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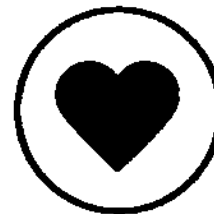
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The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada

August 2015



OPEN HEART



OPEN BIBLE



OPEN HANDS

Principles for making
prayerful decisions in community

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Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

- 9) **Listen to pertinent facts and information** related to the question without judging or rebuttal
- 10) **Silence**
 - Create space for God and listen to the Spirit
 - Which direction brings us the deepest sense of:
 - *inner peace* Philippians 4:7
 - *life* John 10:10
 - *freedom in the Spirit* 2 Corinthians 3:17
- 11) **Go forward**
 - Smaller groups (tables) identify which direction/s (maybe one or more) they have discerned, and pass these on to the facilitator for consolidation, OR
 - Someone similar to James may articulate a discerned way forward (as in Acts 15)
 - Pray in small groups or at tables
- 12) **Direction**
 - The facilitator summarizes the discerned direction from the smaller groups (tables) and identifies degree of similarity.
 - The facilitator asks gathering by a show of hands the alignment with the discerned direction/s from the tables.
 - The results of the discernment process are brought forward to the main decision-making body for ratification (vote).

We must be open to trust the work of the Holy Spirit in others as much as we trust His work within us.

Leaders seek to find unity on what is best for the community, even though they may disagree on the particulars of the issue at hand.

Preface

We do nothing until we pray! This is one of our core values, and it will play a significant role in how we move forward together.

So, what if, in the midst of our meetings, we listen to God while making ministry decisions? Would that change our direction? Would ministries be more effective?

One of the strong encouragements coming out of General Assembly 2014 was the desire for a discernment model that could work in tandem with “Robert’s Rules of Order” in the process of making significant denominational decisions.

As we look to the future, we as The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada (C&MA) are committed to living on mission alongside least-reached people groups—people who may never have heard of Jesus—around the world.

Locally and globally, things are changing very quickly, and there will more than likely be difficult decisions ahead. Can we afford to carry on with business as usual?

We would like to invite everyone in our denomination to play a role in creating a new norm. We want to encourage all congregations and elders boards to develop a discernment culture around all aspects of their lives and ministries.

This is something that we truly would like everyone throughout the C&MA in Canada to enter into.



“Find out where God is at work and join him.”

Henry Blackaby



Discernment:

In his book, *"Discernment—Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church"*, Danny Morris writes **"Decision making has its limits. We make decisions. Discernment is given. The Spirit of God, who operates at the deepest levels of the human psyche and within the mysteries of the faith community, brings to the surface gifts of wisdom and guidance which we can only discover and name."**

These are days when we need to expand our "seeing." We are in desperate need of an encounter with the Holy Spirit that will increase our sensitivity to discern where God is going.

Without it, we will see less and miss more of God's transforming work among us!

John chapter nine is a powerful story about the danger of impaired vision. Jesus encounters a man who is blind from birth. The disciples instantly ask the question, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (9:2). The disciples see the situation through their faulty thinking and superstitions, believing that illness was the result of personal sin. Jesus radically challenges their limited vision, saying, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned...but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (9:3).

It is as though Jesus is declaring, "Open your eyes to see that God's will and glory transcend faulty religious beliefs and cultural superstition."

A better way of seeing is to ask, "What is God doing in this situation and how can we join him?"

"The process of discernment invites us into the heart and life of the Triune God. Decision-making can no longer be defined as doing what we think best; it is now a search for the mind and will of God within a community of people with whom God has chosen to dwell."

Danny Morris / Charles Olsen

5) Test for surrender

- Everyone has the opportunity to share what they are feeling. At this point, there may be a prayer of surrender or for surrender.
- Remember, complete surrender is something God does in us rather than something that we can make happen.

6) Prayer for wisdom and quiet trust

- Wisdom

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (This is a humbling prayer because it admits we don't know for sure)

James 1:5

- Quiet trust

"God, I'm not trying to rule the roost, I don't want to be king of the mountain. I haven't meddled where I have no business or fantasized grandiose plans. I've kept my feet on the ground, I've cultivated a quiet heart. Like a baby content in its mother's arms, my soul is a baby content. Wait, Israel, for GOD. Wait with hope. Hope now; hope always!"

Psalms 131 (The Message)

7) Review and listen to the issue that brought this question for discernment.

8) Listen to Scripture

- What in Scripture speaks to the issue?
- Is there anything in the life and teachings of Jesus that informs our considerations?
- Which choice will nurture the fruit of the Spirit in our community?

Making Prayerful Decisions

A framework for discerning decision-making

Acts 15 (among other Bible passages) provides instructive insight into a God-honouring and Spirit-led discernment process.

Framework

(Please note: The following process assumes that a facilitator/ chairperson/moderator will guide the group through the steps.)

- 1) **Clarify the question to be discerned**
- 2) **Gather the Assembly for discernment**
- 3) **Agree on guiding values**
- 4) **Prayer for surrender**
 - Ask God to make us completely open to His will about the matter that we are gathered to discern.
 - Ask yourself, “Am I willing to let my opinion die to let God’s will rule?”
 - We cannot find God’s will for us if we enter into the decision-making process with a pre-conceived outcome based on our self-will, biases, or an attitude that says, “I already have my mind made up, so do not confuse me with other perspectives.” This does not mean we cannot have strong opinions, but it does mean that we must be willing to surrender our personal prestige, advantage, preference, and ego, so that God’s will may be known.

Jesus’ model of surrender:

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Matthew 26:39

What did Jesus Do?

“What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.

The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, “Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?”

But we have the mind of Christ.”

1 Corinthians 2:12-16

Jesus’ example:



“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed”

Luke 5:16

*“So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and **that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.**””*

John 8:28

The Challenge

The posture of an open heart, open Bible and open hands are vital to hearing the voice of God in community.



According to Ruth Haley Barton, the Quakers “regard meetings where leaders of the community come together to discern God’s will as “a meeting for worship in which business is conducted”” (*Pursuing God’s Will Together*).

The question

If Christ is the head of the Church, how do we hear/know the mind of Christ, and how do we do this in a corporate/larger group setting in which there are many players and participants?

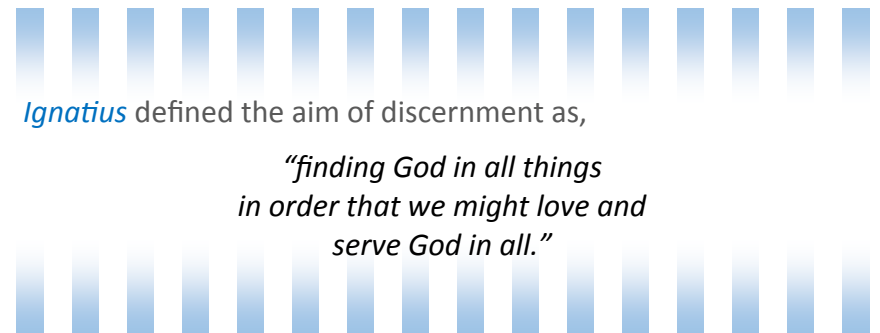
Current reality in decision-making

- In many contexts, the outcome/decision is influenced by the use of human skills, such as debating abilities, position, power, authority, pre-meeting discussions.
- Many times, debates and discussions become heated, feelings are hurt, and relational capital is used up.

Three Foundational Principles

Discernment in community calls us to:

- **Enter into a process of spiritual formation** in which prayerful listening to God not only shapes our decisions, but also renovates our lives.
- **Engage in practices that will help us stay open** to the presence of Christ in our midst so that we can determine God’s will together.
- **Order our life together** in such a way that we become increasingly abandoned to God rather than being driven by our egos, selfish motives or personal perspectives.



Ignatius defined the aim of discernment as,

*“finding God in all things
in order that we might love and
serve God in all.”*