

FORMATION SESSION 10:

Ignatian Discernment for College Directors and Leaders.

This session is best undertaken after the Ignatian Spirituality Session.

Discernment is important on a personal individual level, but also on a group level such as an executive team, board or Trustees.

For Ignatius of Loyola, the discernment of spirit is part of everyone's spiritual journey. Discernment enables us to examine the motives, hopes, desires, consolations, and desolations in one's life and decision. Sometimes discernment is best assisted with a guide, mentor or Spiritual Director in order to facilitate an honest insightful reflection which connects the head, heart and soul

... Extract from MAM Leadership Framework.

	Program and Focus	Guide Notes
Welcome Setting the Scene: 5 min	Leader: Ignatian spirituality, and its' way of proceeding', is a reflective and Christ-centred approach to life interlocked into the relationships and processes of the everyday. 'Discernment is a process of coming to an understanding of the movement of the Spirit within myself so, that I may better strive for interior freedom and the service of God.' (from <i>Ignatian Spirituality for Today</i> . Martin Scroop and Sandie Cornish	
5 minutes	Prayer – see Power Point (Slide 2 from Moments of Stillness) Click here See link below. www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/taking-time-to-reflect/inspired-decision-making1/index	
20 minutes	Refer: PowerPoint Click here and Resource 1. 1. Ignatian Discernment for Directors and Leaders PowerPoint. Click here 2. Hand-out: Introduction to Ignatian Inspired Decision-Making: Personal and Communal Discernment (Resource 1)	
20 minutes	Refer Resource 2:	

	In small groups, using Ignatian Communal Discernment, consider one of the scenarios as outlined. You may prefer to use this process with an issue/decision that is based in your college context.	
Concluding comment 5 min	Leader: <i>Invite participants to sit quietly for a couple of minutes: Ponder the place and value of Ignatian Discernment in their leadership/ governance context.</i>	
Final Prayer/ Reflection. 5 min	Resource 3	

Reference Material:

Bible

www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/taking-time-to-reflect/inspired-decision-making1/index

The Eyes of God, Living Discernment: Brian Gallagher MSC

Ignatian Spirituality for Today: Martin Scroop and Sandie Cornish

Turning to one another: Margaret j. Wheatley

Moments of Stillness: Sr Stanislaus Kennedy

Resource 1:

Introduction to Ignatian Inspired Decision-Making: Personal and Communal Discernment

<https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/taking-time-to-reflect/inspired-decision-making1/index>

The Ignatian tradition offers many gifts, one of which is the gift of Discernment which *invites us to be open to God's spirit as we consider our feelings and rational thought in order to make decisions and take action that will contribute good to our lives and the world around us.*¹

Ignatian discernment, first articulated by St. Ignatius Loyola, offers a paradigm for making choices, in a spiritual context, between several possibilities all of which are potentially good². It invites us to ask the question, 'What do I desire?' in the presence of a deepening relationship with God and the common good.

*Drs. Wilkie and Noreen Au describe a contemporary **personal discernment process** based on the Ignatian tradition. It begins by outlining the decision -- the issues, concerns and values that are at stake. Throughout the process, we are called to Ignatian indifference, a state of inner freedom, openness, and balance that allows us beforehand not to incline more toward one option than to another.³ We are invited to pray and reflect on the matter noticing the interplay of reason, affect and faithful experience in our decision-making process. We consider the head work, the pros and cons, as well as the heart work and asking ourselves do our feelings go along with what our mind has decided. When the head and heart match, when we are enlivened and generally at peace with a decision, we experience Ignatian consolation and may proceed with the decision. When the head and heart are in disharmony, when we feel uneasy, agitated, or anxious (what Ignatius would call desolation), we should keep the process open until we arrive at a decision that the head and heart can embrace. Consolation lets us know that we are in tune with The Spirit, and deciding together God's will; as has been said, Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God.⁴ The discernment process ends with a call to share our decisions with those that will be affected and to live-out our decisions with courage, hope and trust in God.*

*The approach to Ignatian **group** decision-making, or **communal discernment**, mirrors the process of personal discernment. It offers a way to govern, lead, and make challenging decisions just as Ignatius and his first companions used in their deliberations in forming the Society.⁵ As outlined by the Jesuit Fr. Michael Sheeran SJ, it includes a weighing of the pros and cons of each option in light of shared values and mission, a call to Ignatian indifference by all members of the group, and attention to our feelings and to God's presence. Where disagreement occurs, we are to make a special effort to understand how the other views the choice. That is, to see with the other person's eyes. Deliberations continue until all are united and can own the decision. Confirmation is experienced together through a shared sense of contentment and peace - and a commitment to carrying out the decision.⁶*

Popular novelist, J.K. Rowling, has stated, 'It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities. Ignatian spirituality is a spirituality of choice,⁵ and it is through the discernment process, both personal and communal, that we experience the gift of making truly inspired choices.

Debra Mooney, PhD (retrieved from Xavier University: www.xavier.edu)

1. Xavier University Discernment Group I: *Report to the President*, 2009.

²George Traub SJ (2012 ed.) *Do You Speak Ignatian: A Glossary of Terms Used in Ignatian and Jesuit Circles*.

³ Wilkie and Noreen Cannon Au (2008). Refining the Acoustics of the Heart, pp 192-216. In George Traub, Editor, *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader: Contemporary Writings on St Ignatius Loyola, the Spiritual Exercises, Discernment, and More*.

⁴Attributed to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ.

⁵ William Byron SJ (2000). Ours is a Spirituality of Choice, *Jesuit Saturdays: Sharing the Ignatian Spirit with Lay Colleagues and Friends*.

⁶ Michael Sheeran SJ (1987). "A Tradition in Common," *St Joseph's Magazine*, pp. 27-30.

Resource 2:

Scenario: an opportunity to work with Ignatian Discernment

Select one of the following scenarios and use Ignatian discernment to work your group's way through your decision-making process...

Communal Discernment is a group of people, in a common enterprise, discerning the Spirit to determine where they are being collectively led? This is more than group dynamics or the sum total of everyone's personal choices; it is not simply arriving at a majority. It is reaching a consensus guided by the Holy Spirit.

Discernment presumes of people... a generosity of heart, prayerful disposition, psychological balance, honesty about self, true image of God and motivation and awareness.

Discernment presumes of communities... a sense of communion; a common vocation in the Spirit; a common commitment to carry out decisions of the group; individuals who live for and by the group and as such do not subvert the common good, for personal ego or gain; a leader to facilitate an agreed discerning process and a period of confirmation of the decision.

Scenario A:

The place and voice of women in the Australian Catholic Church has been a strong theme in the community submissions to the 2020 Plenary Council. As a Mary Aikenhead Ministries 'college, in the tradition of the Sisters of Charity of Australia, you have a heritage and continuing opportunity to influence the broader agenda.

How will you lead and educate your community to take up the invitations which may emerge from the Plenary Council? Why is this so?

At the conclusion of your discussion consider: How Ignatian discernment influenced your discussions?

Scenario B:

It is 2023. COVID 19 has informed and dominated national and international agendas for the last couple of years. We have seen some extraordinary changes and adaptations in education. However, we also note the post COVID doldrums have become entrenched in the wider environment. There is pressure on enrolments as parents weigh up their financial commitments. The local parish and government schools are a cheaper option and have had good academic results through access to best practice online learning. Tertiary education is now more expensive, and many parents are exploring the range of alternatives open to them. This scenario is facing many school Boards, Leaders and their Teams...

How will you respond and proceed? Where will Mary Aikenhead and the Sisters of Charity Charism be evident in your decision-making?

At the conclusion of your discussion consider: How Ignatian discernment influenced your discussions?

Resource 3:

Ignatian Discernment- concluding prayer...

We never know who we are...

*We never know who we are (this is strange, isn't it?)
or what vows we made or who we knew
or what we hoped for or where we were when the world's dreams were seeded.*

*Until the day just one of us sighs a gentle longing
and we feel the change
one of us calls a name
and we all know to be there
one of us tells a dream
and we all breathe life into it*

*One of us asks 'why?'
and we all know that answer.*

It is very strange.

We never know who we are.

Margaret Wheatley, 'Turning to one another.'

We Listen...

Whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. All of us gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is Spirit.

Corinthians 3: 16-18

The Way of Discernment:

God's Spirit is always alluring, always drawing towards God... (Hosea 2:14)

And so, the movements that come from the Spirit of God lead to wholesome life, to personal freedom, to loving relationships, ultimately to God.

On the other hand, movements prompted by some spirit that is not-of God lead to non-life, to isolation and loss of one's inner freedom.

For most of us, most of the time, spirits not-of-God aim at our vulnerabilities and our lack of freedom...Invariably, the temptation comes via false messages that we give ourselves; though messages are false, they are heard as true, because they appeal to our vulnerability.

The necessary process of sifting...asks for a contemplative listening to the inner movement in one's self, both to recognise the movements and to come to understand their significance.

A Way of Life

Integration is wholeness...It is healing.

*It is self-possession, consolation, openness, freedom, detachment,
indifference,*

a trusting spirit, and all the other fruits of the good Spirit.

The integration we speak of is the work of grace.

Ernest Larkin, Silent Presence.