

To Know To Believe To Live – KBL2 Discernment Official Handout

02.13.21 Version

Developed by Msgr. Michael Clay

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DISCERNMENT

Identifying and Unleashing God's Gifts

I. Introduction:

- A. It is our belief that God has a divine plan for each and every one of us, a plan that is for our benefit and the benefit of others. But as any of us know who believe in God and believe that God has a plan for each and every one of us, a manual wasn't given to us with step-by-step instructions on how to discover and live out God's great plan.
- B. Because this is so, the Lord asks to accompany us and to equip us so we can discover and live out this great plan. This requires us to discern. The good news is that we are not doing this alone.
- C. The Lord accompanies us through the Holy Spirit. It's a partnership in which God takes great delight.
- D. Our life is a journey of discovering and living out this divine plan. The good news is that we are not left as orphans to figure this out exclusively on our own. God provides a variety of things to facilitate our journey. Here are just a few:
 - 1) the Holy Spirit,
 - 2) divine revelation that is contained in Scripture and the doctrinal/dogmatic teachings of the Church,
 - 3) the Church itself, in this sense a community of believers who support/accompany one another on the journey of discovery,
 - 4) the sacraments (especially the Eucharist), and
 - 5) charisms, gifts from God given to us in baptism that enable us to live our God's plan in a fulfilling way.
- E. Christians believe that fulfilling the divine plan involves living our lives as lifelong discerning missionary disciples.
 - 1) Lifelong:
 - a) Knowing ourselves and our purpose in life is a continually ongoing process of exploration and discovery. Who we were 10-20 years ago is not exactly who we are today. Our journey though life is a continually ongoing process.
 - b) Christians believe God has a plan for each and every one of us and that fulfilling that plan is a lifelong journey because it is that rich, complex, and incredible.
 - 2) Disciple:
 - a) Definition: A follower of Jesus Christ whom the follower believes to be the Son of God and therefore worth following and learning from through a lifelong journey of growth and commitment.
 - b) In baptism, we have become a brother or sister of Jesus Christ and are invited on a lifelong journey of following him/his teachings.

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3) Missionary:

- a) Christians hold that simply believing in Jesus Christ and following him is not sufficient to fulfill our calling as a Christian. We are also called to take what we have received and share it with others. The sharing is called our “mission.”
- b) A missionary is a disciple of Jesus Christ who goes forth to announce his Good News to others by word, deed, and example.

4) Discerning:

- a) There are many ways we can be missionary disciples but there are particular ways in which we have been equipped by the Lord to be particularly effective as missionary disciples.
- b) Discovering how we have been equipped and how we are to use the gifts that have been given to us is called discernment.

II. What and Why of Discernment:

- A. In the context of this series, discernment is not discerning simply for my own sake and well-being, important as this is. Discernment does start by inviting us to turn inward on a journey of discovery both of God and myself, but it doesn't end there.
- B. For the Christian, discernment is also discerning how I am to use the offices I received in my baptism and the charisms given to me by God in my baptism for the sake of serving others and promoting the Reign of God.
- C. Discernment has to do with acknowledging and figuring out what God is doing, how God is acting in our lives, and where God is leading us.
- D. Discernment presumes that discerners believe in God, that God wills only the good for us, and that God wants us to discover God's great plan for us, and, through us, for others.
- E. Is a closer looking at what is really happening in someone's life, either my own or someone else's.
- F. Takes time and focuses truly on God and God's invitation to live the great plan God has for the discernor.
- G. Is a way of life because it takes a lifetime to discover the depths of God's will, dream, or call for each of us.
- H. Requires a basic trust in God and belief that God “wants to truly bring us happiness, and that God wants to act in our lives” and is waiting for us to open ourselves to God who is waiting to accompany us on our journey through life.” (DD17)

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- I. Implies an openness to letting things unfold differently than we would initially want and a willingness to live in deep honesty (DD26)
- J. Means “sifting through or separating apart. In discernment, we are sifting through and separating out various feelings, beliefs, values, and inner voices in order to listen for and to the voice of the Spirit of God.” (DD14)
- K. Decision-making is based primarily on rationality (what the mind thinks). Discernment involves the heart, feelings, and gut instincts as well as what the mind knows. (DD15-16)
- L. Discussion:
 - 1) We are called to be lifelong discerning missionary disciples. Which of these four do you embrace most easily? Which one is the most challenging to embrace? Why?
 - 2) Christian discipleship normally includes some type of outreach/witness to others, either explicitly or implicitly. Describe a time you reached out/witnessed an office of your baptism and/or one of the charisms you received in your baptism to another person. What was the experience like?

III. The How of Discernment:

- A. Begins with “noticing what is happening in my life. Then, listening within to find out what is underneath the behavior associated with what is happening in my life, to discover the various feelings that may be operative by paying attention to them and praying in the midst of all this for clarity from the Lord.” (DD15)
- B. Letting ourselves see what is inside of us, for better and for worse, so we may sift through what is authentic about ourselves and what gets in the way of being authentically ourselves.
- C. Often involves discussion with others, especially those who are serious about discernment in their own lives because sometimes we’re too close to what is within us and need others outside us to help us clarify and name what may be happening inside us (DD28)
- D. Discernment ultimately rests on bringing our lives, as fully as possible, to the Lord and asking for direction on how we are to take what we have received as gift and use it for God’s glory and the benefit of others.

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IV. Challenges to Discernment:

- A. Emotions are “primary places where God’s Spirit moves us.” Paying attention to them, acknowledging them, allowing ourselves to feel them, telling God how we feel, and inviting God to guide us through them is important. (DD20)
 - 1) We can resist letting ourselves feel the feelings that are inside, because we’re afraid of them or culturally conditioned to suppress them. Negative feelings also are challenging because sometimes we’ve held onto them for so long that we can’t imagine living without them. (DD 20-21)
- B. Resistance to paying attention to our true feelings and our true selves and bringing our true selves to God in prayer. Resistance allows us to remain comfortable with our current lives but inhibits us from becoming our truer selves. Bringing resistance to prayer is helpful. (DD21)
 - 1) Examples: staying too busy so we do not have to feel loneliness, hurt, anxiety, or emptiness. Escape into virtual worlds, TV, internet, etc. Eating, drinking, using drugs to keep us from feeling what’s inside. Excessive shopping. (DD22)
- C. Inner voices (pre-recorded tapes), also known as ‘self-talk’ can get in the way as well. (DD22). Paying attention to the “shoulds” can be internalized messages from authorities in our lives (e.g., parents, bosses, etc.)
- D. Discussion:
 - 1) Everyone faces obstacles when it comes to discernment. Some more common obstacles include discomfort with our emotions, resistance to change which leads to an unknown future, and/or inner voices recorded earlier in life that assert themselves when discerning. Can you identify a challenge you have faced in discerning how to live as a missionary disciple? If so, what was it and how did you handle it?

V. Discernment Prayer:

Today, O God of all days, give me an experience of your heart. Draw me deep into your very being, into the core of your love for me, others, and the world. Give me a glimpse of others the way you see others: loving them, forgiving them, and delighting in the way they give glory to God through their very existence. Help me to discern out of that open place of deep affection so that I too might be a useful vessel of your love in the world. - Author Unknown <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/discernment>

VI. Bibliography:

Donna Steffen, S.C., *Discerning Disciples*. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.