

Discernment Process Overview
(Approved by Council; December 4, 2017)
(Designed for use in Council/Consistory level decisions)

Guiding Principles:

1. Reflects Scriptural principles of discernment and is bathed in prayer
2. Assumes participants have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and are regularly listening for the Spirit's leading
3. Recognizes not every decision needs a full discernment process
4. Reflects the Biblical principle of the priesthood of all believers
5. Assumes those making the decision are practicing the discipline of indifference (i.e. are able to set their personal perspective aside), are able to trust God is guiding the process, and are willing to follow what people are hearing from God.

The Three Levels of Discernment

1. Level One Discernment - A Simple Discernment (one evening)

Items needing discernment at this level can normally be made at a single leadership meeting with a clear discernment question, when ample time for prayer, information, discussion and reflection is available, and consensus is easily reached

2. Level Two Discernment - A Full Discernment (about 60 days)

(This level of discernment deals with more significant issues than level one, but the entire discernment process remains with the leadership)

1. This discernment process is initiated by presenting a significant discernment question (issue) to leadership.
2. At the initial meeting a proposal - normally written - is presented with background, information and rationale. Members are invited to simply ask questions seeking additional information/background
3. This is followed by a month of prayer and listening - to God (Scripture, prayer), to the Spirit (consolation and desolation), and to each other.
4. At the next meeting, a time of prayer is held followed by a discussion is held, listening (what we have been hearing from God, His Spirit, and others) is shared, additional information, questions are answered. The level of consensus is discerned.
5. This is followed by another month of prayer and listening
6. At the third meeting, following a time of prayer, consensus building begins; a decision or a partial decision is discerned, agreed upon and implementation is scheduled. A time of review is scheduled.

3. Level Three Discernment - A Critical Discernment (often 3-12 months)

(This level is reserved for major issues that impact the mission, vision, and values of the entire congregation; engages the entire congregation in the discernment process)

1. Formation of the Discernment Question (normally written by the leadership)
 2. The entire congregation is invited to engage in significant prayer around the discernment question for a spirit of indifference, for God's wisdom, and for the ability to trust God is at work. Normally a prayer guide will be made available to assist in their discernment process
 3. The education/information phrase will provide - as unbiased as possible - background, rationale and additional information to the congregation. Opportunities for questions and answers will be provided
 4. As the congregation is invited to listen for God's leading in Scripture, from his Spirit and through each other, opportunities will be designed for leaders to hear what the congregation is hearing from God.
These "listening" opportunities may be held in small (5-7) or medium sized groups (12-20) with one or two leaders present (one for small groups, 2-3 for the medium sized groups). These venues may be used for discussion and consensus building - in addition to listening. Responses will be recorded (through a scribe or recording device), collated, and shared with the congregation/participants.
 5. Congregants will again be invited to engage in prayer and may be invited to provide the leadership with additional feedback they are hearing from God via 3X5 or 4X6 cards (to keep the responses short and simple). This will only be received if signed.
 6. The leadership will begin discerning what they are hearing God say as a result of their personal and corporate listening and begin forming consensus in addressing the entire issue or moving ahead on a partial response.
 7. The "decision" (consensus) remains open to continual evaluation and refinement
- (This process often takes four to six months - but may be longer.)

Schedule for Use of Women's Gifts/Women in Ecclesiastical Office issue

November

- Recommendation from Admin team of the process for discerning the use of women's gifts issue
- Approval of the discernment question

December - approved by Council

- Approval by the Council of the process for discerning the use of women's gifts issue
- Approval of the discernment question
- Approval of the transition team facilitating the process

January - Month of Prayer

- Hand out prayer guide focused on prayers for indifference, prayers for God's wisdom, prayers to hear God's voice; prayers of Trust, prayers of unity; prayers of obedience
- Spend time in similar prayer during worship
- Each leadership team would commit to spending thirty minutes during their January meeting in praying for God's leading and our discernment

February - Month of information

- February 4 - Q&A - Framing the Question including focus on God's leading, hard for some people, maintaining the unity of the church, relationship to the Church's mission/vision; How to Listen for what is God saying?
- February 4 - the booklet "*A Cause for Division?*" will be made available
- February 11 - Professor John Cooper - a presentation(s) of the Scriptural foundations - underscoring the various positions and interpretations I
- February 18 - Professor John Cooper - a presentation(s) of the Scriptural foundations - underscoring the various positions and interpretations II

March - Listening to each other

- Congregants will be invited to participate in listening/discussion groups of 12-15; groups will be scheduled throughout the month at various times
- Each group will have a facilitator and a recorder; "listenings" (i.e., what people are hearing from God re: this discernment) will be recorded.
- These "listenings" will be collated and shared with the congregation at the April 8 Q&A

April - additional prayer and listening responses

- Members will again be encouraged to spend time engaging in "listening" for God's voice and leading during the first half of the month of the month
- On April 15, (4x6) listening card's will be made available for members to record what they hear God's spirit saying to them in answer to the discernment question. These must be returned, signed, by April 29. They will be recorded anonymously and shared with the congregation as the elders begin their discernment and decision-making

May - The elders, at a special meeting, will discern where the congregation hears God leading