

Seven Essential Elements of Discernment

1. An explicit attitude and atmosphere of faith
 - a. This is a belief that God cares about this process and desires to lead us to the best possible decision
2. Prayer – before, during, after: for light; for freedom
3. Interior freedom; poised spiritual liberty
(Refer to the questions on the handout – Searching for Interior Freedom)
4. Information – disseminated, assimilated
 - a. The issue under discernment
5. Separation into pro and con arguments
6. Attempt at Consensus
 - a. Seeking areas of agreement
7. Confirmation – Congruence
 - a. Internal: joy and peace in the Holy Spirit
 - b. External: How does it work over time? Acceptance by Authority?

Searching for Interior Freedom

- Given my stronger inclination toward one choice rather than another, am I willing to accept the possibility that even the choice toward which I am less inclined might be the Word of God addressed to us here and now?
- Have I consciously or unconsciously diminished any of the possible choices as a means of fulfilling the goals to which God is calling?
- Do I fully intend to follow God's Word even before it is discovered, or is my decision and enthusiasm suspended until it is known?
- Do I really believe that God is sufficiently concerned in the matter to even have any Word to speak, or that God is completely indifferent to all and every alternative that might be chosen?
- Do I distrust our merely human efforts to find our goals and take the means to achieve them?
- Do I believe that the others associated with me are really willing to be led by God and are sincerely trying to be open to God's Spirit?
- Does my mistrust of God, or the others, or even myself make me fearful, timid, and cautious in the search and choice of alternatives?
- Can I commit myself beforehand to the discerning group's final choice unless it is disconfirmed by just authority or by experience in carrying it out?
- Am I indifferent to all but that to which God is calling?
- Am I ready to counter by intense prayer any desire that I might feel within myself that could impede or block the Word of God?
- Can I accept the fact that God might not choose to speak in the most humanly efficient way or process undertaken to make decisions?
- Am I willing to name, own, and examine my thoughts, emotions and feelings in order to assess even the possibility of self-deception in discerning God's Word for us?
- Am I aware of my past failures and lack of freedom and my ever present need for conversion and purification?
- Am I aware of my fears and ready to also renounce them?

Communal Discernment

- I. **Communal discernment** – a process undertaken by a community to discover God's direction here and now and involving some communal action.
- II. **Communal discernment** is basically the personal discernment of all the persons in the community. It is no stronger or purer than the quality of the personal discernment of each person.
- III. **Christian Decision Making or Discernment presupposes:**
 1. Prayer – absolutely essential for authentic discernment.
 2. Faith and Hope in the power of the Spirit to shape the future.
 3. Peace of Soul, the proper atmosphere, for the working of the Spirit.
 4. Indifference to all but God's will ("Not our will, but Your will, God.")
 5. Conviction that God's will is manifested through Sacred Scripture, but also through the events, people and circumstances of our lives and the history, needs, and resources of the Community; and also in the signs of the times in the social, political, cultural and economic milieu in which we live in society and in the Church.
- IV. **Pre-requisites for Christian Decision Making or Discernment:**
 1. Freedom from any preconceived notion that "I know what God wants."
 2. Openness to the Spirit and to others.
 3. Active listening to others, instead of closing ourselves off from others, or assuming "they have nothing to teach me."
 4. Acceptance and respect of each person who is discerning with us.
 5. Searching for, collecting and reflecting on the necessary information needed to make an informed decision. The Holy Spirit does not act in a vacuum.
 6. Awareness of my own feelings, resistances and attitudes toward the issue or person being discerned.
- V. **Suggested steps in this Act of Communal Discernment:**
 1. Have a specific question – after receiving necessary information
 2. Take the con arguments – for a specific time
 3. Brief break
 4. Take the pro arguments – same specific time
 5. Communal prayer for enlightenment and freedom
 6. Private prayer leading to each person's opinion in the Spirit
 7. Tap for consensus
 8. If there is no consensus – check to see if each person can live with the direction that may not be his/her first choice.