



Spiritual Discernment

for a Group Process



ELCIC

www.elcic.ca

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada



How to do spiritual discernment as a community

STEP ONE: Identify the issue.

Unless you can be specific about what you are seeking to discern it will be hard for you. See the introduction for some examples of common discernment questions.

STEP TWO: Identify who will participate in the discernment.

- Is this an open invitation to the congregation/synod/national church?
- Are you going to organize small groups or let it happen organically?

STEP THREE: Set a place and time to meet.

Time:

Place:

- This may take one meeting or it may take a series of meetings.
- If possible sit in a circle.
- Allow space for God to be in the middle. Symbolize this with a cross, candle or icon.

STEP FOUR: Gather.

- Welcome participants and if it is a small enough group have people introduce themselves.
- State the question for discernment. Open with prayer. Use this opening prayer or something similar:

God of wisdom and discernment, we come before you to discern <INSERT ISSUE>. Be with us now. Open our hearts and our minds to hear your will. Help us to listen for your presence and your voice. Help us to listen carefully and respectfully to each other. We pray these things in your holy name. Amen.

- Read a piece of scripture. Choose a piece of scripture that associates best with your questions for discernment. Suggestions include: Romans 12:1–2; Isaiah 43:16–21; John 15:1–17; Acts 15:1–20; Philippians 2: 1–11; Acts 16:6–15.
- Sit in silence for three minutes.

STEP FIVE: Invite the group to go around the circle and say what they are hearing God say or what is going on in the passage.

- People may pass their turn. Pause between each speaker.
- After you have gone around the circle, ask if anyone who passed wishes now to speak.
- Sit in silence for two minutes reflecting on what you have heard.

STEP SIX: Ask the group, is there anything surfacing in what we have heard that feels like God's will?

STEP SEVEN: Repeat steps five and six up to two more times.

- If there is no consensus on discernment, agree to meet again and repeat the process.
- Pray the following or something similar.

God we thank you for your presence and your word. We acknowledge that we have not yet heard you clearly. We pray that you would continue to work inside of us so that we may come to consensus on your will. Be with us as we leave this place and guard our thoughts until we meet again. We pray in your holy name. Amen.

Ask people to continue to meditate on the scripture you used at the start of the session before you come together again.

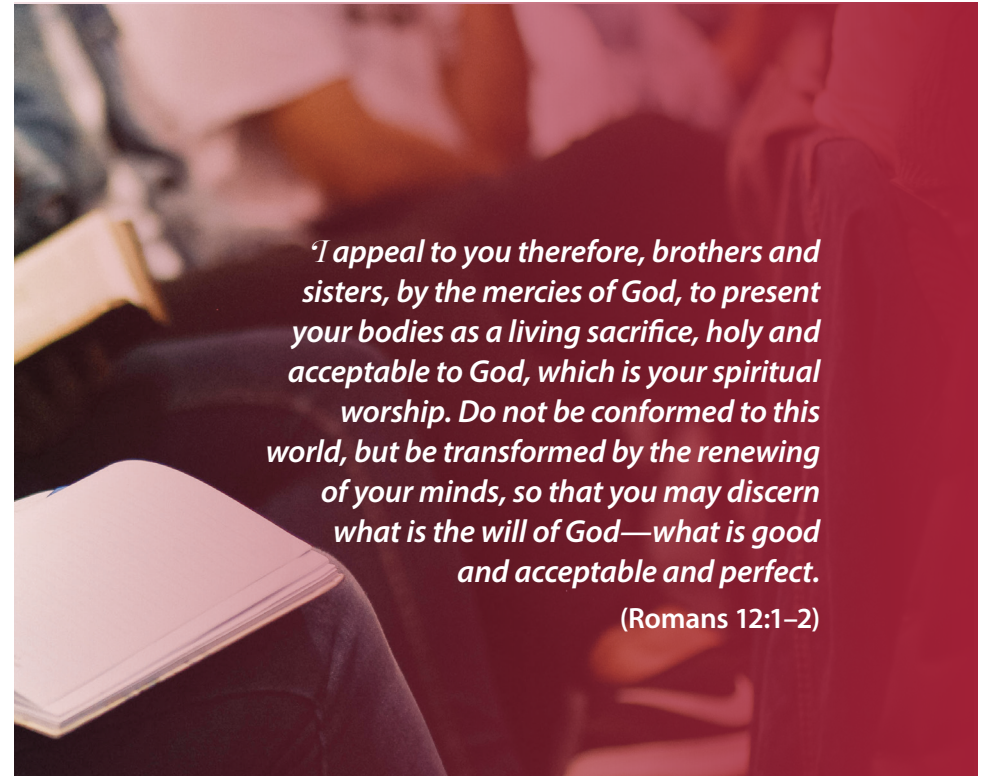
Or...

If there is a consensus, rejoice and close with the following prayer or something similar.

God of celebration, we rejoice that today we have discerned your will for us. Thank you for your presence with us. Thank you for the spirit spoken through each one of us. Bless us now as we commit to living out this new pathway. We pray in your holy name. Amen.

NOTES:

- This process requires a group facilitator. Where large groups are trying to do discernment it is best to split them into smaller groups and use several facilitators.
- A facilitator's role is creating safe space for the process to take place and keeping people on track—ideally someone with some skills in this area—though not necessarily an “expert.”
- If this process is being used to discern a new national bishop, make sure people have access to the appropriate bylaw information as well as the current list of tasks and responsibilities for the position.



‘I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

(Romans 12:1–2)

Synods and the national church need to do spiritual discernment as well. What are the priorities for the work of the synod/National Church? Who should we elect as the next national bishop? Do we have the resources to continue acting as a distinct unit?

Sometimes, we try to use analytical ways to make decisions. Can we afford it? Do we have the people resources? Sometimes this ends up becoming a mathematical answer to a discernment question!

What if instead we really took time to try to discern God's will in a given situation? What if we spent time together in prayer? What if we studied scripture to learn ways other children of God have come to know God's will? What if we spent as much time in silence (listening and reflecting) as we did in speaking?

This small booklet suggests a process to use when trying to do spiritual discernment as a community.