Discernment as a Tool in Life-long Conversion:

Practice it as an initiation team; share it with your catechumens



This brief look at discernment is written specifically for members of Initiation Teams. The practice of reflecting on and naming God's movement in your life, prepares you to assist candidates and catechumens recognize God's presence in their lives.

Let us begin with this perspective: initiation ministry is the work of discovering Emmanuel, God-with-us, and then responding to that great gift with our lives. Discernment is the method for doing that.

To reflect with your Team:

1) How does this perspective compare to the way you view the work of initiatory catechesis?

2) Share ways in which you, personally, have experienced the wonder of God-with-you as you have engaged this ministry.

Defining Discernment

Discernment, in the context of a spiritual journey within the Roman Catholic Church, comes from the Latin *discernere*, which means to separate out, to distinguish, to recognize what is distinct and different. Discernment is a method that aids in recognizing and responding to God's invitation to follow Jesus so to participate in the Reign of God. Within this method are practices and skills that enable those who use it to see what is of God and what is not, and to then engage in the practices of clearing away obstacles to God's movement. Within the initiatory journey, discernment is the ongoing work of everyone involved, for initiation is all about meeting the Lord Jesus, being touched by Him and KNOWING it.

To reflect with your Team:

1) Share stories from your faith journeys that reveal how a relationship with Jesus Christ has caused you to be able to sift, sort and distinguish that which is of God's Kingdom and that which is not. What specific activities assist you to "see" the Lord's movement?

2) What gets in the way of this kind of activity in our lives?

Discernment: A way of holiness

One of the great challenges of the Second Vatican Council remains the universal call to holiness.[i] Each of us is called to live distinctly (the root meaning of holy from the Hebrew is distinct/set apart[ii]), and that distinctness comes from the degree to which we put on the mind of Christ.[iii] You will recall that the definition of discernment has to do with separating out and distinguishing and so it is intimately tied to this call to holiness/distinction.

The entire journey guided by the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is a journey into holiness: an intimate love affair with Jesus Christ lived out with His Body, the Church. That means that all along the way, discernment is necessary for everyone from seeker/inquirer to the Initiation Coordinator and the pastor. Everyone is looking

for God's touch, trying to walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, listening for the voice of the Spirit and searching for God's desire/dream.

To reflect with your Team:

1) How does this description of the initiation journey as a journey into holiness, or into a love affair with Jesus Christ and His Body, the Church align with how you view the work of Initiation?

2) Do you agree that Initiation Team members ought to be on the faith journey with catechumens and candidates, risking more conversion of themselves, even as they offer chances for transformation to others? Why or why not?

3) How does this description spark you to consider different methods and expressions than you might already be using? Or the desire to use even more of some methods or expressions?

Discernment: The Work of the Whole Church

The ritual text calls for the entire community and sponsors/godparents to accompany the catechumen, to come to know them, to break bread together in their homes, to serve together in works of charity and justice, to learn and grow together in the ways of faith, and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with each other. This is not the private work of a few people that happens in a parish meeting room on, say, a Monday night, sequestered from the rest of the community. This is not the responsibility of a team of people or the pastor and one or two others. Initiation is the responsibility of all the baptized[iv] precisely because of the inherently communal nature of faith in Jesus Christ in the Roman Catholic Church.

To reflect with your Team:

1) To what degree is the entire community of the faithful echoing God's living word to your catechumens? When is this most powerful and persuasive? How do you know that?

2) How might you tweak, change or begin your relationship with the community so they can become the primary initiator?

Practicing discernment as an initiation team, and personally to reflect on one's own faith journey, will help sharpen those skills so to better guide others. When we accompany seekers to full initiation, we want to have also equipped them with the tools they need to continue discerning the Spirit in their lives.

Adapted from *Discernment: The Roles of the Community of the Faithful, the Sponsor and/or the Godparent*, by Deborah Stollery, January 2015

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[i] *Lumen Gentium*. Chapter 5 http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html Accessed 11/4/14

[ii] *Qadosh.* http://www.christianleadershipcenter.org/otws7.htm Accessed 11/4/14

[iii] I Corinthians 2:16

[iv] *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,* Ministries and Offices. #9