



Personal and community guide

SSCC PASTORAL DISCERNMENT IN COMMUNITY

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PASTORAL DISCERNMENT IN COMMUNITY¹

INTRODUCTION

In the letter promulgating the 39th General Chapter of the Brothers, Alberto Toutin ssc, Superior General, highlighted the experience lived by the Chapter Brothers as the key to spiritual discernment:

"The General Chapter was a time of spiritual discernment that gathered the feelings and reflections of the brothers after a rereading of the Constitutions and Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation '*Evangelii Gaudium*'".

These words highlight the feeling and reflection of the chapter period that led to an attitude of seeking God's will, a desire for spiritual discernment. What we felt and experienced from within, which the spiritual language calls motions, was the voice of the Lord. During the Chapter there was much that deeply animated us and excited us. Discernment became a frame of reference. We also recognised that our pastoral experiences as SSCC sisters, brothers and laity in the various geographical coordinates of the world are the voice of God.

In a similar way, Patricia Villarroel, ssc, Superior General, synthesised the Chapter experience in her letter to the Sisters on the occasion of the promulgation of the Decisions of the 36th General Chapter:

"... We gave ourselves a great space to speak about our apostolic commitments, about the calls that we hear coming from reality, about how we want to walk with the people of God at this time, and serve in the world in which we live today... and experience, as always, what unites us, what makes us a body and gives us an identity".

In this text, Patricia calls us to listen carefully to reality. We have to give a quasi-sacramental character to this present time, to today, to the reality in which we move. At the same time, we are aware of the gifts we received after the spiritual discernment of both General Chapters of 2018: interior renewal and pastoral and missionary conversion. Alberto also reminded us in the aforementioned text:

"The renewal of the inner self and pastoral and missionary conversion are two poles that mutually require and illuminate each other. They are the expression of a renewed encounter with Jesus and his Gospel. We only discover its effectiveness

¹ The present text is based on a presentation by **Fernando Tapia Miranda**, priest of the Archdiocese of Santiago de Chile, and director of the Department of Spirituality of the Archdiocese of Santiago, given to the brothers of the Province of Chile, who were gathered for their Assembly in January of 2020. Here we have tried to insert different charismatic elements and include various sources that connect the text with the globality of the Congregation, as well as some elements that were not included in the original presentation text.

when each one of us, each community of the Congregation continues along the path of spiritual discernment begun in the General Chapter”.

As a religious family we are convinced that community discernment is a spiritual and pastoral exercise that belongs to the heart of a Church that wants to remain faithful to the Lord, through the different socio-cultural contexts that occur in time.

There is no doubt that the more profound the cultural, social, political and religious changes are, the more urgent is the need for community discernment to reorient the pastoral action of the Church. In this way it is intended that the Gospel does not lose its relevance, its novelty, or its transforming power. There is always the danger of letting "salt lose its flavour", as the General Chapter of the Brothers of 2012 comprehensively reminded us.

Thus, it is very important to be clear about the reality we are living, the main challenges that it presents us and the new ways that we are seeking to be and serve in the Church. Pope Francis, the documents of the Church, like those of the Synods, present us with the characteristics of the Church that Christ wants today. In this sense, we cannot fail to quote again the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, which is an irreplaceable tool in all current pastoral discernment. Its intuitions and demands have to be taken into account. It is, without a doubt, a very useful text that cannot be ignored.

In order to formulate some pastoral accents that simultaneously serve as the response of the Gospel to these challenges and bring us closer to our Church Ideal, we need a climate of discernment that contains appropriate attitudes and methodology.

We speak of discernment because neither the discovery nor the prioritising of challenges can result from a simple human analysis. Even less so, when there is undue pressure, manipulation or imposition of some groups on others. Nor can true discernment be the result of blind, lazy, and thoughtless obedience. Rather both must surely be the fruit of a communitarian, believing and pastoral discernment.

We will develop, below, the two great pillars of community discernment:

- a) The contemplative dimension.
- b) The pastoral dimension.

In other words, discernment is about first seeing what God is doing in the world and in the Church in the here and now (contemplative dimension) and then discerning what we must do in such a way that our pastoral action is effectively collaboration and cooperation with God's acting in the world (pastoral dimension).

THE CONTEMPLATIVE DIMENSION OF DISCERNMENT

1. Foundation of faith

Discernment has a foundation of faith: GOD is present and is acting in the world through his Spirit and calls us to collaborate with his work. John the Baptist, referring to Christ, said to those sent to him by the priests and the Levites: "In your midst there is One whom you do not know ... and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandal " (Jn. 1:26-27). And therefore, our challenge as believers is, in the words of St. Ignatius of Loyola, "to find GOD in all things". The Lord continually gives us signs, signals, of his presence and we sometimes perceive them and other times not. Evil and sin are also present in our world and we are able to grasp the signs of its presence and action. (Cf. Const. Art. 4). Both types of signs are mixed like the wheat and the tares in the parable and that is why it is necessary to discern what is from GOD in our world and what is not from God. Hence St. Paul's recommendation to the Thessalonians "Do not quench the fire of the Spirit, do not despise prophecy, examine everything and hold on to what is good, avoid all forms of evil" (1 Thess. 5:19-22).

The action of the Spirit of God in the world is always saving and is directed towards the emergence of a more human world. Therefore, if the Church wants to collaborate with this salvation that the Lord brings us, it must - according to the Council - "examine in depth the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel. It is opportune, therefore, that they know and understand the world in which we live and its hopes, its aspirations, its often dramatic way of being".²

And what is meant by the "Signs of the Times"?

According to Father Chenu, the great inspirer of the Conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, they are "those phenomena which by their generalisation and frequency characterise an epoch, and through which the needs and aspirations of humanity are expressed".³

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the term "signs of the times" appears on several occasions which, when added to the previous teaching of the Church (GS 14), warns us of the need to be vigilant in studying them, as well as being aware of the responsibility and consequences that they may create:

It is not the task of the Pope to offer a detailed and complete analysis of contemporary reality, but I do exhort all the communities to an "ever watchful

² Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 4.

³ Cfr. Chenu M. D., *The Signs of the Times*, in AA.VV., *La Iglesia en el mundo de hoy*, Taurus, Madrid 1979, pp. 253-278.

scrutiny of the signs of the times". This is in fact a grave responsibility, since certain present realities, unless effectively dealt with, are capable of setting off processes of dehumanisation which would then be hard to reverse.⁴

On different occasions, Pope Francis has asked the Holy Spirit 'to act in us so that, both personally and as a community, we can acquire the habit of discernment' and 'be able, always, to see the unity of salvation history through the signs of God's movement in our time and in the faces of those around us (..)'⁵

2. Criteria of discernment

What criteria can we use to realise whether or not these facts, situations, cultural currents, etc. are from God? Without doubt, the fundamental criteria are in Sacred Scripture, particularly in the Gospels. We also find them clearly in the path of our Founders:⁶ both of them 'knowers' of the unfathomable depth of God's love manifested in the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, collaborators in and caretakers of the Work of God, participants in the reparative Love of Christ, heading a family of brother-sisters-laity who, as joyful pilgrims, journey towards the definitive homeland.

Before referring to these criteria, I would like to mention one criterion that Paul VI pointed out in *Populorum Progressio* (n. 20 and n. 21) and which was taken up by the Latin American Bishops at Medellín. In the light of the founding event of the people of Israel, the Exodus, the Bishops noted how "Just as Israel, the first people, experienced the saving presence of GOD when they were freed from the oppression of Egypt, when he brought them across the sea and led them to the promised land, so we, the new People of God, cannot fail to feel his saving action, whenever true development takes place, which is the path, for each and every one, from less humane conditions of life to more humane conditions".⁷

The Gospel and the activity of Jesus reaffirm this criterion and give it its definitive status, since the criteria with which Jesus acts are those with which God acts in the world, because He is the definitive revelation of the Father. Jesus himself gives us the key clue to discovering them in the answer he sent to John the Baptist who was imprisoned and doubting whether or not Jesus was the one awaited for centuries: "Are you the one who is to come or must we wait for another? (Lk. 7:20):

At that time Jesus healed helpless individuals who were afflicted with diseases, infirmities, and evil spirits, and restored sight to some who were blind. Jesus answered the messengers saying, "Go and tell John what the blind see and hear, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them." (Luke 7:20-22)

In other words, the signs of life reveal the action of the GOD of Life and are the best proclamation of the Gospel of life. Every time a man, woman or human group is healed physically,

⁴ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 51.

⁵ For example, in the General Audience given on 19 September 2019.

⁶ Cf. Toutin A., *SSCC Apostolic Discernment. Availability to God's work*, Études Picpuciennes 11, Rome 2021.

⁷ Medellín Conference, Introduction, n.6.

psychologically, morally or spiritually, there is the Risen Christ, the fullness of life, giving life and salvation. Whereas, on the contrary, every time a person or a group of people is crushed, destroyed, deceived, exploited or abused, there is the action of evil because, Jesus says, the devil is "a murderer from the beginning and the father of all lies" (Jn. 8:44).

To avoid any subjectivism or biased reading of the signs of the times, the Church offers us her Tradition and her Magisterium, which is the authentic interpretation of the Word of God, especially when it is exercised collegially, 'in a new tone, not known before' the Second Vatican Council, as John Paul says in the *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*.⁸ It is an obligatory reference point for interpreting the Word of God and making a correct discernment. That is why it is providential that our pastoral planning processes are situated in the present ecclesial context that attempts, encouraged by Pope Francis, to recover enthusiasm, doctrinal synthesis, the ecclesial style and the very rich pastoral orientations that emanated from the Second Vatican Council.

Finally, the testimony of the saints is an ongoing criterion for discovering the presence, the ways and the will of God, as is the testimony of sisters and brothers who contemporaneously try to discover enlightening answers for our today, with enthusiasm, encouraged by the Spirit. The 39th General Chapter of the Brothers spoke to us of icons that feed our consecration and our mission:

"From the origins of the Congregation to these days, there have been brothers and sisters who, in the way they embodied the charism and the mission of the Congregation, have become **icons** that nourish our consecration and our mission as religious of the Sacred Hearts. We have our founders: the Good Father and the Good Mother; our brothers whose holiness has been recognised by the Church: Saint Damien de Veuster, Blessed Eustáquio and Blessed Martyrs of Spain; and other brothers whose process of beatification has begun, martyrs of the Paris Commune and Esteban Gumucio."⁹

3. Discernment as a gift of God

However, it is necessary to keep in mind that discernment is first and foremost a gift from God. The capacity to discover and distinguish both the presence of God and the presence of evil and sin is part of the prophetic charism of the Church. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to his people and which must be asked for insistently, especially in the processes of ecclesial renewal, because sometimes it is not so easy to distinguish the two realities. Already in the Old Testament, Solomon, in spite of all his wisdom, humbly implored this gift: "Grant therefore to your servant a heart that understands, that he may judge your people, and discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 9). The longer prayer, found in the Book of Wisdom, is along the same lines.

There are many factors that make it difficult for us to discover and distinguish the signs of life from the signs of death. Our outlook is sometimes overshadowed by our own personal and social

⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, Nov 1994

⁹ Chapter Document, *Sacred Hearts Spiritual and Historical Patrimony*, n. 5.

sin, by our prejudices, our political ideologies, our cultural sensitivities, our personal or group interests, or simply by our misinformation, our lack of knowledge of reality.

There is no clearer example of this difficulty in seeing God than the blindness of the Pharisees. They were so blocked by their religious rigidity that they never discovered in Christ the Liberator that God was sending them. On the contrary, they attacked him harshly until they took him to the Cross. That is why Jesus spoke of them as "the blind leading the blind". If we want to make a believing discernment, then first of all, like the blind man in the Gospel, we have to ask the Lord for the grace to see. To Jesus' question "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus answers "Master, that I may see" (Mk. 10:51). And the Gospel says that at once he saw and began to walk with Jesus.

How to discern spirits?

One of the Catholic letters exhorts us to put spirits to the test to see if they are from God or not (1 Jn. 4: 1-3). The same Saint Paul advised the Thessalonians: "Rather, examine everything carefully, hold fast to what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). To the degree that God manifests his power, the evil spirit will do everything possible to destroy the work of God. Thus, discernment is essential, together with the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. The apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 12:10 shows that the discernment of spirits is a gift (a personal quality that no other person has). Now, we must be very attentive to the spirit that moves us to carry out some action or make some determination since the evil spirit will deceive even the chosen ones (Mk 13:22). The human spirit is fragile and can become confused as to what the Spirit of the Lord is setting in motion in the person and can provoke false prophecies.

In the New Testament a clear distinction is established between the human spirit and the Spirit of God, since it is the Holy Spirit who uses the human spirit as an instrument to carry out God's will. But how does one discern the spirits? In the First Letter of John there are more instructions regarding evil spirits and how they can be identified (1 Jn. 4: 1-4). It states that every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. As for the process of discernment itself there is a danger in assuming something to be the will of God that is not necessarily so. It is important to know that what does not bear good fruit cannot be accepted as something that has come from God (cf. Mk. 11:14; Mt. 3:10; 21, 43; Lk. 13: 6-9 and Jn. 15:6).

In those relationships, projects and commitments in which good fruits appear, it is easy to find God's will; where ruptures, interests, partisanship and injustices predominate, the will of God cannot be discerned (cf. 1 Cor. 13:3).

For all this, it is necessary that every person should seek in every moment and situation what pleases God (cf. Rom 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:9; Eph. 5:10; Phil. 4:18; Col. 3:20; Tit 2:9). And to achieve this, the human being must use all the means to discover what is God's will and thus be able to make a life choice without fear of being wrong (good discernment).

This condition is even more important for vocational discernment, since the Christian vocation supposes an evangelical style of life, founded upon a conversion of the heart, an ecclesial

reference and working for the Kingdom. To the extent that the believer enters into a communion of life with the person of Jesus Christ and acquires the same sentiments, he grows in love for God and neighbour. Each person discerns from the values they live daily; Therefore, only those who live the experience of evangelical love can adequately discern what is pleasing to God (cf. Eph. 5:10), the best (cf. Phil. 1, 9:10; 1. Thes. 5, 21:22; Heb. 5:14) and what is God's will (cf. Rom. 12:2).

For all this, discernment understands human action as a response to divine invitation, the result of a free search for God's will.

4. Conditions of discernment

In order to discern, therefore, it is necessary, first of all, to intensify the life of prayer: asking the Lord to remove from our eyes everything that prevents us from seeing Him. Without a gaze that has been converted there is nothing that can be done. The first thing is to recognise sin, only then is one in a position to discern. Discernment is the intuition of a converted heart. We need to read, meditate and contemplate much more the scenes of the Gospel in order to become familiar with the criteria of Jesus and thus increase our spiritual sensitivity. It is not by chance that, in the Spiritual Exercises of thirty days, St. Ignatius places the election at the end of the second week, after having contemplated for several days the mysteries of the life of Christ. It is also necessary to know better the magisterium of the Church which interprets Sacred Scripture authentically.

Likewise, a truly communitarian life is required to help each other see. It is about making a community discernment to discover the presence, the action, the voices and calls that the Lord is making to us in our everyday reality. This implies developing in all of us great listening skills and great inner freedom that only the Holy Spirit can give us. Discerning "the paths of the Spirit" is an invitation that Pope Francis continually makes:

“We see then that the task of evangelisation operates within the limits of language and of circumstances. It constantly seeks to communicate more effectively the truth of the Gospel in a specific context, without renouncing the truth, the goodness and the light which it can bring whenever perfection is not possible. A missionary heart is aware of these limits and makes itself “weak with the weak... everything for everyone” (1 Cor 9:22). It never closes itself off, never retreats into its own security, never opts for rigidity and defensiveness. It realises that it has to grow in its own understanding of the Gospel and in discerning the paths of the Spirit, and so it always does what good it can, even if in the process, its shoes get soiled by the mud of the street.”¹⁰

Having discovered both the presence and action of GOD and the presence and action of sin, it is easier to realise what the Lord wants us to do, both to collaborate with Him and to combat evil. Our pastoral action must always first have a contemplative moment, so that what we do as the Church enhances what the Risen Good Shepherd is already doing in the hearts of individuals, families and societies and combats what prophetically we have discovered as the presence of evil.

¹⁰ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 45.

At this point, we are aware that we carry out various pastoral tasks that are good, but which one or ones should we prioritise? This is a question that must accompany our discernment and decision-making.

With Darío Mollá we could ask ourselves: What are the basic criteria, the fundamental criteria, that make the decisions we make “evangelical”? For him four are decisive:

- 1) *The person of Jesus*: exercising contemplation, personal contact with his way of being, speaking, doing, letting ourselves be infected by his criteria will result in affective transformation and from then on we can give Jesus’ answers. To discern well is basically to decide what Jesus would decide, so the essential question is: what would Jesus do in this case?
- 2) *Communion with the Church*: this frees discernment from all forms of pride and arrogance and helps to weigh communion as a greater good than the prevailing of one's own opinion.
- 3) *Fidelity to one's own charism* which, while remaining true to one's intuition, must be updated.
- 4) That we recognise *the authority of those who suffer*: that we awaken from our narcissism and our self-referential world and open our eyes and hearts to the suffering of another human being.¹¹

¹¹ Cfr. Mollá D., *Discernimiento: concretar el amor. Discernimiento y gobierno de personas en la vida consagrada*, Frontera Hegian, Vitoria-Gasteiz 2017, pp. 37-41.

THE PASTORAL DIMENSION OF DISCERNMENT

1. Discernment as a search for the will of God

In the first part we saw that the first step in all discernment is to discover the presence and action of God in our daily life, both personally and in community and collectively. What motivates us to make this discernment is the desire to collaborate with the saving work of God, with what God is doing in our midst to give us life and life in abundance, leading to eternal life.

The Church, as a family of the sons and daughters of God, must constantly ask herself if what she is doing, pastorally speaking, and the way in which she does it, is what God wants from her. That is what is expected of a son or daughter of God, as we see in Jesus and in the Virgin Mary. In effect, the Letter to the Hebrews puts the following words into the mouth of Christ when entering this world. "Behold, I come to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10: 5-7). Also, the final words of Mary, before the announcement of her divine motherhood, are, "Behold the servant of the Lord, be it done unto to me according to your Word" (Lk. 1:38).

Seeking and doing the will of God is the practical way for the Church to grow in fidelity to the Lord and to avoid being seduced by other "lords" (search for power, prestige, easy and comfortable life, etc.). This is why Saint Paul tells the Romans. "Do not be conformed to the way of the world, rather be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:2).

It is not always easy to discover the will of God, except in the case where we are faced with an alternative in which something is clearly good or bad. In these cases we cannot speak of discernment. For example, regarding abortion: it is very clear that it should not be practiced and that this is the will of God. Discernment is necessary when we have to choose between two paths that are good. For example: a young person who tries to understand if God is asking him or her to start a family or consecrate himself/herself to celibacy. A discernment of the will of God is required here. In the decisions of the 36th General Chapter of the Sisters, several concrete examples of discernment were given. One of them was in the area of insertion and social projects: "To discern the needs to which we can respond and collaborate, at least in one social project, in each territory."

Also a church community, when it wants to think about its future, is faced with several possibilities. A great theologian 30 years ago wrote the following: "It is not said at all that the will of God forces its way into the human heart without further ado, charged with the accent of uniqueness, or that it is simply obvious, and identical with whatever the heart may think. The will of God may lie very deeply concealed beneath a great number of available possibilities. The will of God is not a system of rules which is established from the outset; it is something new and different in each different situation in life, and for this reason a man must ever anew examine

what the will of God may be. The heart, the understanding, observation and experience must all collaborate in this task.”¹²

May we have the courage, through re-reading and bringing to life the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, to discern objectives, structures, style and methods of evangelisation. At every ecclesial level, discernment must review everything to see what the Holy Spirit is asking. This is what Pope Francis tells us: “Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.” (EG 33)

2. Basic attitudes for discernment

How then can we discover communally what God wants for his Church '?

Undoubtedly the first thing needed is to intensify the climate of prayer so that we can be purified by the Spirit of the Lord and attain greater interior freedom and availability to what He wants from us. This is not easy because we naturally attach ourselves affectionately to what we do and find it hard to step back, be critical of our pastoral work or let others criticise it. We immediately defend ourselves and many times we seek to justify at all costs what we do.

This disordered attachment to our Ideas, projects or pastoral works makes discernment difficult and subjects us greater pastoral individualism.

Also difficult for discernment is the lack of mutual trust within the Church Community, the inability or refusal to communicate what we really feel or think, or the lack of channels to do so, intolerance, prejudice, activism, overload work and fear of change.

Accordingly we need the Holy Spirit to purify us from all this and give us the spiritual attitudes that make possible an open and frank dialogue aimed at discerning the will of God.

In addition to prayer and community life, the conditions presented in *Service of Authority and Obedience*, concerning the role of authority in the growth of the community (n. 20) and obedience in community life (n. 25) are very suitable for apostolic discernment.¹³

¹² Bonhoeffer D., *Ethique*, Génève 1965, p. 21.

¹³ The CICALSAL document issued on 11th May 2008 is a very helpful read:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_20080511_autorita-obbedienza_en.html

3. Method of discernment

Accepting the basic attitudes of discernment, a precise method is necessary to carry it out, so that we do not equate any type of pastoral reflection as discernment. There is no single method, since this depends on the specific objective of discernment, as well as on the subject concerned. However, there are some elements that necessarily have to be present.

- * **Prayer:** this is the climate in which the whole process of discernment must take place. At some point prayer will be petitionary, at another it will be to give thanks or indeed it could be a time of deep silence that tries to capture the inner motions.
- * **Information:** it is important to have enough information about the subject to be discerned because there may be issues that are very complex.
- * **Reasoning:** it is necessary from the beginning to start an exchange on the reasons for and against the different proposed alternatives for action. At first there is to be no debate but mutual listening, during which one tries to understand what the other says and why he says it.
- * **An Inner sensitivity** to grasp where I am going. Feeling inclined, attracted, to what is "burning" in my heart, or what it is rebelling against. To feel the inner "motions" and discover if they are coming from the good spirit or the bad spirit as we saw above.
- * If the process is well done, a consensus is usually reached because it is the same Spirit that is blowing in all the evangelising agents. If opinions are very divided, decisions cannot be made; it is necessary, rather, to wait a while for things to mature, pray more to improve the ability to listen to each other and understand the problem, ask more insistently for the lights of the Spirit and have more information.
- * **Decision-making:** discernment is oriented to pastoral action, to doing the will of God. Therefore, it has to culminate in a decision.

4. Confirmation

Once a decision has been made, we may experience different feelings that either confirm the decision made or question it. They are like signs that God sends us.

A sign of being in tune with the Lord or of having found the will of God is to feel peace, inner tranquillity, joy, courage, enthusiasm, light, contentment with oneself, serenity, certainty, increased faith, hope and love. Saint Ignatius calls these "consolations".

Signs that the opinion given or the proposal made or the decision made are not in accordance with the will of God, are to feel uneasiness, anxiety, internal resistance, displeasure, fear, confusion, frustration, guilt, rage, emptiness, disappointment, restlessness, decrease in faith, hope and love. St. Ignatius summarises these in the word "desolation".

This point can be very novel for us, since we are not used to introducing our feelings or our "inner motions" as Saint Ignatius would call them, in decision-making processes both personally and collectively. Rather we have mistrust towards them and we tend to privilege reason.

However, we know that what affects or paralyses a human being is the affections. If we pay attention to our inner world, the feelings and emotions are there. Reality does not leave us indifferent. Neither do the decisions we make. The discernment processes invite us to be aware of what we feel and to value it as a place, a way, whereby God wants to help us see his presence or his absence, his will or his displeasure. We need to exercise ourselves in this and improve what we might call our spiritual sensitivity.

5. Pastoral discernment within the planned pastoral process

Once the challenges to our pastoral work have been discovered and prioritised in a climate of discernment, it is necessary to formulate the lines of pastoral action for the coming years and to draw up a pastoral plan. This work is also done with the attitudes and method proper to pastoral discernment.

It is hoped that discernment will lead us to a "pastoral conversion" necessary for a passionate and renewed missionary going forth:

"I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself." ¹⁴

¹⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27.

CONCLUSIONS

1. By choosing community discernment as the main instrument to exercise participation and co-responsibility, we are introducing in the pastoral life of our Archdiocese, a key element to improve the evangelical and evangelising quality of our Christian life. An element that should remain forever in our way of doing pastoral work because it allows us to recognise, in daily practice, the Lordship of Christ over the world and over the Church.
2. It also allows us to build the unity of the Church and to build up ecclesial communion around the prayerful search for his will, which at times will be found easily and at others arduously and even painfully.
3. For this reason, community discernment requires us to improve the level of our spiritual life in order to grow in what St. John Paul II calls "a particular sensitivity to all that the Spirit says to the Church and to the Churches" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 23), especially in this time of purification and ecclesial renewal.
4. This growth is not spontaneous: it must be worked on. Discernment is an exercise: one must train in it in order to acquire the spiritual skill it requires. Discernment is learned by doing discernment, just as prayer is learned by praying. Here pastoral agents in general have a great call to be "teachers of the spirit".
5. Finally, we must not forget that discernment always generates a dynamic of renewal in the Church, since it creates the conditions so that the Spirit, with fewer obstacles on our part, leads the Church where He wants to take her. The Constitution *Lumen Gentium* says that the Spirit "makes the Church keep the freshness of youth. Uninterruptedly He renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse. (4). We must, therefore, be prepared to seek and walk new paths of evangelisation, growing in the inner freedom and availability that every authentic process of discernment requires.

QUESTIONS

for personal reflection and community sharing

After reading “Community Pastoral Discernment” we propose a moment of quiet in the community meeting as being key to trusting and wanting to share the questions that are proposed to us. Perhaps we can begin by sharing our reaction to what we have read. After then we can respond to the questions. It may be that you don’t have time for everything or you want to choose one in particular. What is important is that we be convinced of the importance of applying community discernment in our pastoral practice.

1. Where do we recognise Jesus walking with us today? What new paths does he propose to us?
2. In order to constantly assimilate the will of God, it is necessary, as an indispensable and ongoing condition, to get rid of all that is “disorderly”, that is, to reach complete “interior indifference” and to always be alert to listen to the voice of God. Therefore, discernment is not possible without conversion, “a continuous conversion” as Pat Bradley, ssc would say. How can we help each other as a community in this change of heart and mind?
3. Is there a desire in you for a deep inner renewal? What are the means we use to revive our spiritual life?
4. What are our your experiences of community pastoral discernment? Have there been any concrete experiences at the local or Major Community level where we have seen light to move forward?
5. Do you agree with the elements that make up the method of discernment? Are there any elements missing that you would add?
6. Are we willing and prepared to seek and walk along new paths of evangelisation? What are we missing in our current practice and what can motivate us in this search?

ADORATION

INTRODUCTION

Our adoration is centred around pastoral and community discernment and invites us to remain silent, to open our hearts and to ask for the gift of the Spirit to see the movement of God in our world, in the Congregation, in our brothers, sisters and lay people, and to see his project of love. Let us pray for the Spirit to come to us.

PRAYER TO THE SPIRIT

Holy Spirit, Creator, at the beginning you swept over the waters:
Come, Holy Spirit!

Holy Spirit, Christ promised us that you will always be with us and in us.
Come, Holy Spirit!

Holy Spirit, you descended over the apostles to gather them into a new communion, the Church.
Come, Holy Spirit!

Holy Spirit, Comforter, through you we have become children of God.
Come, Holy Spirit!

Holy Spirit, you make us a living sign of God's presence.
Come, Holy Spirit!

Holy Spirit, you pray within us.
Come, Holy Spirit!

SILENCE

THE WORD OF THE LORD

For who can learn the counsel of God? Or who can discern what the Lord wills? For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail; for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind. We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labour; but who has traced out what is in the heavens? Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high? And thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and people were taught what pleases you, and were saved by wisdom. (Wisdom 9:13-18)

PSALM 33

Let us acclaim the greatness of the Lord with this psalm, with the certainty that "the plan of the Lord stands for ever, the designs of his heart through all generations".

ANTIPHON: *How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!*
(Rom 11,33).

Rejoice, you righteous, in the LORD;
praise from the upright is fitting.

Give thanks to the LORD on the harp;
make music to him ten-stringed lyre;
sing to him a new song;
play skilfully, and shout for joy!

For the LORD's word is upright;
all his works are trustworthy.
He loves justice and right.
The earth is full of the mercy of the LORD.

By the LORD's word the heavens were made;
by the breath of his mouth all their host.
He gathered the waters of the sea as a mound;
he sets the deep into storage vaults.

The LORD foils the plan of nations,
frustrates the designs of peoples.
But the plan of the LORD stands forever,
the designs of his heart through all generations.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people chosen as his inheritance.
He fashioned together their hearts,
He who knows all their works.

Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon those who fear him,
upon those who count on his mercy,
To deliver their soul from death,
and to keep them alive through famine.

Our soul waits for the LORD,
he is our help and shield.
For in him our hearts rejoice;
in his holy name we trust.

May your mercy, LORD, be upon us;
as we put our hope in you.

ANTIPHON: *How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!*
(Rom 11,33).



SILENCE

All: *Listen the voice of your God is calling*
Listen with the ear of your heart
The Voice of your God is calling.
https://youtu.be/R_tkOKokgJE

REFLECTION (Benjamín González Buelta sj)

God has pitched his tent among us, to walk by our side, He does not give us a roadmap with everything organised, He invites us to go with Him. In accompanying each other, we discover that the steps ahead of us always contain an element of surprise. But he always comes, he is faithful and he obliges us to be vigilant, to be attentive so that we can distinguish his call from other calls. He enters through all the cracks, all the time respecting our freedom.

From the new mindset of the Gospel, it is possible to distinguish what is the will of God in order that we may surrender to it. Each one gives himself according to the gift he or she has received from God. We must discern the path that God proposes to each of us within a community that seeks to incarnate in the world the ever-new presence of Jesus.

All: *Listen the voice of your God is calling...*

Discernment implies a contemplative look that respects reality as it is, without idealizing or demonizing it. It is being faithful to the reality of the world in which the Son manifests Himself.

The prophets look at reality as it is: "I have seen, I have heard, I have come down". (Ex 3:7f). Jesus also looks at reality as it is, discovering a people of the Beatitudes (Mt 5:2-12).

He always looks to the depths where the possibilities of new life and future are moving. There is a privileged place from which to look: the poor, the existential peripheries where it seems that there can be no future... It is from there that we must look with the saving gaze of Jesus. The whole of reality can become for us a sanctuary where God currently lives, works and reveals Himself to us in unexpected ways.

All: *Listen the voice of your God is calling...*

The quality of our discernment, in which there is always something that dies and rises, depends on our attachment to Jesus. With Jesus by our side, our inner self will be purified of all that is deceptive. In contemplating him all of life and every new gift he offers us will be illuminated, and in exercising discernment with him, we will join in his work and in the struggle to implement and celebrate it with a "new song" (Ps 96:1) that has never been heard before.

All: *Listen the voice of your God is calling...*

Pope Francis tells us that “there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills. The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place. This is what it means to be mysteriously fruitful!” (EG 280)

All: *Listen the voice of your God is calling...*

SILENCE

Time for shared prayer.

OUR FATHER

SALVE REGINA

