

A MODEL PROCESS FOR GROUP DISCERNMENT IN TWO MEETINGS

First Meeting: Communicating Information and Clarifying the Discernment Process

- **Opening prayer:** An opening prayer based on a Scriptural “call” story (e.g., call of the disciples in Jn. 1: 35; call of Peter in Lk. 5, etc.) After reading the story and quiet reflection on it, invite sharing about what the story stirred in the group.
- **Clarify the purpose and goal of the meeting:** The purpose of the meeting is to communicate information about _____ (whatever the decision you need to make is) and to outline a process to discern where God is calling the group.
- **Communicate relevant information:** Whatever information is needed for someone to feel they are being well-informed.
- **Questions, clarifications, initial responses:** Allow ample time for questions and feelings to be expressed about the information presented. The focus of this meeting is not about making a decision. It is to understand what is at stake - and to understand more about whatever it is they are being called to decide.
- **Explanation of the discernment process:**
 1. Communication of information. (The focus of this initial meeting)
 2. Personal prayer and reflection by those involved in the discernment process.
 3. A discernment meeting in which the decision will be made
- **Personal prayer and reflection:** Those involved in the discernment are asked to commit themselves to pray for at least fifteen minutes a day over several days before the discernment meeting. In your prayer you are invited to:
 - a. pray for openness to God’s call for your group and whatever the decision is, awareness of any bias you may have. The question is not whether you like or dislike the idea, but rather is God calling us to this decision?
 - b. reflect on what you have read, heard and seen about whatever the decision is concerning and note the thoughts and feelings that arise in response. Does the idea bring peace, hope, freedom, joy, interest, energy? Does it stir fear, anger, encouragement, cynicism? What’s behind these feelings? Do they change over time?
 - c. write down the pros and cons as you see them concerning the decision. Also take note of the weight of the pros and cons.

Second Meeting: Discernment and Decision Making

- **Opening Prayer/Song/Silence:** Choose a call story from Scripture followed by quiet reflection and sharing of what was stirred as one listened to the Word. The opening prayer is a way of rooting the process in God's word. Take your time!
- **Clarification of the Purpose and Process of the Meeting:** The purpose is to gather together and make the decision that was presented at your first meeting. The process is one of prayerful discernment which will unfold through several steps.
- **Testing for Openness and Freedom:** Check in with the group about the first focus of personal prayer: openness to God's call and recognition of bias or attachments. Some may say they are open. Others may share obstacles to inner freedom. "I'm having trouble letting go of my agenda." All statements should be honored as honest statements of concerned and struggling people. After each person has spoken, the group can proceed. Freedom may grow as the process unfolds.
- **Exploring the "Cons":** Allow time for each person to present the fruits of their prayer and reflection on the cons, concerning whatever it is your decision is about. The cons are recorded. Allow time to discuss their relative weight and feelings the group may have about them.
- **Break for Prayerful Reflection:** Break for at least ten minutes for prayerful reflection on what was shared.
- **Exploring the "Pros":** When the group reconvenes each person presents the fruits of their reflection on the pros, concerning whatever it is your decision is about. These are recorded and discussion takes place regarding the weight of the pros and the feelings associated with them.
- **Individual discernment of God's call:** Break for quiet, prayerful reflection on both the pros and cons and what each person senses as God's call.
- **Sharing individual discernments with the group:** Each person shares his or her perception of God's call for the community. A clear consensus may emerge at this time. This is ordinarily confirmed by a sense of peace, rightness, joy, freedom, enthusiasm, etc. If this is so, the session ends with prayers of thanks.
- **If there is conflict or division** or uneasiness about the decision, there are several possible options: try to identify the underlying obstacle; take time for further prayer and reflection; meet again at a later time; appoint one person to decide for the group; decide by a vote with a predetermined majority rule. (simple, 2/3, ¾)
- **Rest in the decision** for a day or two and see if it continues to bring peace and consolation and a sense of being "of God."