

Qualities of the Process That May Point to a Sense of the Meeting

Probably the times when I have felt the most challenged as a clerk are those situations, actual or feared, where a sense of the meeting is elusive, or where there is no unity as to a sense of the meeting, but where there is considerable urgency on the part of most to move forward with a decision.

I used to hope for some formula that would direct me in such cases, but there is none. We do have a method, however. It is the method of discernment. Both the clerk and the meeting must discern whether the sense of the meeting includes a decision and whether there is unity respecting it.

Discernment is a process of coming to know God's truth in the circumstances. Discernment often happens without giving it much thought, but when time is taken to analyse a given situation, often the following are some of the qualities that point to a sense of the meeting:

1. How recently has the matter been introduced to the meeting? Has there been time to labor with the matter over a period of time?
2. What has been the quality of the laboring with each other. Has it been guarded, closed and defended, or friendly, open and undefended. Is there a sense that we understand our differences and respect them?
3. Can it be said that the matter is "seasoned?" Have all who have needed to speak on the matter had an opportunity to share their concerns with the meeting? Does everyone feel heard? Have attempts been made to introduce new light on the matter?
4. Do those who have trouble with the direction in which the meeting seems to be going seem spiritually grounded, or do they seem to be otherwise driven?
5. Is there a sense of the presence of the Spirit?
6. Are the fruits of the Spirit in evidence? (Galatians 5:22-23).
7. How will love be enlarged, or diminished, if the proposal is adopted, or not adopted?

Larrabee/Clerking Workshop
03.06.25

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Discernment

Indicators of a Right Discernment of God's Will

Contra-indicators

Joy	Sadness, worry, fear, melancholy
Peace, tranquility, humility, obedience, charity	A "sandpaper feeling"
A greater sense of the integration of life.	A sense of disharmony, secretiveness, turning away.
An experience of new creation	A sense of death or self- centeredness
Freedom from attachment or drivenness to an outcome	Attachment, clinging to wants
Doors opening	Doors closing
Unrest, confusion, but moving toward peace	Movement toward distress
Seems to lead me toward awareness of God	Seems to lead me away from God
Fruits of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self- control" (Galatians 5:22,23)	Bad fruits: "...quarrels, a conten- tious temper, envy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, party intrigues and jealousies.." (Galatians 5:20,21)
Deep sense of congruence	Lack of a sense of congruence
Simplification of life	Lack of centeredness or focus
Warmth	Coldness

[The heart of this material is from Rose Mary Douherty and Shaun McCarty of Shalem Institute, made available to me through Frances Taber, and modified by me]

23APR99
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