

Listen to each other in discernment of God's gifts for service, and support others in their service

Discernment is a word used frequently in the church, but how often do we remember that discernment starts with listening? The tradition of spiritual discernment requires time to pray, ponder, study and listen to what the Spirit is saying. Discernment is a prayerful and intentional sifting and sorting around a crucial question such as "where is God leading us?" and "what is God calling me to do?"

St. Ignatius of Loyola has handed down to us principles of discernment which are quite useful to remember.

Christian spiritual discernment leaves the outcome of the discernment in God's hands. This is the hardest principle to put into practice, but is crucial to good discernment. As you discern ask yourself if you can really be at peace with whatever comes from this time of sifting, sorting, praying, studying and choosing. Opening ourselves to new possibilities is spiritually freeing.

Good discernment takes all the facts and practical issues into consideration. Spiritual discernment about God's call does not and must not ignore the realities of life and the practical considerations of the ramifications of that call.

Good discernment is steeped in prayer along each step of the process. Are you praying, really praying? Are you taking long pauses of silence in order to listen and pay attention to God's movement in your hearts? At each turn, are you asking "What does God desire for us?"

Good discernment does not go on forever, at some point make a choice and take action. Although good discernment takes time, it is not an excuse to procrastinate. If you are waiting for certainty, forget it. Seek clarity instead. And just because we discern well does not mean we never make mistakes. Having prayed, studied, sifted and sorted to the fullest we need to take a leap of faith and act.