

Ignatian Communal Discernment

CLA Cohort – Spring 2014 – Marilyn Nash

You are what your deep driving desire is...

As your desire is, so is your will

As your will is, so is your deed

As your deed is, so is your destiny.

- Ancient saying – Upanishads

Our role as leaders is not only to participate:

But to co-create circumstances that help make possible the participation of others....

Circumstances that provide and create conditions under which life is possible, creation can flourish and the Spirit can be heard.

Presuppositions to Communal Discernment:

Groups and individual decision makers need to be...

- ⊙ 1. Ready to move in any direction God wants – Radical freedom
- ⊙ 2. Open to sharing all that God has given me – Radical generosity
- ⊙ 3. Willing to suffer if God's will requires it – Radical patience/ availability
- ⊙ 4. Questing for union with God in prayer Radical spirituality I

General Overview of Communal Discernment Process:

- ⊙ 1. Relevant facts and data laid out & shared – “as if placed on the table”
- ⊙ 2. Options are explored and named: Each option a plausible choice representing a relative good.
- ⊙ 3. Honest conversation – members name feelings, felt responses and reflect on the origins of those responses
- ⊙ 4. Confirmation of decision – Clarity is the ultimate outcome. Peace, shifts in perspective & alignment with mission are all confirming elements

Questions for participants in #3 above – Honest Conversation

- ⊙ How do I feel regarding this option?
- ⊙ What is the origin of my response?

- ⊙ Is my response from God ?
- ⊙ Or “not from God” – i.e. ignorance, fear, obstinacy, ego, about a person not the option.

Communal discernment requires...

- ⊙ Real and prayerful communication – n.B. willingness to communicate AND skills to do this effectively /healthily
- ⊙ Collective ownership & investment – one body, common good.
- ⊙ Shared vision or purpose in the group - a priori to discernment
- ⊙ Prayer and silence
- ⊙ Willingness to examine personal responses to each person in group
- ⊙ Openness to the presuppositions - collectively and individually
- ⊙ Honest assessment – naming what might be holding the individual or group back

Cautions and potential pitfalls

- ⊙ Moving too quickly - even to “agreement” at expense of the encounters and felt responses
- ⊙ Uninhibited and honest expression
- ⊙ Group safety/trust - Vulnerability/intimacy of personal responses
- ⊙ Full picture – not only information and data – but also willingness to name cons for the pros

Practical Suggestions for groups:

- ⊙ **Give the process the time and space it needs.**
- ⊙ **Clarify the shared vision/purpose before the discernment process**
- ⊙ **Spend time in personal reflection/discernment on the presuppositions and desires of individuals on a regular basis.**
- ⊙ **Practice (on-going formation) of interpersonal skills, conflict skills, and healthy communication**
- ⊙ **Prayer changes things – start and ground the group in prayer**
- ⊙ **Provide for quiet time before and during process**
- ⊙ **Accumulate and sharing all relevant info**
- ⊙ **The debate and disclosure comes early in the process**

- ⦿ After that – it's not about debate – it is dialogue
- ⦿ Separate out the “pro” time / “con” time – separate
- ⦿ ALL decision makers speak and participate– even if only to confirm assent
- ⦿ Facilitator – reads the group/intuits and offers possible consensus to test it