

Cultivating a Discerning Disposition

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“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.”

(Romans 12:2)

INTRODUCTION

As caregivers, leaders and individuals called to work in Catholic health care, discernment is already familiar to us. Much has been written about this intentional decision-making process, and ministry leaders often speak about it. In recent years, mission leaders, CEOs and sponsors have contributed meaningful insight into the what and how of discernment. CHA also provides a framework for discernment in decision-making.¹ In each of these, we are offered spiritual guidance, clinical experience and practical considerations for “discerning the will of God.”

What does it mean to *discern the will of God*?

As you have discerned life, career and family paths, you might also have encountered or attempted to answer this question in your own lives. Age, grace and continued formation have all left their marks as each of us have embarked on life-changing decisions at home and at work. In a recent article on the topic of discernment,² Fr. Michael Rozier, SJ, names a shift in perspective that articulates well how my own answer has taken shape over time. That is, we *discern the will of God* through the cultivation of a *discerning disposition*.

This can be fostered by taking time each day to pray, learn something new, and notice what is stirring in our minds and hearts. It is through daily attentiveness and self-awareness that

we cultivate a *discerning disposition*.

The late spiritual writer Henri Nouwen, in his book *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*, articulates it this way:

The books we read, the nature we enjoy, the people we meet, and the events we experience contain within themselves signs of God’s presence and guidance day by day. When certain poems or scripture verses speak to us in a special way, when nature sings and creation reveals its glory, when particular people seem to be placed in our path, when a critical or current event seems full of meaning, it’s time to pay attention to the divine purpose to which they point.

Maybe you have wept upon encountering a poem or scripture passage that speaks “in a special way.” Perhaps you have a deep-felt sense of intuition, a feeling in your gut that leads the way. For others, the process may involve making lists of the pros and cons or conversations with trusted advisors and mentors. Even as we incorporate qualitative and quantitative data in our decisions, Fr. Rozier reminds us to reflect afterward so we can recognize patterns and deepen our practice of discernment.

REFLECTION

With our recognition of patterns and continued reflection, hopefully, our answer to what it means to discern the will of God deepens, becomes more nuanced, and adds more layers to our understanding with each decision we make. As we notice the signs of the times, the presence of the divine, and the inner and outer movements of our heads and hearts, may our attentiveness bring us to know “what is pleasing and perfect.”

Reflect on the following:

- In your own life, what does it mean to *discern the will of God*?
- Think of a time when you made a meaningful or life-changing decision. Can you point to specific data or signs that guided you to the right choice?

CLOSING PRAYER

God of transformation, God of quiet stirrings:

Root us in prayer deep enough to hear You and in community wide enough to reveal You.
Let Your signs of attentiveness rise gently in our days,
in the words that move us,
the beauty that surprises us,
the people placed before us,
and the moments rich with meaning.
Teach us to notice, to listen, to follow,
so that we might be renewed in mind and discerning in what is good.
Guide our steps in Your healing work.
Make wisdom our companion
and compassion our practice,
so that Your Kingdom can be realized through our work.
Through Christ, our Lord we pray.
Amen.

NOTES

1. “Decision-Making Informed by Discernment,” CHA, <https://www.chausa.org/docs/default-source/ethics/cha-na-discernment-guide-covid-v3.pdf>.
2. Fr. Michael Rozier, SJ, “How Do We Avoid the Misuse of Discernment in Decision-Making?,” *Health Progress* 105, no. 4 (2024): <https://www.chausa.org/news-and-publications/publications/health-progress/archives/fall-2024/how-do-we-avoid-the-misuse-of-discernment-in-decision-making>.