

DISCERNMENT IN COMMON - INPUT

INTRODUCTION

Today's world is one of complexity and opportunity presenting a rich variety of options. Discernment in common means a prayerful consideration of these options under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is a key part of the Society of Jesus' history. In 1539, when Ignatius and his Companions met in Venice to reflect on their future, they deliberated in common. During the process, this culturally diverse group experienced a growing sense of unity. Since then, many instances of discernment in common have occurred.

MAIN IDEAS

Everything is changing. This is why we need to have an ongoing discernment, the process never stops, and it is slow and down to earth. There is no such thing as instant discernment. Discernment is the way to live in the midst of a changing world. It has to be communal, for no single person can control everything, and God does not allow himself to be captivated by anyone. - Adolfo Nicolás (2009)

Discernment - A way of life

Discernment is becoming more and more known and practiced in the religious world; secular forms are also developing and is seen as a vital part of decision making. However, discernment, in its essence, is not about making decisions or about resolving questions or problems. It is, fundamentally, a way of being. It is about seeing how the Spirit is at work in our lives and in our world. It is about learning how to feel where the Spirit is moving and to learn how to follow that direction. If we learn to tune in like then decisions on concrete points will follow more easily. Conversely, if we don't know about discernment of the Spirits we can't really decide very well in accordance with those Spirits. But tasting the Spirits is the first thing.

This separation of Decision making from the rules for Discerning spirits has its basis in the Spiritual Exercises; there the rules for discerning the Spirits are in a separate section from the guidelines for the election (see the three times of election). It is vital to avoid being trapped in a mechanical methodology that sees discernment as just another method. It is deeper than that. It is a whole way of being.

Situational and Decisional Discernment

There are different kinds of discernment that go on in the lives of groups and individuals.

Situational discernment could involve, for example, discerning the secular challenge in a country; the atmosphere in a community; the wider Province; or, indeed, in the whole Society of Jesus. It involves reflecting on data, basically asking "What is happening in this situation? What are our different reactions to it? What are the different movements that go on in our hearts?" Discerning these movements is important. A province or community may be in basic consolation, in which case, the thoughts, reaction and interactions are

Discernment in Common in Leadership

Ronald L. Dufresne, Karin Botto, and E. Springs Steele (2013) **suggest that** In facilitating a communal discernment, Ignatian leaders recognize they are not driving their personal position but creating a space where communal wisdom can contribute to the positive future of an organization. They recognize in these complex times they do not hold all of the answers, and understand the importance of group members feeling valued and included in the decision-making process. This requires a “death to self” that finds its exemplar in the Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises, where one is called to walk with Jesus through his Passion and Death.”

Ignatian leaders also recognize the necessity of understanding the collective knowledge, opinions, thoughts, insights, and goals of their partners in discernment for developing a shared vision for the future. The Ignatian process of communal discernment solicits such information. In addition, once the collective knowledge is gathered, Ignatian discernment provides a framework for coming to a decision as to how a group might bring about the best course of action for the greater good. Thus, Ignatian leaders must be skilled at active listening, group dynamics, asking questions, analyzing information, interpreting movements of a group both verbal and non-verbal, and nally, articulating the nal outcome of the process and the intended action. They also need to recognize when their own ego—which is an example of what Ignatius call “disordered affections”—blocks the best outcome for the whole. Ignatian leaders must model respect, generosity, and openness as a group attempts to discern communally.

Discernment in common and Decision Making

The focus of discernment is an interior disposition open to whatever outcome emerges. Where decision making is ultimately focused on the decision that is made. Training oneself to be discerning then is about fostering the interior disposition, the one we need to make good decisions. (Magie Blackie), therefore, they are part of a same process but entirely different concepts. Moreover, if you do not form part of the process you can easily be a cause of its ruin. If you are not really involved in the process you will never be attuned to it. In addition, communal discernment requires much more humility than personal detachment. So also does the acceptance of the common good in preference to the private idea. Finally, interior signs of confirmation are **joy, hope, charity in the community, sometimes even health.**

EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Understanding the difference between situational and decisional discernment
2. Learning about the different steps in discernment in common
3. Tapping into why leaders should know about it and why they should work on it

“The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression”