

PRAYER AND DISCERNMENT

RESOURCES GUIDE

for a year of listening



**WALK
AGAIN**

A Collect for the Year of Listening

Lover of Souls, you sent your son Jesus Christ to show humankind how to live abundantly and dwell in your heavenly kingdom; be with our Bishop Greg, as he ponders your will for his life, and pour out your wisdom and grace upon each member of the Diocese of Olympia as we listen obediently for how we might proclaim the mighty power of your love and mercy; in the name of your Son who was born, lived, died, and raised for us – who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reign; one God, ever and ever.

Prayers for a Year of Listening – a Discernment Office

For use by the people of the Diocese of Olympia during a season of seeking God's direction in our future relationship with our bishop.

Opening: Teach us to seek your wisdom,
as we embrace the fullness of your love.

Prayer: O God of love, you are the true sun of the world, evermore risen and never going down: We pray you to shine in our hearts and drive away the darkness of sin and the mist of error. We pray that we may, this day and all our lives long, walk without stumbling in the way you have prepared for us, which is Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God in glory everlasting. Amen.

(Erasmus of Rotterdam, 1466-1536)

Hymn of Praise

Scripture: Luke 10:1-12 (NRSV)

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ² He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

³ Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' ⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.



⁷ Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' ¹² I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

Meditation:

One of the following readings may be shared followed by question and silence for reflection.

It is the contemplative saints who most know the fear and pain as well as the joy and freedom of entering emptiness; they have chosen to confront that which has to be thrust upon the rest of us. They have stretched and yielded themselves to experience cleanly and clearly the hunger and brokenness of their own hearts and of our world. They have willingly sought to deprive themselves of anesthesia. They have claimed their desire to bear the beams of love, regardless of the cost.

...Spaciousness is always a beginning, a possibility, a potential, a capacity for birth. Space exists not in order to be filled but to create. In space, to the extent we can bear the truth of the way things are, we find the ever-beginning presence of love. Take time, then; make the space. Seek it wherever you find it, do it however you can. Seek the truth, not what is comfortable. Seek the real, not the easy.

From "Entering the Emptiness" by Gerald May in *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*, edited and compiled by Michael Schut (New York: Church Publishing).

Or:

To know in truth...is to allow oneself to be known. This is the truth that became incarnate in Jesus Christ, a truth known not in abstraction, but in relationship. The shared commitment to truth ensures that the spiritual direction relationship is one of mutuality, for both director and directee must allow themselves to be known. This marks one of the major differences between spiritual direction and psychotherapy: the director must be willing to be known – not just by her credentials, affiliations, and titles, but known in her vulnerability and limitations as a child of God.

Similarly, the directee must be willing to be known, to lay aside his masks one by one, no matter how beautiful and useful. Despite good intentions, this is not easy work. Spiritual direction attracts a disproportionate number of introverts, who require a great deal of time and patience to reach the level of trust necessary for self-revelation. A friend once likened working with them to coaxing a deer out of the forest: you watch or peering

between the trees, occasionally venturing into the meadow, but a sudden move on your part can send it dashing back into the woods. Yet only by letting ourselves be known to each other and to our deepest selves can we have the assurance that we are known by God. If this inner work is done in spiritual direction, it will have an effect on the relation of the individual to the rest of creation. When he allows himself to be known to himself, to another, and to God, the directee will be aware of the web of relationship that connects him to all creation.

From "Good Teachers" by Margaret Guenther in *Holy Listening; the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Boston: Cowley Publications).

Or:

We live in a time of struggle between truth and lies, between sincerity, which almost no one believes in still, and hypocrisy and intrigue. Let's not be afraid, brothers and sisters; let's try to be sincere, to love truth; let's try to model ourselves on Christ Jesus. It is time for us to have a great sense of selection, of discernment.

Oscar Romero

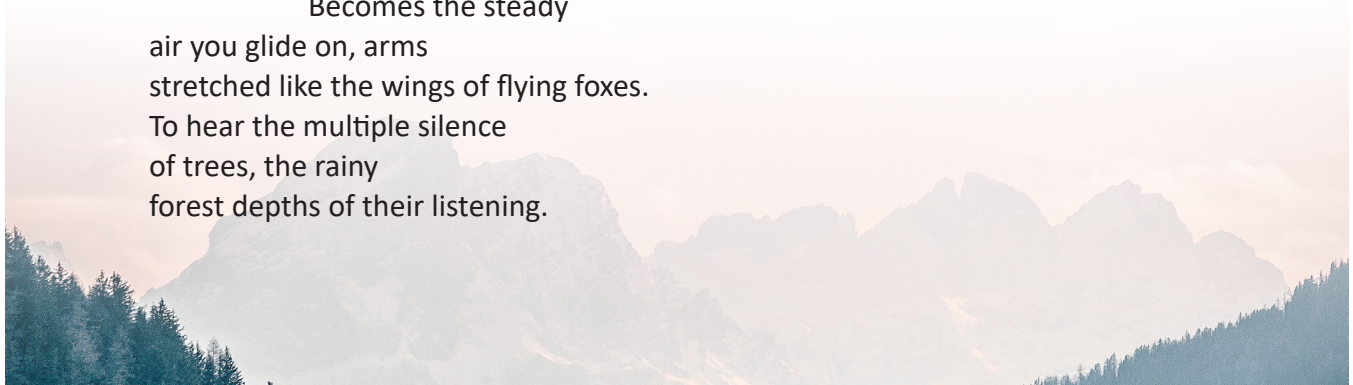
Or:

To Live in the Mercy of God, a poem by Denise Levertov

To lie back under the tallest
oldest trees. How far the stems
rise, rise
 before ribs of shelter
 open!

To live in the mercy of God. The complete
sentence too adequate, has no give.
Awe, not comfort. Stone, elbows of
stony wood beneath lenient
moss bed.

And awe suddenly
passing beyond itself. Becomes
a form of comfort.
 Becomes the steady
air you glide on, arms
stretched like the wings of flying foxes.
To hear the multiple silence
of trees, the rainy
forest depths of their listening.



To float, upheld,
as salt water
would hold you,
 once you dared.

To live in the mercy of God.

To feel vibrate the enraptured

waterfall flinging itself
unabating down and down
 to clenched fists of rock.

Swiftness of plunge,
hour after year after century,
 O or Ah

uninterrupted, voice
many-stranded.

 To breathe
spray. The smoke of it.

 Arcs
of steelwhite foam, glissades
of fugitive jade barely perceptible. Such passion—
rage or joy?

 Thus, not mild, not temperate,
God's love for the world. Vast
flood of mercy
 flung on resistance.

Denise Levertov, "To Live in the Mercy of God" from Sands from the Well.



Or:

The problem is that the wise course is so frequently unclear. For a long while, I thought that this was simply because of uncertainty. When it is hard to know what will happen, it is hard to know what to do. But the challenge, I've come to see, is more fundamental than that. One has to decide whether one's fears or one's hopes are what should matter most.

Atul Gawande, Being Mortal

How will we practice Christ Jesus' way of love, justice, and truth this day? How does God call us forward?

Or:

How is Jesus sending us into this moment of life? What unique gifts do we bring in this diocese?



Prayers:

One or more of the following prayers is offered.

For the Mission of the Church

Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen. (BCP, p.816)

For Clergy and People

Almighty and everlasting God, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift: Send down upon our bishops, and other clergy, and upon the congregations committed to their charge, the healthful Spirit of thy grace; and, that they may truly please thee, pour upon them the continual dew of thy blessing. Grant this, O Lord, for the honor of our Advocate and Mediator, Jesus Christ. **Amen.** (BCP, p.817)

For the Diocese

O God, by your grace you have called us in this Diocese to a goodly fellowship of faith. Bless our Bishop, Greg, and other clergy, and all our people. Grant that your Word may be truly preached and truly heard, your Sacraments faithfully administered and faithfully received. By your Spirit, fashion our lives according to the example of your Son, and grant that we may show the power of your love to all among whom we live; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (BCP, p.817)

For the Discernment of a Bishop (adapted)

Almighty God, giver of every good gift: Look graciously on your Church, and so guide our partnership with our bishop that we may meet and support him as a faithful pastor, who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (BCP, p.818)

For the Unity of the Church

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (BCP, p.818)

For the Unity of the Church For the Unity of the Church

Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by the one Spirit, that the world may believe in him whom you have sent, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.** (BCP, p.255)



For the Good Use of Leisure

O God, in the course of this busy life, give us times of refreshment and peace; and grant that we may so use our leisure to rebuild our bodies and renew our minds, that our spirits may be opened to the goodness of your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (BCP, p.825)

For Travelers

O God, our heavenly Father, whose glory fills the whole creation, and whose presence we find wherever we go: Preserve those who travel [in particular our bishop, Greg]; surround them with your loving care; protect them from every danger; and bring them in safety to their journey's end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (BCP, p.831)

For Guidance

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favor, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (BCP, p.832)

For Guidance

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (BCP, p.832)

A Prayer of Self-Dedication

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray you, as your will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **Amen.** (BCP, p.832)

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles, "Peace I give to you; my own peace I leave with you:" Regard not our sins, but the faith of your Church, and give to us the peace and unity of that heavenly City, where with the Father and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign, now and for ever. **Amen.** (BCP, p.107)

Grant, Almighty God, that we, who have been redeemed from the old life of sin by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, may be renewed in your Holy Spirit, and live in righteousness and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.** (BCP, p.254)



One of the following forms of intercession and thanksgiving is offered:

Jesus, faithful servant of God, sometimes it is difficult for us to know how to be faithful:

Help us discern your will and follow you with gladness.

Jesus, faithful servant of God, in this season of discernment, we still see the brokenness of our world:

Help us be people who faithfully bring forth justice.

Jesus, faithful servant of God, we know the world longs for healing:

Help us be people of hope and bearers of light.

Jesus, faithful servant of God, we want to be the people you long for us to be:

Help us walk in your way of love.

Here, the people add particular intercessions and thanksgivings.

A concluding collect is spoken here.

Or this:

God of hope, help us when we struggle in our daily work.

When we lose our purpose,
renew our hope in you.

When we bow to hatred,
renew our trust in you.

When we despair of bliss,
renew our joy in you.

When we take offense at others,
renew our life in you.

When we compromise our values,
renew our faith in you.

When we cherish regrets,
renew our freedom in you.

When we surrender to despair,
renew our hope in you.

As we accept your renewing love, we offer our prayers to you:

Here, the people add particular intercessions or thanksgivings.

Hold us, and all people, in your loving care,
and may we be hope for others. Amen.

A concluding collect is spoken here.



Lord's Prayer: *Please pray in the language of your heart.*

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those
 who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
 and the power,
 and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

(Contemporary BCP)

Our Mother,
who is in heaven and within us,
We call upon your names.
Your wisdom come.
Your will be done
 in all the spaces in which You dwell.
Give us each day sustenance and perseverance.
Remind us of our limits
 as we give grace to the limits of others.
Separate us from the temptation of empire
 and deliver us into community.
For you are the dwelling place within us,
 the empowerment around us,
 and the celebration among us
now and forever. **Amen.**

(Womanist)

Closing Prayer:

Loving God, as we seek to know and follow you more faithfully, we pray you will open and fill our hearts with the love and knowledge of your Son, Jesus. May we see ever more clearly what it is you call us to, and may we respond with lives of joy and justice. **Amen.**

Or this:

A Collect for Guidance

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** *(BCP, p.100)*

Or this:

Wisdom is brilliant; she never fades. By those who love her, she is easily seen; by those who seek her, she is readily found. She is a breath of God's power, an image of God's goodness, the eternal light and mirror of God's glory. Now let Wisdom do all things, renew all things, and pass into holy souls everywhere to make them friends of God. **Amen.** *(Sara Miles, based on Wisdom of Solomon 7, 2007)*

Sending:

Show our hearts your way,
And we shall follow.



DISCERNMENT RESOURCES

Why discernment?

Discernment has been a part of Christian spirituality from its conception.

Critical to discernment is the virtue, “**Wisdom**” (in Greek, Σοφία, Sophia). In ancient Greek culture, Wisdom was pictured as a woman. Philo, an ancient Hellenized (Greek-speaking) Jew, used the term “Logos” (Word) to talk about Wisdom as it appeared in the Hebrew Scriptures. This image of Wisdom became a foundational part of the Gospeler John’s explanation of who Jesus was: the Word (Logos). Because Wisdom is a feminine term in Greek – the name Sophia is a common female name - Jesus is sometimes associated with or depicted as having feminine qualities.

Today, we speak of wisdom as deep or experiential knowledge of how the world works. Discernment then is the application of wisdom. Wisdom is often described as a gift or charism God gives creatures, but that doesn’t mean only the exceptionally wise can exercise Christian discernment practices.

Christian discernment can be an individual or group practice. Whenever we have very important decisions about congregational life we exercise discernment.

When should we use structured Christian Discernment Practices

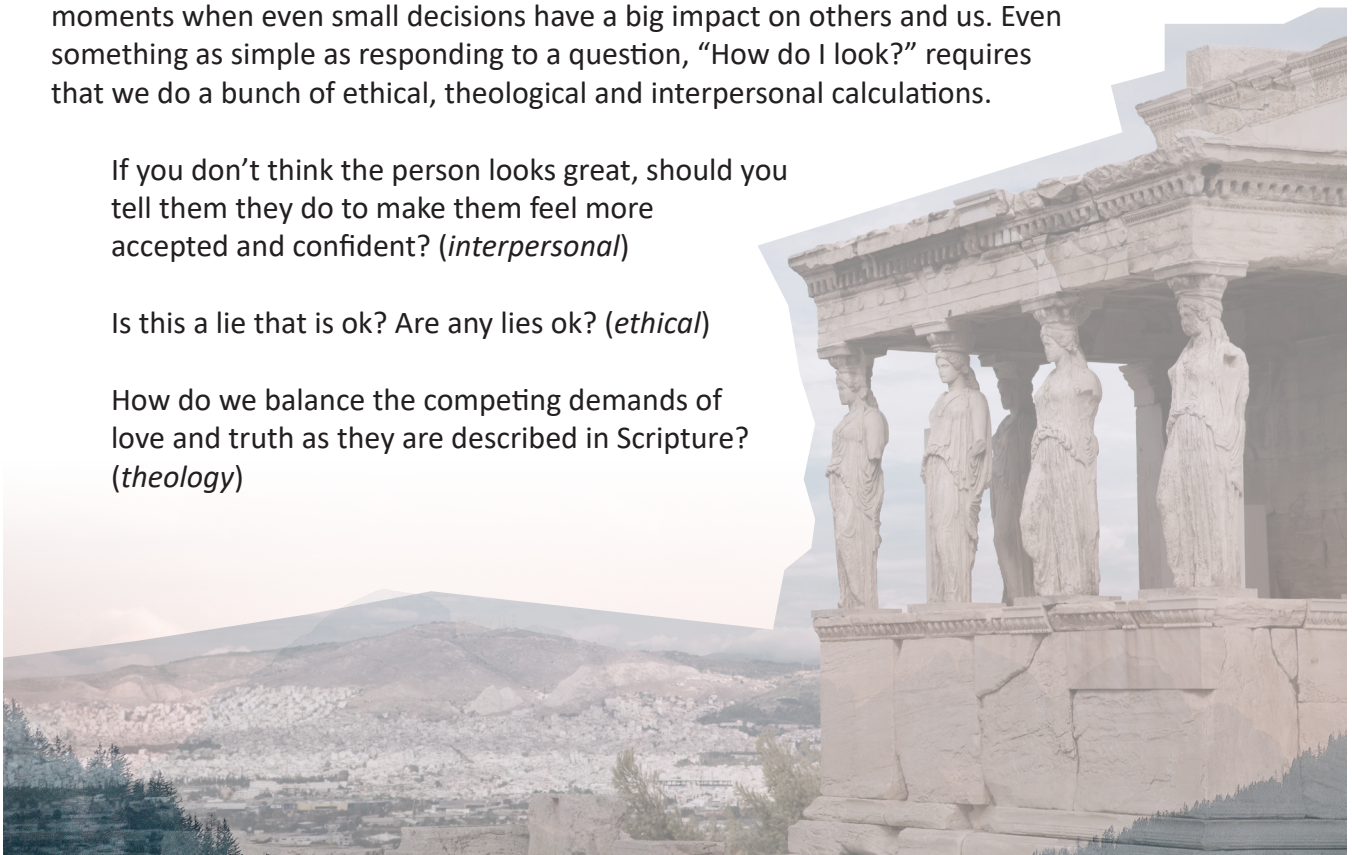
When we follow Jesus, we have a special need to listen in as many ways as possible to God speaking to us.

As individuals we make decisions that require wisdom all the time. There are moments when even small decisions have a big impact on others and us. Even something as simple as responding to a question, “How do I look?” requires that we do a bunch of ethical, theological and interpersonal calculations.

If you don’t think the person looks great, should you tell them they do to make them feel more accepted and confident? (*interpersonal*)

Is this a lie that is ok? Are any lies ok? (*ethical*)

How do we balance the competing demands of love and truth as they are described in Scripture? (*theology*)



Discernment practices provide structure for you to focus on what's most important to you and the behavioral commands embodied by Jesus and found in Scripture. Some examples of Individual and Community Discernment are found below.

Individual Discernment

Relationships

Should I marry this person?

Can I remain in a relationship with a person who has betrayed my trust?

Should I be a Mom/Dad/Parent?

Transitions

Where should I live?

Should I have this medical treatment?

Is it time to end my medical treatment?

Vocation

What ministries is God calling me to carry out?

What kind of work should I do to make a living?

What school should I attend?

Is this job a good fit or not?

Community Discernment - Church life

Who has the gifts we need to lead _____ ministry?

How should we use and talk about money?

Who should our spiritual leader and pastor be?

Tradition

Should the church change its practices? (Examples: Should the church fully include LGBTQ people in our common life and ministry? Should the church offer Communion to the unbaptized?)



EXERCISE

Hot Air Balloon Guided Imagery

The Rev. Arienne Davison

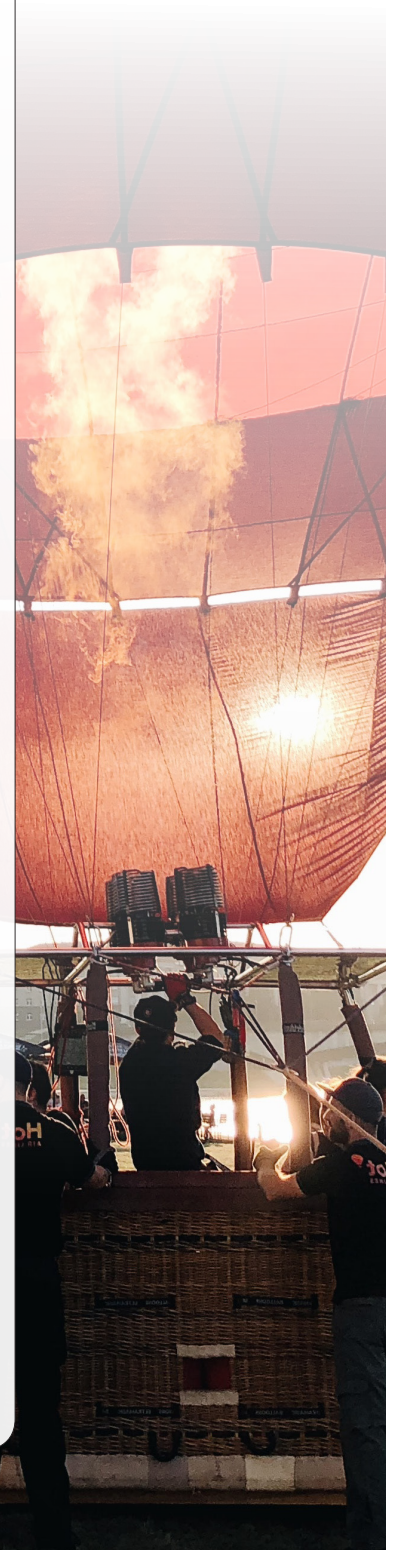
You are about to go on the adventure of a lifetime in a hot air balloon!

As you walk to the basket, you look up and see the fire and hot air fill the balloon. The fire is the Holy Spirit. She will bring you every place you need to go. The basket is the Body of Christ, the Church. She will carry you on your Way. Who needs to come on this journey with you? What people's lives are closely linked with yours? What covenants with people can you not leave behind?

As you (and your tribe) enter the basket, you notice that the basket is anchored to the ground with ropes tied to stakes. These ropes are keeping the balloon from floating away while you climb in. What ropes are keeping you in the place you are? What relationships, dynamics, and situations have bogged you down? What ties would you like to cut?

The balloon is aloft. Your anticipation grows. There is so much of Creation to see! There are so many places you could go. What new possibilities excite you the most? What parts of the world or experiences do you want to seek out on the Way?

On the way, you will need nourishment. What things do you truly need to survive? What comforts do you really want on the way? What feeds you?



A Simple Examem

Ms. Diana Bender

Preparation: You may wish to find a quiet space. Do whatever helps you to feel centered and reflective. Begin by taking a few deep breaths from the bottom of your toes, up through your legs, your belly, and your chest. Breathe in, make space, breathe out, release.

1. Place your hand on your heart and acknowledge God's presence; a God who loves you unconditionally. Breathe in that love.
2. Ask the Spirit (Jesus or God as you understand God) to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are most grateful. If you could relive one moment, what would it be? (There are additional questions below to deepen this moment if you wish to use them) Bask in the remembrance of the life you experienced in that moment.
3. Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful. When were you least able to give and receive love? Where did you feel depleted or "tangled up?" (additional questions below) Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so difficult. Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to be still and breathe gently into that place...both tending to it and experiencing release or forgiveness in the light of God's love.
4. Close by **giving thanks** for whatever you have experienced. What grace would you like to ask for as you close this time?
5. If you'd like, it can be helpful to do this in a journal, or with a friend or spiritual director.

Additional Questions

When did I feel most alive today?

When today did I give and receive the most love?

When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, God, Creation?

What was today's high point?

When did I feel the most joy?

When did I feel the most life draining out of me?

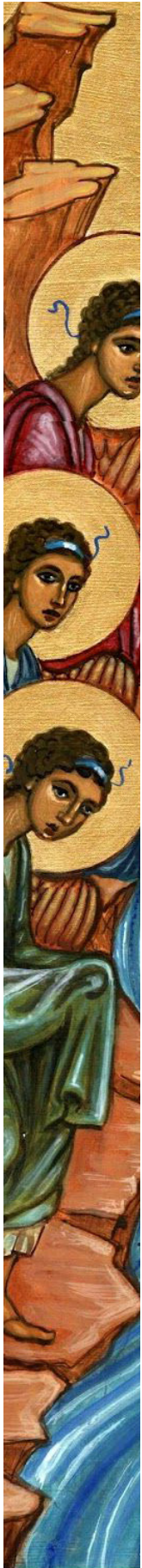
When today did I give and receive the least love?

When today did I have the least sense of belonging to myself, others, God, Creation?

What was today's low point?

When today did I feel the most sadness or anxiety?





Art Stevens Model (Adapted)

This model is used by the Commission on Ministry when discerning recommendations for postulancy, candidacy and ordination. Description of process by the Rev. Arienne Davison

- A member of the discernment group undertakes a “discernment leader” role for the community discernment.
 - The Discernment Leader opens by centering the group in prayer for the individual or group and the work of the Congregation or ministry.
- The Discernment Leader facilitates the asking and answering of any clarifying questions. The facilitator should take care to intervene if questions become statements for or against, or are too suggestive of one choice or another.
- The Discernment Leader asks that the group name concerns or challenges to the question being discerned.
 - Starting with the discernment leader each member names a concern or challenge the person will face in responding to the question. Ex: Q. Should I discontinue chemotherapy? Concern: You might die really quickly and not get to do things you still want to do.
 - Members take turns and do not respond to one another’s concerns.
 - Members may pass.
 - After passing a member may share another concern on the next round
 - After all members pass around the circle, this phase of the discernment is concluded.
- Following a period of re-centering silence or prayer, the Discernment Leader asks that the group to name compelling reasons to respond affirmatively to the question. Ex. Should I discontinue chemotherapy? Affirmation: Discontinuing chemo might relieve your unbearable pain.
 - Members take turns and do not respond to one another’s reasons.
 - Members may pass.
 - After passing a member may share another reason.
 - After all members pass around the circle, this phase of the discernment is concluded.
- The person making the decision then initiates a summary round. Starting with the discernment leader each member names their response to the question: “Yes, I think you should.” or “No, I think you shouldn’t.” You may add a reason for your decision. You may not respond to other’s reasons.
- The facilitator then invites the discernor to reflect on what they heard, and what was helpful to them.

CHAPTER CHANGE

Closing a Chapter and Opening Another

Before you begin, create a safe, quiet space for discernment. Make sure you have: a flipchart, markers, post it notes, pens. [Notes for facilitators are listed inside brackets.] Text in regular type can be used by the facilitator as a script.

You're leaving a chapter of life at _____ and a new chapter is about to begin.

[The facilitator encourages the participant(s) to name changes.]

Transitions can feel difficult or disruptive
Because of that we want to take time to

- honor where you've been,
- think about what can be carried forward, and
- try and articulate how this chapter and the next are a little different

So, when did it feel like things really started changing?

Was it spring and early summer?

Or even the time _____?

I want to choose a time period during which we will reflect on as the most recent chapter, and then we'll think together about the coming 5-6 months.

What did this chapter involve for you? Let's paint a picture of what this time was like for you. Let's draw on gut-level reflections (like getting to the essence of something) as well as the concrete stuff- what you did or things that happened.

- What were some central events?
- What were some key dynamics?
- What were some great things?
- What inspired you about what was happening at _____?
- What were you proud of from this period?

Do you have a short story or two to tell before we write a bit about it?

Write phrases, or sentence about this period or even just words on the _____ post-it in front of you, and post it on the wall. I'm going to write the questions I just asked you on the board, but you don't have to stick 100% to these questions.

[As participants write, facilitator writes the questions on the board, then holds a gracious pause while participants write and post.]



Chapter Change - Closing a Chapter and Opening Another

Let's take a minute and read each other's post-its, - feel free to cluster them and move them around if you see themes. Share and reflect verbally by looking at the wall & building on each other's work.

[Facilitator stands by the posted comments and asks "ANYTHING ELSE?" periodically and when all are posted...]

- What were the challenges?
- Hard or painful or maybe sad?
- What needs to be grieved about the way things were?
- What will you miss?

[As they are writing, I write questions on the board, then write on the flip chart paper "What do we want to carry forward?"]

Final questions:

- What did we learn about ourselves in this chapter?
- What do we want to carry forward from this chapter?

[Facilitator writes this on flip chart paper or whiteboard.]

[The facilitator encourages further reflection saying:]

So, now that we've described this chapter and reflected on it a bit:

- What was the big theme for this chapter?
- What should the title of this chapter be?

[Facilitator writes the participant(s)'s title on the top of the page or on a separate colored piece of paper to be attached with tape.]

OK, so this chapter is closing, and we can be grateful for what has been. Now we're heading to a new chapter.



Chapter Change - Closing a Chapter and Opening Another

[Facilitator names the new chapter identified by the participants: New 5 year vision, new staff model, new vestry, new youth programming, new ____.]

What else is new?

- Let's use the ____ post-its now.
- What will this chapter be about?
- What do we hope for?
- What are we excited about?
- What do we want to be proud of?

[Participants write responses on post-it's and add to the sheets. Participants share, standing around. The facilitator asks "ANYTHING ELSE?" When all have shared...]

- What are we worried about?
- What might be missing as we move forward?
- What do we want to be especially thoughtful or careful about as we begin this chapter?

[Participants write responses on post-it's and add to the sheets. Participants share-verbally building on each other's work, standing around. The facilitator asks "ANYTHING ELSE?" When all have shared...]

So, now that we've described this chapter and reflected on it a bit:

- What was the big theme for this chapter?
- What should the title of this chapter be?

[Facilitator writes the participant(s)'s title on the top of the page or on a separate colored piece of paper to be attached with tape.]

Is there anything we want to remember to ask ourselves in November? January?

Is there any structural or system change that is occurring to you that we need to put in place to ensure success?

OK, we will hold what we learned from opening and closing chapters as we continue our work together today.

