

COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT

The process by which a community of faith seeks to see God's movement in the world and in that community's life. It is our striving to listen deeply and grow in our conformity with God's love for us.

Three Assumptions - Communal discernment is ...

1. Directly related to our efforts for congregational development.
2. Happening in all Christian communities. It may be more or less skilled, grounded or intentional. Discernment is already happening in all parishes. We may strengthen our capacity for discernment.
3. Only confirmed over time. It is confirmed by the experience and acceptance of the community.

The Parish Base for Discernment

Discernment is about particular decisions and processes and the general stance of the community. The more solid that stance the more likely a productive and faithful outcome in particular decisions and processes.

Elements of the long-term preparation for fruitful discernment include:

1. The parish living a full, rooted Christian life and a functioning Renewal-Apostolate Cycle. Habits of Eucharistic participation, a core that does the Daily Office and has some skill in communal reflection.
2. An awareness of having a nature and mission as a local expression of the Body of Christ—one, holy, catholic, apostolic; restoring to unity.
3. A shared understanding of our common faith journey. Including an overview of the story of the people of God (biblical and historical) and the story of the parish.
4. Having shared our own story of faith and having heard the stories of others in the parish.
5. Having some common language and frameworks for understanding the parish's dynamics.
6. The ability to listen -- to God, self, others, creation; to be still and silent when together.
7. An ability to relate well with one another.
8. A sense of stability along with openness to change in parish life regarding worship and decision making.
9. A number of people in the parish with some depth to their faith and life, i.e., an apostolic core.

Out of this "base" may come a living in Christ and Christ living in us; a flowing forth of Christian thinking and deciding. To the extent that the base for discernment exists in the parish, all of our thinking and deciding will be influenced by the heart and mind of Christ.

Discernment in Particular Decisions or Processes

1. Specific discernment methods can be woven into the overall process of planning and decision-making, for example: reinforcement of the foundational elements noted above, silence as part of the process along with respectful discussion, intercession.
2. For a decision on an especially important matter, it may involve one session or go on over several months. In a context of community worship, community building and faith sharing, there needs to be a disciplined process that enables people to deal with the specifics of the issue:
 - A clear defining of the issue, problem, or opportunity that is put forward as a proposal to be heard, explored and prayed about
 - A careful, open listening to one another in which the reasons for and against the proposal are listed
 - Seeking areas of agreement