

# Group Discernment

## A Group Listening Process

Listening to one another in groups can be incredibly powerful. However, it takes a great deal of intentional listening from the participants in order to be effective. The group discernment process gives each participant the opportunity to share what is on his or her mind, while the rest of the group listens intently with clarifying questions.

This process is based on several assumptions:

1. Each person already has the answers to their questions within themselves. Everyone else in the group is simply trying to help them access this information
2. The Spirit is at work prompting questions and opening the focus person up to the deeper truth.
3. Whether or not the process ends with a clear answer is a success because it leads to greater understanding.

Roles: Each group will have a *facilitator* to oversee the process, a *focus person* who is sharing their thoughts & questions, and *inquirers* who will ask clarifying questions.

1. The facilitator will call the group to order and share the following guidelines:

- Give no advice to the focus person.
  - Bad question: "Have you ever thought this might be your mother's fault?"
  - Good question: "What do you mean when you say your mother made you feel frustrated?"
- Ask open ended questions.
  - Bad question: "Didn't that make you feel angry?"
  - Good question: "Did you ever feel like this before?"
- Keep your questions brief and to the point.
- You can ask questions about feelings as well as facts.
- Trust your intuition when asking questions, even if it seems off the wall.
  - "What color is a biology major, and what color is a social worker major?" is a perfectly good question.
- No side conversations, checking phones, clock, etc.
- The facilitator will keep time.
- Don't seek to comfort, reassure, or lead the focus person. They must be in control of the process.

2. After the guidelines are offered, the group begins in silence.
3. When the focus person is ready, they will break the silence by sharing their thoughts and questions.
4. Inquirers are then free to ask questions (see next page for a list of sample questions).
5. The focus person and inquirers are free to take notes if desired.
6. Each focus person's session should last approximately 30 minutes.
7. If the focus person runs out of things to say and the inquirers have no further clarifying questions, the group can sit in silence for the rest of the time. The Spirit may in fact prompt something else.
8. At the end of the 30 minutes, the facilitator calls time. Inquirers give their notes to the focus person.
9. Repeat until everyone in the group has had a chance to be the focus person.
10. Most importantly, remain respectful and open at all times.

## Some Good Clarifying Questions:

- How did that make you feel?
- If there were no other factors to consider (money, family, grades, etc), what decision would you make?
- What possible outcomes do you see in each possibility you're considering?
- What if you don't choose this path? How will it feel?
- How will this decision impact the world in a positive way?
- What are your best hopes in regard to this issue?
- Imagine you have chosen each option available to you. What does your life look like in 5 years because of each choice?
- What are your fears in regards to this issue?
- When in your past have you felt this (joy, pain, excitement, etc)? How did that situation turn out? Does that tell you anything about this one?
- How have you made tough decisions in the past? When and how have you heard God's call?
- Imagine you are talking with God after making this decision...How would God react to this news?
- What happens in your gut when you think about each possibility?
- What resources do you have for each option? What resources would you need for each option?
- What motivates you when considering this option?
- What criteria or values are most important to you as you make this decision?
- Where do you feel joy, energy, or gladness in this matter?
- Where do you feel heaviness, sadness, or draining of energy?
- What need or desire would this fulfill for you? For others?
- What would be most life giving for you in this situation?
- What would you need to give up in order for this to happen?
- What would you need to take up in order for this to happen?

## Additional Thoughts on Questions:

There are four types of questions:

- Open - Invite stories and explanations
- Closed - Elicit one-word or short answers
- Informational - Seeking facts
- Personal - Feelings, opinions, hopes, life applications, etc.

Combinations of types:

- Closed questions may be informational or personal
- Open questions may be informational or personal

	Informational	Personal
Closed		
Open		

Words often used that may lead to the four types of questions:

- Closed - Informational - Does, who, where, what
- Closed - Personal - Use feeling words (like, hate, favorite, worst) with the above: do, are, is
- Open - Informational - What, how
- Open - Personal - Use feeling words with what, how