



COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT

*...from
“I” to “WE”*

In service of the greater good of the whole.

“A prophetic call never happens in isolation; it happens within the context of a particular community, a particular culture, a church culture, a societal culture.

Coming home to the honing and conversion in this process must be contextualized within all these cultures.”

Communication and Communal Discernment



**Always allow a
SPACIOUS HOSPITALITY
to all**

Sources of Wisdom

In the communal discernment process,
there are three sources of wisdom:

- DISCERNMENT
- NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION
- CONSENSUS BUILDING

Dimensions of Communal Discernment

**It is deeply spiritual, and assumes that each person commits to:
personal prayer and reflection, to prayerfully consider all issues and decisions.**

- It assumes a commitment to the integrity of the dialogue; as far as possible, each person speaks her truth directly to the others, not about them outside of the meeting.
- The underlying question is always, “What is for the greater common good of the whole?” which is often different from personal preferences.
- All have a voice. There is space and welcome for each person’s insights and inspirations in a contemplatively paced process.
- It is peaceful, respectful, but not necessarily easy;
- participants make a commitment “to have the meeting at the meeting.”

Respectful Dialogue:

Communal discernment is transparent with all participants present as equals and with equal access to all information needed to make the best decisions together. It unites rather than divides.

- **Nonviolent communication** enables persons in dialogue to speak honestly about their own feelings and needs rather than about what is wrong with others.
- This can open up new avenues for sharing in a compassionate way even about painful and difficult issues.

Consensus Building is:

- Hearing each person’s truth,
- Then dialogue together,
- Then move toward consensus by identifying common threads and seeking common ground for the good of all.

PROCESS

The process utilizes:

- **HOME TABLES:** representing the diversity of the Congregation
- **CONSENSUS TABLES:** composed of someone from each Home Table, representing the unity of the Congregation
- **FACILITATORS** in every group who help to guide the process

Steps in the Process

- The process begins with a question that focuses the discernment.
- This is followed by a period of silent reflection.
- Each member shares her input with no response from others.
- There is a pause between each member's input to emphasize the "listening" stance of all.
- When each member has spoken, the group begins to identify common threads and ultimately reaches consensus.
- Each member takes the agreed common threads (insights) to the Consensus Table.
- The dialogue continues at the Consensus Table beginning with each person sharing the consensus reached at her Home Table.
- The Consensus Table follows the process until they reach consensus on a direction.
- Responses from each Consensus Table are posted so that all may view.
- Designated writers work to develop a directional statement that brings together the consensus of the Whole Body
- The draft statement is brought back to the Whole Body for revision, refinement and ultimate acceptance.

Open microphone is not a part of communal discernment because this process is based on the premise that:

- All participants are equal
- All participants have equal opportunity to speak

The Election

CALLING FORTH: THE ELECTION OF LEADERS

Guiding Principles for Communal Discernment and the Election of Leaders

- Discernment is based on the trust that God is the Source of all we are and are trying to do.
- God is the One who already knows what we are seeking and wants to communicate with us. Letting God be larger, wiser, and greater than us is a key shift.
- It is important to have inner freedom from prejudices, fears, preconceived notions, biases, preferences. To discern is to be willing to be changed.
- It is important to look at and to embrace the reality which we are in, and to analyze the situation and review the facts.

The Process

- There are two opportunities for the vowed members to call forth names for elected leadership. (Once at the Assembly and again during the Chapter)
- At the second calling, new names may be added to the original list. This is the final nomination list.

The Process (continued)

During the time of Election, each sister nominated will speak to the Chapter, sharing her own personal discernment regarding her availability/willingness to be considered for elected leadership and her hopes for the future of the Congregation.

- The Chapter Body listens attentively to each sister and carefully discerns the sister's response to the call.
- Every sister on the nomination list remains on the list throughout the process.
- The delegates will gather in Home Tables where each member shares both the gifts and talents of, as well as the concerns about, those persons she believes are called to leadership at this time.
- Delegates then move to the Consensus Table where they will share the list and comments from the Home Table. The purpose of this sharing is to raise awareness about the sisters who have been called.

It is not about creating consensus.

- The lists from the Consensus Tables will be posted for a short time so that all may see what names seem to be emerging from the Chapter Body.
- No names are removed from the list.
- The night before the election, a sister may withdraw her name if she feels she cannot move forward in the process.
- During the election, sisters are elected individually according to the norms of the Congregation.

Method of Election – ElectionBuddy

- Voting takes place using an electronic process called “ElectionBuddy”
- The voting is monitored by NIX Management.
- Each vote is secure and confidential.
- An absolute majority is more than one-half of the votes cast by the Fully Engaged members of the Chapter.

- The night before the election, a sister may withdraw her name if she feels she cannot move forward in the process.
- During the election, sisters are elected individually according to the norms of the Congregation.

COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT
...from
“I” to “WE”