

“God’s Will: Nothing More, Nothing Less, Nothing Else”

Adapted from Rev. Jessica Moffat Seay - First UMC, Bixby, Oklahoma

Discernment and consensus are an important part of who we are as a church body and together they provide a primary guide for how we operate as a church.

What Is Discernment?

The purpose and goal of spiritual discernment is knowing and doing God’s will.

Discernment is seeing as God sees.

Scriptural Basis For Discernment

1 Kings 3:5, 9-14 *At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I should give you.” Solomon replied “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil... It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, ‘Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind...I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life;”*

Romans 12:2 *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Ephesians 5:17 *So do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.*
(Scriptural quotes from the New Revised Standard Version)

There are three preconditions to discernment:

1. A relationship of open communication with God.
2. A desire to know the will of God.
3. A commitment to doing the will of God.

Discernment To See As God Sees

(From Bishop David Lawson’s book *Discernment Steps: Toward a Vision of God’s Will*)

_____ 1. Gather good data and basic factual information, identifying alternatives and possibilities.

_____ 2. Insist that all categories be kept “soft” in order that creativity may be present and contribute to the process.

_____ 3. Maintain a holy indifference to the outcome, laying aside all biases and prejudices. Be willing to leave the outcome to God’s direction and to be obedient to the results.

_____ 4. Maintain a community and climate of worship.

_____ 5. Ask and respond to the question, “Where have we sensed God’s affirmation in what we have been about?”

_____ 6. Spend time in reflection and prayer, listening to God’s direction.

_____ 7. Share with the community what you have seen, heard and felt in your reflection time. Dialogue about it. At this stage there is no right or wrong, but rather a desire to hear God. Frequently, insight and wisdom come in the dialogue.

_____ 8. Humility is crucial. Each one must be constantly aware that God may have spoken through another person.

_____ 9. Wait for God’s timing. Sometimes there is silence during the wait. Continue to ask God for direction during the wait.

_____ 10. Remember to keep a holy indifference to the outcome, willing to receive new ideas and to consider them.

_____ 11. When consensus begins to form, continue to offer all plans and commitments to God for reshaping.

We no longer conduct “business” or make decisions following parliamentary procedures (Roberts’ Rules of Order). Instead, we seek consensus.

Consensus

“If the conditions of authentic communal discernment have been fulfilled (i.e., if there is genuine openness to the Spirit), the decision should be made clear, and confirmation should be experienced unanimously through shared deep peace... finding God together..”

(John Futrell, S.J. “Communal Discernment: Reflection on Experience,” Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits IV, no. 54 [November 1972]: 173).

Consensus Levels: *When we talk about consensus, it doesn’t necessarily mean everyone is in absolute agreement. *Consensus can occur at three different levels. Everyone may not completely agree, but they can live with the decision.*

~ I agree

~ I don't agree with everything, but I can live with it.

~I don't agree at all, but I can see that most do agree and I can live with it.

***There is one level which means that consensus is not reached.**

~ I don't agree and I can't live with it.

****If there is anyone who cannot live with a decision, (i.e., we haven’t reached consensus) then we return to more prayer to seek reshaping of our decision and to continue to seek unanimous consensus.***