

DECISION MAKING
INFORMED BY DISCERNMENT



GREETINGS

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted all our communities in many devastating ways. United in our shared mission of healing, we strive to be compassionate and thoughtful in our response.

The pandemic has further highlighted the multiple injustices within our nation's health system. The data continues to expose that persons with low incomes, and persons of color suffer disproportionate rates of sickness and death. Those who already experience more hardship and illness are suffering the most during the pandemic.

As leaders of Catholic health ministries, the inequities we are witnessing call us to action. Our shared heritage passed down by our founding sisters and brothers includes a powerful tool for decisive action – discernment. Discernment calls us to reflect deeply on the most urgent needs of our day, and to use that reflection as a means for thoughtful and intentional decision-making. The first step is to listen and hear the call of those in need. Then, moved by the Holy Spirit and our institution's mission, we resolve to respond.

We recognize that many organizations already have a discernment process in place, and we encourage all to utilize such a resource. For those members without a formal process, CHA has created a process that we hope will help guide you in your discernment. We have also included a series of prayers and reflective practices to help facilitate the process of listening and discovering that is central to the art of discernment. In the coming months, CHA will publish a facilitator's discernment guide that will further aid our members in making prudent choices ahead.

As always, we are here to support you in whatever way we can.



*For discernment, when all is said and done,
is nothing else but being guided by
the Spirit: seeing the world, and what we must be
and do in the world, no longer with our own eyes,
but with the eyes of the Spirit.*

SERVANT OF GOD PEDRO ARRUPE, SJ



FORMAL DISCERNMENT PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

This discernment guide is a companion to a series of resources from the Catholic Health Association of the United States to guide and support leaders in their critical responsibilities to advance and safeguard the health ministry of the Catholic Church.

We hope this guide will help foster greater clarity and effectiveness in strategic decision-making in considering the impact of potential decisions on the Catholic identity and mission of organizations in service to the common good.

IMPORTANCE OF A FORMAL PROCESS FOR DISCERNMENT

Decisions that could significantly impact local communities, persons' lives and affect an organization's Catholic identity and character should be made against the background of the organization's core commitments and be approached with discipline and discernment.¹

Discernment has always been a key practice of the congregations of religious women who founded Catholic health care. It is first and foremost a spiritual discipline: a way of perceiving and cooperating with God, the Spirit and spiritual influences in important decision making.

The practice of discernment requires intentional, ongoing cultivation of our spiritual capacities. Two key, and easily neglected, spiritual tenets of discernment are *preparation* and *continually returning to reflection and prayer*. These tenets foster and sustain a *contemplative inner disposition*.²

Refining a contemplative inner disposition is inextricably connected to prayer. During a discernment process, we are encouraged to return over and over to prayerful reflection at each stage of the process. This necessitates that we develop a personal prayer life so that we can fully engage in the communal prayer of the discernment process. Cultivating a contemplative disposition and returning to personal and communal prayer are the bedrock of discernment and animate every stage of the process.

The process invites us to be spiritually grounded in the here and now, mindful of the movement of the Spirit in the decision-making process. It also enables a greater awareness of potential psychological bias and allows less attachment to pre-conceived outcomes and distractions.

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

The process begins with three fundamental questions:

- ◆ WHO NEEDS TO BE HEARD?
- ◆ WHO SHOULD BE AT THE TABLE?
- ◆ WHO MAKES THE FINAL DECISION?³

1 Including the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services* (ERDs), and all relevant Catholic moral teaching.

2 See accompanying CHA workbook in development. For example, in the Buddhist tradition, there is a similar concept of adopting a 'beginners mind'. "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few" from S. Suzuki, T. Dixon, H. Smith, R. Baker, A. Harmon, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (Walker Weatherhill, 1972).

3 Facilitated by an ethicist or mission leader.



STAGES OF DISCERNMENT



GATHERING INFORMATION

- ✦ Determine what information and facts are needed and how they will be obtained
- ✦ Elicit insight from outside expertise and those with prior experience
- ✦ Identify who is most affected by the issue and determine how their views/concerns are being represented at the table
- ✦ Identify relevant information, including core values, mission, legal, ethical and theological resources



CREATIVE COMMUNAL DIALOGUE

- ✦ Identify what is stirring in the group, personally and collectively
- ✦ Brainstorm ALL emerging possible solutions
- ✦ Determine potential bridges and gaps
- ✦ Identify what further information/data is needed



TIME FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION

- ✦ Allow for silence at any time during the process
- ✦ Pray individually and collectively
- ✦ Share what came in your prayer to help you arrive at your position
- ✦ Pray and reflect over the answers of the group and ask for guidance of the Holy Spirit



ASSESSMENT AND CONSENSUS

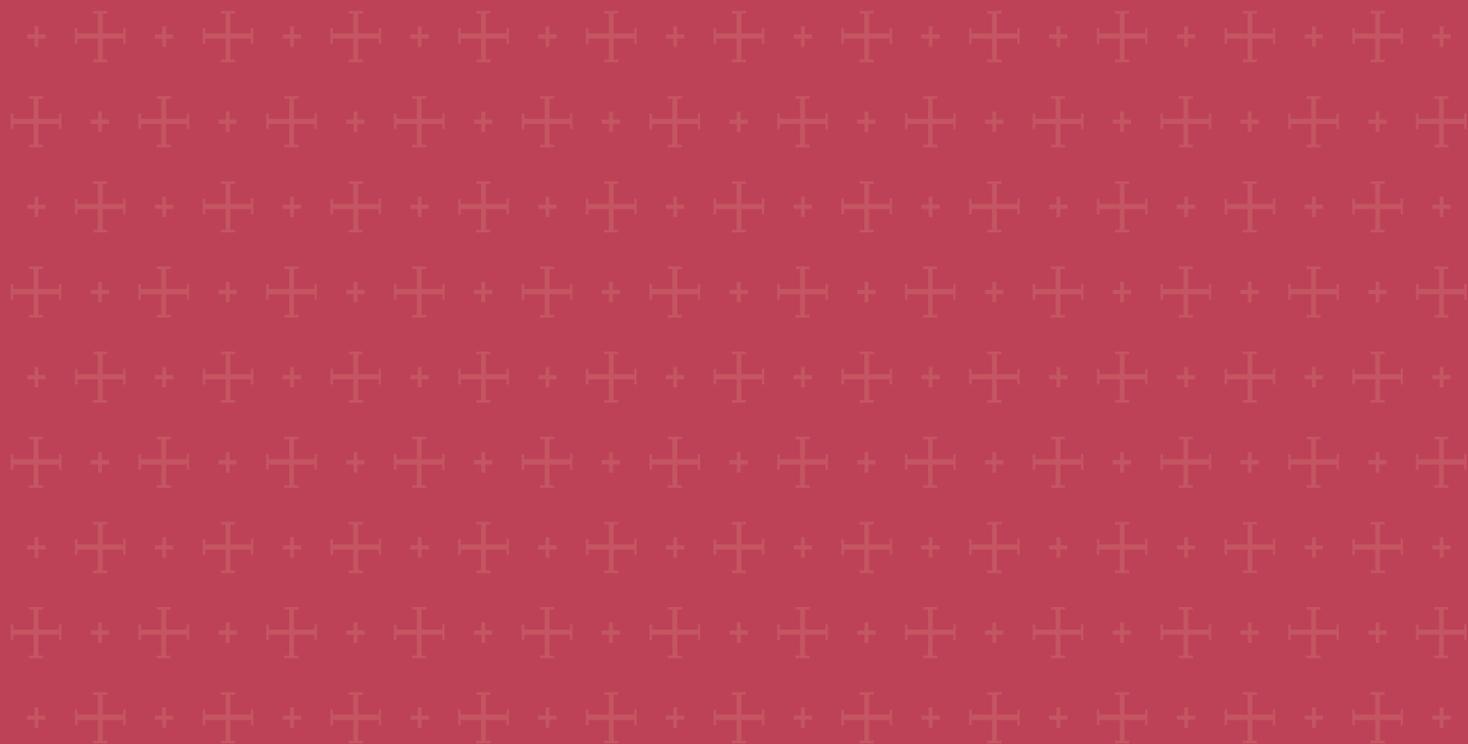
- ✦ Identify tentative decisions
- ✦ Consider and protect the human dignity of all persons who will be impacted by the decision
- ✦ Evaluate the impact on the common good
- ✦ Assess the impact on ethics and social justice with particular attention to the poor and marginalized
- ✦ Gain consensus on the decision in light of the organization's mission and core values



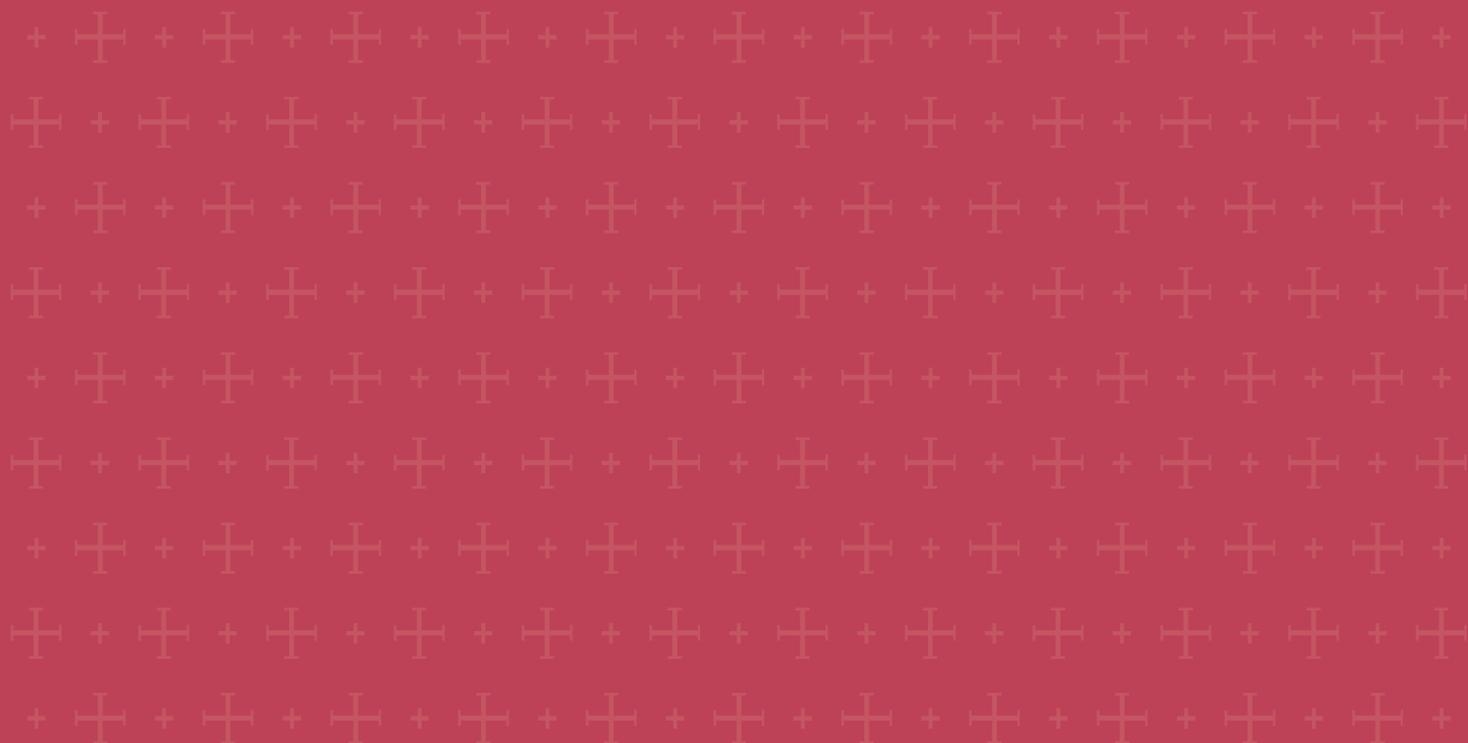
COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

After the conclusion of discernment, the work is not complete. Leaders must remain vigilant that the decision and the goals are properly executed by the management team. Communication is vital to success. In addition to communicating the plan, it is also helpful to describe the process that was involved in the decision making to let the broader community know that true discernment occurred. We recommend a series of ongoing communication comprised of status updates by the management team on the implementation and challenges, periodical review of the impact of the decision on the ministry and the stakeholders, and a self-assessment of the discernment process for continued formation and preparation.

We sincerely hope that this tool and the guidance it provides will assist leaders in their important responsibilities for the ministry and that this process will be embedded into future organizational decision making. Discernment is a skill that requires intentional practice and awareness. Once established, it will be a roadmap to guide the ministry in this ever-changing world.



— REFLECTIONS —





*Discerning is the art of attending to
and acting with the Spirit
to allow the best possible decision to emerge
in light of the given circumstances.*

FORMATION TEACHINGS: JACK SHEA, S.T.D.



REFLECTION

LEADER

We gather today, tasked with making a decision that will influence all facets of our organization. Let us recognize that we do not make this decision alone. We have worked diligently in preparation, and we have listened in prayer. The choice before us is a matter of listening to the Spirit of God who is working in our world even now. This type of discernment has always been a hallmark practice of the congregations who founded Catholic health care.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “Whoever belongs to God hears the words of God.”

Discernment is first and foremost a spiritual discipline; a way of perceiving and cooperating with God, the Spirit and spiritual influences in important decision making.

Let us remember in gratitude the work that has preceded our meeting today ...

Let us pause to ground ourselves in this moment, mindful of the significance of our decision making ...

Let us invite the Spirit’s continued guidance and presence ...

Let us open the ear of our heart to what God has in store for us ...

Allow time for silence.

DISCERNMENT

READER 1

The practice of discernment requires intentional, ongoing cultivation of our spiritual capacities. Two key tenets of discernment are preparation and continually returning to reflection and prayer. Preparation and prayer foster and sustain a contemplative inner disposition. Refining a *contemplative inner disposition* is inextricably connected to prayer.

READER 2

Discernment invites us to be spiritually grounded in the here and now, mindful of the movement of the Spirit. It also enables a greater awareness of potential psychological biases and encourages detachments from pre-conceived outcomes and distractions.

READER 1

In the Buddhist tradition, there is a similar concept of adopting a “beginners mind.” It is said, *“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s, there are few.”* Although we have much expertise and many expectations, we are called to remain open, listening to one another and the Spirit, letting go of all expected outcomes. When we hold tight to what we think we know, there is no room left for a new revelation.

READER 2

Jesuit priest and Servant of God Pedro Arrupe, speaks of discernment in this way: *“For discernment, when all is said and done, is nothing else but being guided by the Spirit: seeing the world, and what we must be and do in the world, no longer with our own eyes, but with the eyes of the Spirit.”*

CLOSING INVOCATION

LEADER

As we conclude, each of you is invited to name the gift of the Spirit that you seek for this group as we continue together in prayer and discernment.

Allow time for the group to invite the gifts of the Spirit.

LEADER

We pray that the eyes of the Holy Spirit be open in us.

ALL

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful.

LEADER

We pray that the ears of the Holy Spirit listen through us.

ALL

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful.

LEADER

We pray that the heart of the Holy Spirit moves in us.

ALL

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful.

+ II +

REFLECTION

LEADER

We gather today, tasked with making a decision that will influence all facets of our organization. Let us recognize that we do not make this decision alone. We have worked diligently in preparation, and we have listened in prayer. The choice before us is a matter of listening to the Spirit of God who is working in our world even now. This type of discernment has always been a hallmark practice of the congregations who founded Catholic health care.

In the *“Introduction to Part Two, Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services”*, we are reminded that Catholic health care has the responsibility to treat those in need in a way that respects the human dignity and eternal destiny of all. The words of Christ have provided inspiration for Catholic health care: “I was ill and you cared for me.” The care provided assists those in need to experience their own dignity and value.

We gather today in the face of a significant decision, and, though we know our gifts and know that we have been chosen to be here for a reason, it is easy to feel intimidated. Let us rest for a moment in the presence of God who is always with us, who reminds us that we are enough and whose love continually sustains us.

Allow time for silence.

DISCERNMENT

COMMUNITY

In ancient days King Solomon was known as a wise ruler. Discerning and fair, God favored Solomon and granted his request for wisdom. Let us pray in the spirit of King Solomon for wisdom in our discussion today and always.

(Adapted from the Book of Wisdom 10:1-2, 9-12)

Let us all join and then follow along as appropriate.

ALL: Wisdom, hasten to make yourself known.

[Left Side] God of all ages and Lord of mercy,
You made all things by Your word,
and by Your wisdom have formed humankind
in Your image and likeness.

ALL: Wisdom, hasten to make yourself known.

[Right Side] With You is wisdom, she who knows Your works and was present when You made the world; she understands what is pleasing in Your sight and what is right according to Your commandments.

ALL: Wisdom, hasten to make yourself known.

[Left Side] Send her forth that she may dwell among us, and from the throne of Your glory send her, that she may labor with us that we may learn and do what is pleasing to You.

ALL: Wisdom, hasten to make yourself known.

[Right Side] For wisdom knows and understands all things, and she will guide us wisely in our actions that our work may be acceptable to You and worthy of Your name.

ALL: Wisdom, hasten to make yourself known.

CLOSING INVOCATION

LEADER

As we conclude, each of you is invited to name the gift of the Spirit that you seek for this group as we continue together in prayer and discernment.

Allow time for the group to invite the gifts of the Spirit.

COMMUNITY

God of all creation, grant us wisdom that in faith we might discern and do what is pleasing to You.

Move our hearts with love for those You have created, for the sick and distressed.

Fill us with the hope of the resurrection through which You renew and reconcile all things to Yourself.

We pray in the name of the One who is Your Wisdom and Word, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

+ III +

REFLECTION

LEADER

We gather today, tasked with making a decision that will influence all facets of our organization. Let us recognize that we do not make this decision alone.

We have worked diligently in preparation, and we have listened in prayer. The choice before us is a matter of listening to the Spirit of God who is working in our world even now. This type of discernment has always been a hallmark practice of the congregations who founded Catholic health care.

Matthew's Gospel speaks of the Reign of God in many ways. As we prepare to listen to one way it is described and to reflect on how our own decision making contributes to this vision, let us be still in the presence of God and one another.

Allow time for silence.

DISCERNMENT

READER

A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew: MT 13:31-32

[Jesus] He proposed another parable to them.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field.

It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants.

It becomes a large bush, and the ‘birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.’”

Allow time for silence.

LEADER

Our work in Catholic health care is a participation in the Reign of God.

We hold in trust this ministry which has been handed up to us from the women and men who have come before us.

In this time of re-imagining, we pray that our wisdom and discernment may remain strong and secure for generations to follow.

CLOSING INVOCATION

LEADER

As we conclude, each of you is invited to name the gift of the Spirit that you seek for this group as we continue together in prayer and discernment.

Allow time for the group to invite the gifts of the Spirit.

COMMUNITY

Lord of heaven and earth,

send us Your spirit of wisdom and truth

that we may walk a path that leads to You.

Send us Your spirit of peace and love

that we may walk in joy,

and be witnesses to Your goodness.

Amen.

+ IV +

REFLECTION

LEADER

We gather today, tasked with making a decision that will influence all facets of our organization. Let us recognize that we do not make this decision alone.

We have worked diligently in preparation, and we have listened in prayer. The choice before us is a matter of listening to the Spirit of God who is working in our world even now. This type of discernment has always been a hallmark practice of the congregations who founded Catholic health care.

We take a moment now in silence to express our commitment to the community we have been entrusted to serve. May God's presence be felt as we enter this conversation, fully aware of the challenges that may accompany our exploration of right and just actions.

Allow time for silence.

DISCERNMENT

READER 1

“Discernment relies on intuition that has been informed by mature emotional dispositions. . . .

Discipleship is not based on carefully calibrating actions to an objective standard, as though discernment were some sort of surveying process. We become disciples by committing our lives to the Lord and taking seriously what Jesus took seriously. His attitudes take root in our dispositions and emotions: inclusive love, compassionate service, radical trust in God, gratitude, forgiveness, courage, a thirst for justice, nonviolence, freedom from anxiety, dependence on God, obedience. While the practice of meditation nurtures these dispositions, they have to be lived out in order to become deep habits of the heart. . . .

These dispositions together comprise a distinctive sensibility, rooted in the values of Jesus Christ, that is the basis of judgment for Christian discernment.”

WILLIAM C. SPOHN, *GO AND DO LIKEWISE: JESUS AND ETHICS*

Allow time for silence.

READER 2

You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you:
Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God (Mi 6:8).

Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect (Rom 12:2).

CLOSING INVOCATION

LEADER

As we conclude, each of you is invited to name the gift of the Spirit that you seek for this group as we continue together in prayer and discernment.

Allow time for the group to invite the gifts of the Spirit.

ALL

May our discernment ultimately reveal to us and those we serve that, as members of this community, each of us is dependent upon and responsible for the others.

LEADER

We ask You, Lord God, to be with us this day. Help us to remain committed to the ideals of this healing ministry to which You have called us. Please inspire each of us, individual members of this community, to contribute our wisdom and compassion to the betterment of those we serve.

ALL

Amen

PROPHETS OF A FUTURE NOT OUR OWN

THE OSCAR ROMERO PRAYER

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between
the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

BISHOP KEN UNTENER