

Ignatian Discernment, Part One: What is Ignatian Discernment?

The board takes responsibility (together with the provincial) for this school as a Jesuit ministry. While Ignatian discernment of spirits serves essentially the spiritual life and activity of individuals, some of the dynamics of Ignatian discernment can be helpful to the board's deliberations. Let's start with four elements of Ignatian discernment for individuals. Ignatian discernment is:

1. **An activity of faith**, coming to know what God seeks for me and of me. Ignatius believed strongly that God enters personally into the minds and hearts of individuals. This experience assumes emotional health and reasonable freedom from biases—a healthy, open person. God's presence to such a person can occur through his or her thoughts and ideas, emotions and affect, conscience, desires, ups and downs. The Ignatian believer understands that God can be present in any of these experiences.
2. **Based in my experiences**, for example, in activities and interactions that are ordinary or those of greater significance. Any or all of these involve thinking and feeling, frustration, satisfaction, anxiety, peace, promise. In Ignatian discernment I reflect on such matters, noting those that stay with me and draw me to wonder why.
3. **An approach to know and understand myself better**. Reflection—my examining where this response to an experience comes from and where it leads—becomes the more formal part of discernment. Particularly, I attend to feelings that move me towards virtuous activity or not. I seek to realize what draws me towards emotional health and freedom, what God invites me to know for the sake of my spiritual well-being and my effectiveness for others. This gradually brings me to a deeper understanding of my values, needs, motivations, and aspirations.

Ignatian discernment involves intentional activity. While each person is unique in relating to God, a structure to support Ignatian discernment requires a habit of quiet reflection and prayer to build and sustain a personal relationship with God. In this prayer we grow increasingly aware of how God's spirit moves in our minds and hearts, drawing us to one direction rather than to another. Understanding and acting on this movement of spirit within us is what "Discernment of Spirits" is all about. A person engaging in this Ignatian discernment needs to share his or her experience with a knowledgeable companion who can help clarify how God is present and active.

4. **Orientation towards action**: Ignatian discernment is a means to "know God's will." The goal in this knowledge is my being a deeply whole person, truly happy. The criterion for choosing the right means to this goal is to live according to the values of Jesus Christ, which we know from the Gospels and which we see in leaders such as Pope Francis. The choices I make can be small, such as how manage my worry over a sick child; or more significant, such as how to get some seriously needed recreation; or clearly important, such as whether to accept a promotion that involves relocation.

Further items helpful to understanding Ignatian discernment:

- a. For a short explanation of the term “discernment of spirits” and the important role of consolation and desolation, see the item by Jesuit expert Joseph Tetlow.
<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits/discernment-in-a-nutshell/>
- b. For Ignatius’ description of consolation and desolation, [link to separate file—it is appended below—I’ve asked permission to use this text and am waiting to receive that.]
- c. For a description of how Ignatian discernment might help the work of a board, see “**Ignatian Discernment, Part Two: Ignatian Discernment and the Work of Our Board**”

[after the links]

Reflection questions:

1. What about Ignatian discernment interests or attracts you? Why?
2. Think of some times when you have experienced consolation. What was that experience like? What kind of impact did it have on you?
3. Think of some small choice or decision that you need to make in the near future. How could use Ignatian discernment to help make this choice?

[This concludes the fourth Board Formation module.]

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Separate file to be set up as a link to **item b** above.

From *What’s Your Decision?* by Sparough, Manney, and Hipskind, Loyola Press. pp 61-62