open-ended (rather than yes/no).
- Don't be afraid to ask questions that seem far-fetched. If they arise, they probably need to be asked.
- Gather information and ideas.
- Explore practical considerations.
- Evaluate the information you have.
- Keep the attention on the focal questions.

Take Part in Prayerful Deliberation

- Tap into the imagination and draw upon Scripture.
- Provide opportunity for reflective responses.
- Look for signs of God. Pay attention to where God seems to be breaking through with love, joy, or compassion.
- Wait for and ask whether there is consensus on the question.

Watch for an Emerging Plan of Action

Follow the Spirit's leading in developing a plan of action.

Take Time to Review What You've Experienced of Prayerful Decision-Making

Reflect on how it worked in your group and how you might improve it.

- Are you truly listening to each other?
- Does everyone have the opportunity to speak?
- Have you been looking for signs of the Spirit?
- Are you growing closer to God and one another in your time together?