Discernment Workbook
for Christian Ministries & Churches

A Christian Discernment Process to Empower Churches and Ministries to Discover their Calling
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discernment

Faithfully living and listening to God’s love and direction so that we can fulfill our individual calling and shared mission.
-Nouwen
Acknowledgment

This undertaking began with an email to a large group of folks asking, “How do you discern?” The responses to that simple question grew into a significant project to provide a simple resource to help churches and ministries develop the muscles of spiritual discernment. This workbook results from many people’s hard work, sage-like wisdom, helpful feedback, and creativity.

First, I would like to acknowledge the support provided by Bishop Fairley and his Operational Team. He and his team provided the encouragement and accountability necessary to complete this project. Those who know Bishop Fairley will see the influence of his spirit of grace in this discernment process.

This workbook was significantly influenced by “Guidelines for Communal Discernment” by Victoria G. Curtiss. We have made every effort to cite her work throughout the document, but her thinking substantially influenced the overall design of this process. A link to her work can be found in the resource section of the workbook in Appendix C page 46.

This project came to fruition because of the considerable work of a superb team. The Design Team, which I had the privilege to lead, was made up of Aaron Bouwens, Phil Bradley, Brenda Branson, Janet Carden, Troy Elmore, and Alan Wild. Their dedication, creativity, prayerful reflection, and wisdom were invaluable. As the lead writer, I was tasked with taking the material and converting it into the workbook format you have – but I could not have done it without this group.

In addition to their work was the feedback of many pastors and leaders who tested and improved the workbook and process. Special thanks also go to two Conference staff members, Alan Wild for his editing skills, and Cindy Young, who used her creativity and graphic design skills to bring the workbook to life.

Lastly, it was the entire team’s hope that what we produced and how it would be used would honor Jesus and assist in making passionate spiritual disciples of Jesus Christ. That remains our prayer as you use this tool in your ministry setting.

Sincerely,

William Moore
Director of Connectional Ministries, Kentucky Annual Conference
Design Team Leader
Why Discernment?

The Lord is at work! The lost are being saved, the hungry are being fed, the sick are being healed, disciples are being trained, kids are learning, youth are growing in faith, the lonely are finding fellowship, and justice is being proclaimed. The Lord is doing far more than we can ever imagine. The Lord is at work! The question is, “how can we participate in what the Lord is already doing?” What would the Lord have us do to join in his gracious work in the world? This discernment tool aims to help us see what the Lord is doing and hear where the Lord is calling. It is hoped that much of this will feel familiar to you and your team. This workbook attempts to create an easy-to-follow process of listening together for the voice of God. Most of this tool is simply discussion questions. But asking the right question at the right time is vital to effective discernment.

What is Discernment?

According to Merriam-Webster, discernment is the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure. This general definition is helpful but does not fully capture what we seek to do as Christians within the Church. There is a spiritual dimension that is not captured in this definition.

Paul writes in Colossians 1:9-10, “We ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord.”

Here we recognize a spiritual component.
**EXERCISE: TAKE TIME TO READ COLOSSIANS 1:9-10 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NRS Colossians 1:9-10</th>
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<td>“For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.”</td>
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- What is the purpose of “spiritual wisdom and understanding” in this passage?
  
- What connection does the writer make between knowledge and actions?
  
- What fruit do you envision the Lord may be calling your church or local ministry to produce?
  
- Why is understanding God’s love important in discernment?
In an early theological essay titled “Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” John Wesley points out the importance of faith in Christian discernment.

“Faith is that divine evidence whereby the spiritual man [person] discerneth God, and the things of God. It is with regard to the spiritual world, what sense is with regard to the natural. It is the spiritual sensation of every soul that is born of God.”

Consider the faith needed to go through the discernment process ahead. In what ways will you bolster the faith of your team and ministry during this decision-making time?
Henri Nouwen offers a definition of discernment in his book, “Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life.” He writes:

“Discernment is faithful living and listening to God’s love and direction so that we can fulfill our individual calling and shared mission.”

While he writes primarily about individual discernment, his definition is helpful as we consider discernment for a church or ministry. In the same way that we each have our own calling that supports the more extensive work of Christ in the world, local churches and ministries also have a particular calling that is intended to support the shared mission of the Church universal.

Why do you think Nouwen included faithful living along with listening in his definition of discernment?

How would you describe God’s love to someone unfamiliar with the Bible and the story of Jesus?

Why is understanding God’s love important in discernment?

Why might two different people or ministries both be discerning their calling yet come to a different conclusion as to where the Lord is leading them?
Throughout the rest of this workbook, our working definition will be that discernment is the faithful living and listening to God’s love and direction so that we can fulfill our individual [churches’ or ministries’] calling and shared mission. This workbook aims to assist you and your team in not just deciding what is best for your ministry but helping you determine what the Lord is calling you to do as part of the larger mission of Christ in the world.

“Discernment is faithful living and listening to God’s love and direction so that we can fulfill our individual [churches’ or ministries’] calling and shared mission.”

**Next Steps...**

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:** Split up into groups of two or three. Imagine you walk out of this room, and someone asks what you were doing. You tell them that you were learning about discernment. They respond that they must hurry off to another commitment, but they would love to hear what you mean by discernment. Have each person spend a couple of minutes sharing how they would explain discernment to someone unfamiliar with the topic.

**Overview of the Process**

This workbook outlines six significant steps in the discernment process: **FORMING, KNOWING, GATHERING, FILTERING, DECIDING,** and **DOING.** Each step is essential and requires your full attention. Depending on what you are discerning and the work your ministry has already done will determine the amount of time needed for each step. While jumping ahead to filtering and doing may be tempting, the process is most valuable if you work through each step.

The diagram on the opposite page visualizes the process.

While the discernment process appears very linear, you will likely need to circle back several times to already completed portions of the process. The higher the stakes of your decision, the more you will want to circle back, gather more information, clarify and make sure your assumptions are correct. It is not unusual to discover you don’t have enough information or your team’s thinking is not as clear and straightforward as you initially assumed. But these are not setbacks. These are all opportunities for the Holy Spirit to be at work. Don’t run from the opportunity to pray more, think harder, and talk more. Discernment seeks more than group agreement. The goal is to recognize when “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28). Sometimes, that recognition comes when God’s presence settles over the group in silence. Sometimes, a joyous convergence of direction brings a sense of peace and rightness.
Forming a Team

Create a Covenant → Coming Together → Rhythm of Prayer

Knowing the Right Question

Gathering Your Options

1 2 3 4 5

Filtering Your Options

BUILD YOUR FILTERS

Contextual Filter → Potential Outcome Filter → Theological Filter

Deciding

Going & Doing
Here is a brief overview of the steps we will be walking through:

1. **FORMING**
   Forming a team that can have honest, Spirit-filled conversations.

2. **KNOWING**
   Ensuring the team knows the right question to ask and all the options.

3. **GATHERING**
   Discovering and learning about your options.

4. **FILTERING**
   Passing your options through three filters.

5. **DECIDING**
   Deciding as a team where the Lord is leading.

6. **GOING & DOING**
   Planning the next steps.

Each stage is significant and includes essential steps. This tool will assist you in working through each stage and phase of discernment. Under each step, we will offer some ideas, suggestions, or exercises to help in your journey to discernment.
Forming a Team

This discernment process is designed to be done by a team of persons on behalf of the church or ministry. It is not for a heroic solo leader to discern God’s will on behalf of the ministry. In Acts 15, we see the church coming together to discern, decide and set the course for future ministry.

EXERCISE: TAKE SOME TIME TO READ ACTS 15:1-35 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- What were the church leaders trying to discern in Acts 15?
- Did they all agree at the beginning of their time together?
- How did they act and relate to each other?

Qualities of a Good Team

Good teams have a purpose and a goal. Sports teams have a goal of winning games, educational teams have a goal of increasing understanding and learning, and engineering teams might have a goal of building a bridge or a rocket. Your team will need a shared purpose and a goal around discernment.

You may already have a team adept at discernment and can take on discerning the issue at hand. If you don’t already have this type of team, you will need to form a new team. For the sake of time, it may be tempting to give an already existing team a new goal. But this can present its own challenges; in the same way, there would be difficulties if you asked a basketball team to build a bridge. You will want a team that is all-in on the common goal of discernment.
If you are building a new team, consider some things. The first is the size of the group. Generally, teams over 12 people find it challenging to function relatively quickly and to have crucial conversations. The larger the team and the more lines of communication, the more challenging it is to process information. But you also need a group big enough to bring a diversity of thought and a plethora of ideas to the table. Limiting the size of the team doesn’t mean limiting the input or the final say in important decisions. The team can and should talk with a broad group of people in the organization. Also, depending on the decision, it may need to go to a representative body for final approval.

In Patrick Lencioni’s helpful book “The Ideal Team Player,” he writes that you want people on your team who are humble, hungry, and smart. As you think about team members, you will first want humble people. People who listen to others are humble about their thoughts and opinions, don’t insist on their way, engage in discussion, and put others first to make good team members. Also, it is essential to have people who are hungry and have a passion for the team’s work. The team members must be hungry for the same thing in order to discern your ministry’s part in the larger mission. Those with a personal agenda, a hunger all their own, will not be helpful in discernment. Finally, you will want people who have people smarts. Lencioni is not talking about IQ smarts but people smarts. You need team members who can have difficult conversations, work through misunderstandings, come across as loving, and help others to communicate their thoughts. Fill your team with the humble, hungry, and smart.

**Humble**
Don’t insist on their own way, engage in discussion, put others first, humble about one’s own thoughts.

**Hungry**
Will have a deep desire to see the team achieve its goal and will work hard and sacrifice to achieve that goal.

**People Smart**
Good with others, can have difficult conversations, come across as loving, and work through misunderstandings.
Coming Together

Nothing beats team-building and coming together more than shared experiences. Many sports teams spend hours practicing, eating, traveling, and learning together before they ever play their first game. Something about a shared experience brings a group of people together. Your team’s history together and shared experiences will determine how much time you will need to spend in group-building. You may need to spend a lot of time building relationships before diving into the work of discernment.

Each time you get together, it is crucial that you have some shared experience beyond the work of discernment. Before rushing into the work, be sure to have a short worship service [See Appendix page 44], study a passage of Scripture, or share glory sightings.

GROUP BUILDING IDEAS

- Cook and share a meal.
- Play a game or games.
- Do a service project.
- Go on a ropes course.
- Share in worship.
- Take a short trip.
- Go on a retreat.
- Do a work project at the church.
Create a Covenant
As your team forms, it will be essential to agree on how you will operate and live together as a team. Creating a covenant gives the team a shared experience and provides guidelines for your time together. A covenant can be simple or complex, depending on the group’s needs. Take the time to outline essential expectations.

From a UMC.org feature article, “The 5W’s and 1H of Christian Conferencing,” Crystal Caviness writes:

Through a means of communication called Christian conferencing— or holy conferencing — participants are encouraged to discern the Holy Spirit in their decision-making process. This sacred form of communication, however, is not limited to difficult discussions. As Christians, United Methodists are urged to bring holy conferencing into all interactions.

The term “holy conferencing” reflects that, “in our speech and our actions and our relationships, we’re looking for a more excellent way in … how we treat each other,” writes Bishop Sally Dyck of the Northern Illinois Conference. Dyck, who authored a study guide titled “Eight Principles of Holy Conferencing,” adds that these principles are especially important when discussing controversial topics.

Christian conferencing dates back to Wesley’s times when the founder of the Methodist movement sought to engage members and clergy in small groups to encourage listening and learning from one another, with a focus on mutual understanding. With Wesley’s Christian conferencing, there were no winners or losers, only those who desired to discern God’s will.
Here are the eight principles, with accompanying Scripture verses, cited in Bishop Dyck’s white paper:  

1. **Every Person is a Child of God.** “If he won’t love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can’t see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You’ve got to love both.” (I John 4:20-21, The Message)

2. **Listen Before Speaking** “Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don’t see things the way you do. And don’t jump all over them every time they do or say something you don’t agree with.” (Romans 14:1, The Message)

3. **Strive to Understand from Another’s Point of View** “He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.” (Philemon 2:8, NRSV)

4. **Strive to Reflect Accurately the Views of Others** “I tell you, on the Day of Judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:36-37, NRSV)

5. **Disagree without Being Disagreeable** “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:1-2a, NRSV)

6. **Speak About Issues; Do Not Defame People** “The simple moral fact is that words kill.” (Matthew 5:22, The Message)


8. **Let Prayer Interrupt Your Busy-Ness** “Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, NASB)

Participants should agree to follow the above principles throughout this process to facilitate civil discourse and group discernment. We recommend developing a covenant to guide the discernment process. These covenants outline the principles that the group will follow throughout the discernment process and how we hold each other accountable during the process. The team should develop its own covenant using the above principles as a starting place.
EXERCISE: TAKE TIME ON A WHITEBOARD, NEWSPRINT, OR SHARED COMPUTER SCREEN TO WRITE A COVENANT TOGETHER.

Let’s Brainstorm
Sample of a Covenant for Communal Discernment by Victoria G. Curtiss

As Christians called to model the body of Christ, we will:

- Be intentional in developing relationships with one another in order to build and maintain Christian community and foster trust, even when discussion may at times be tense;
- Rely on prayer, Scripture, listening, and deep engagement with Christ and each other;
- Act in a spirit of truth and love, honoring the truth that God works through each member of the body;
- Engage in conversation and ongoing study together in such areas as Scripture, theology, church, vocation, and gifts of the Holy Spirit;
- Share adequate information with the whole body;
- Learn about the various perspectives on the topic;
- Use I-messages to speak openly and transparently regarding one’s intentions, concerns, values, and interests;
- Speak from our personal experiences related to the subject;
- Listen attentively and with respect and openness to our sisters and brothers, believing that all desire to be faithful to Jesus Christ;
- Respond after restating what we have heard and asking for any clarification;
- Focus on ideas instead of questioning people’s motives, intelligence, or integrity;
- Refrain from name calling or using labels;
- Desist from “calling for the question” in order to remain open to the vision God holds for us all and to find win/win solutions where possible; and
- Articulate what the largest portion of the body senses is the leading of the Holy Spirit.
Rhythm of Prayer
Central to discernment is the ability of individuals and the team to listen to God. We listen to God in many ways. However, prayer is a powerful means the Lord has given for the people of God to hear his voice. Your team will need to engage in a regular rhythm of individual and corporate prayer. You will want to pray inside and outside of meeting times and make yourself available to hear from God. (Additional prayers and resources for prayer can be found in the Appendix on page 41.)

EXERCISE: GROUP PRAYER EXPERIENCE.
Take about 10 minutes and have each person write a prayer for your team and the discernment process. Then have each person prayerfully read what they wrote. After the team goes through each prayer, answer the following questions.

What common themes did you hear in the prayers?

What was unique to your prayer?

As a group, agree to a rhythm of prayer for when you are meeting and between meetings. (Does it need to be added to your covenant?)
KNOWING THE RIGHT QUESTION

Making the right decisions requires asking the right questions or better questions. For example, if the question is whether to buy a Chevrolet or Ford truck, the better question might be whether I can afford to buy a truck at this time.

As a team, you must make sure you are discerning the right question. Later in the process, you will seek the Lord’s direction on one clearly stated question. Let’s make sure that is the right question. Also, this step is crucial because it ensures that your whole team is on the same page.

EXERCISE: AS A TEAM, WALK THROUGH THE FOLLOWING STEPS.
(Be sure to include everyone in the conversation. Those who talk a lot should wait for others to share first, and those who tend to be quiet should make an effort to add their voice to the discussion.)

Getting to the right question:
• Pray for the Lord’s guidance in asking the right question.

• Have each person share what they believe is the core issue at hand.

• List what you think are some side issues affected by the core issue but could quickly become distractions.

• Take a moment and have one or two people tell how they would explain what you are trying to discern to someone outside your church or ministry who is unfamiliar with your situation.

• Have each person write the core question in their own words.

• On newsprint, whiteboard, or shared computer screen, form the question that your team will be discerning around.
- Take the time to wordsmith the question.

- Ask: Does this question get to the heart of the matter?

- Ask: Will answering this question set us on course to mission and ministry?

- Ask: Is the question clear and straightforward?

- Would someone outside this group understand what we are asking or seeking from God?
It is still possible that later in the discernment process, you will discover this is not the core or most important question you need discernment around. Or you may find that there is another question you need to discern before coming to this question. If that happens, don’t worry! Work your way through this process again and seek to bring clarity to the core question for which you are seeking discernment, and state it clearly.

Let’s Brainstorm

Write the core question you will be discerning to the right.
GATHERING YOUR OPTIONS

You now have a straightforward question in which you are seeking the Lord’s direction. If you are seeking discernment, that means there is more than one option. At this stage, we want to discover as many options as possible. Rarely are there even just two options. Likely there are many options, but sometimes our limited thinking prevents us from seeing all the possibilities. Ephesians 3:20-21 captures God’s ability to do far more than we can imagine.

EXERCISE: READ EPHESIANS 3:20-21 AND REFLECT ON THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

“Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us; glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, forever and always. Amen.” CEB Ephesians 3:20-21

List some stories from the Bible where the Lord did far more than the biblical character seemed able to imagine.

Share a story of a time you witnessed the Lord doing something beyond what you could have imagined.
We now want to use creative thinking and imagination to allow the Holy Spirit to open up the possibilities of where the Lord might be leading. Later you will have the opportunity to evaluate and judge each option critically, but this is not the time for that. Don’t say, “that won’t work,” or “that is a silly idea.” The Lord often uses that which looks impossible or silly to bring about his kingdom.

**EXERCISE: AS A TEAM, WALK THROUGH THE FOLLOWING STEPS.**

- Begin by praying that the Lord might open your eyes to the possibilities.

- List the easy ones. Begin by listing the most obvious possibilities.

- Pass out index cards or small sheets of paper. Have each person write at least three possible options. They can be crazy, creative, or don’t even have to make sense fully.

- After everyone has three, have them share out loud and add them to the list of the easy ones.

- Next, have each person pick one of the items off the list and add something to what is already there. (For example: Imagine you are discerning what to do with the floors in the church. Someone has suggested putting down a green shag carpet. You can add to that idea that it should also have a purple border.)

- You should now have a creative list of possibilities.

- On the other side of the index card, have each person write their three favorite possibilities.

- Poll the group and tally up the top 3 to 5 possibilities to explore. (Hang on to the others; you may need them later.)
• List below the top 3 to 5 options your team plans to explore.

Let’s Brainstorm

List of Options We Will Explore

Your team will now want to gather information about each of these options. Later we will filter the options to see if they are suitable for your church or ministry. You can create small groups or give each team member one of the options to gather facts and information. After gathering the information, you will fill out an Option Factsheet (page 49) that will distill the information for the filtering process.
EXERCISE: ANSWER AS MANY OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITY FOR EACH OF YOUR OPTIONS. Depending on your discernment question, not all these questions may apply. This initial stage is to get as much information as possible. Later we will pare it down to a more manageable summary.

Section A

What will this option do? (This may be reflected as a mission or a mission statement.)

What will this option require us to do?

What does this option claim to do?

What evidence is there that this option will do as it claims?

Where is this option leading? (This may be reflected as a vision or vision statement.)

What goal does this option claim to achieve?

What evidence is there that this option will achieve its goal?

What values do this option claim or appear to support?

What will this option cost or require? (Including time, financial, leadership, space and other resources.)
Section B

What theological claims does this option make?

Using Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, outline any theological implications of this option.

What argument from Scripture might be used to support this option?

Section C

Use the Consequences Worksheet (page 51) and list some likely outcomes of this option.

(Read the following section before using the worksheet.)
Consider the Consequences

As part of the discernment process, we want to consider the consequences of each option. There can be good or bad consequences for any decision we make; in some cases, a determination can have some good and some bad consequences. The Consider the Consequences Worksheet (page 51) will help you thoroughly consider the positive and negative consequences.

Often, we can guess the immediate or first-order consequences of a decision. But what we want to do is to look further down the road. What will be the consequences of the consequences? We call these second-order consequences. And if possible, we want to consider the consequences of the consequences of the consequences of the option we are considering. These are called third-order consequences. While predicting third-order consequences require a lot of speculation, the exercise of putting them down on paper is beneficial in avoiding unintended consequences.

Example of first-, second-, and third-order consequences:
I am considering if I should eat a big piece of chocolate cake after dinner. I love chocolate cake! A positive first-order consequence is that I feel a sense of delight and satisfaction with each bite of cake. Because of that sense of happiness, I began to eat a big piece of chocolate cake every night after dinner to make me feel happy and content, which is a second-order consequence that could be considered positive. After months of eating chocolate cake and feeling good each evening, I gained significant weight and became pre-diabetic. That is the third-order consequence, which is clearly negative. Sometimes the initial results appear good, but when forced to consider the long-term implications, we discover they are perilous.

The opposite can also be true. The initial consequences of an option might look negative, but coming to discover what initially is going to be hard or challenging can result in positive second- and third-order consequences. An excellent example of this would be heart bypass surgery. The initial consequences are pain, weakness, and an extended hospital stay, but the second- and third-order consequences are a better quality of life and longer life.

The Consider the Consequences Worksheet (page 51) will help you think about each option. Fill out a worksheet for each option placing a consequence in each block. Then mark in the circle if that consequence is positive (+) or negative (-). Save these worksheets to use later in creating your fact sheet and filtering your options.

Next Steps...

Option Summary Sheet
Next, you will take what you learned from answering the questions and finishing the worksheet to complete the Option Summary Sheet (page 49) for each option you are considering. This will consolidate and condense the information into a one-page summary allowing you to more easily share information with others and filter your options later in the discernment process.
FILTERING YOUR OPTIONS

Now that we have a team, our core question, and some possibilities, we need to begin discerning where the Lord is leading. During this step, we are listening to the Lord through the team’s work, gathering information, answering key questions, and running our possibilities through a set of helpful filters.

**Three key questions that help us to discern are:**

- *What is the Lord already doing?*
- *What is the Lord saying?*
- *Where might the Lord be leading?*

We want to use these filters to gain greater clarity about where the Lord may be leading. The first filter we call the **context filter**. This filter helps us to see what the Lord has already been doing and is doing in the context of our ministry. It is comforting to know that God has already been at work in and through us and, in some cases, for a very long time. How the Lord wants to use you next is not disconnected from how he has already been using you.

The second filter we call the **theological filter**. The Lord has already spoken to God’s people and the church. His voice to his Church helps us know and understand what the Lord would have us do next. In our Methodist tradition, we refer to this tool or filter as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

The third filter we will use is the **potential outcome filter**. It is helpful in discernment to consider the possible outcomes of any path forward. Some potential consequences might qualify or disqualify an option.

Before running our options through the filters, we will need to set them up. A more robust filter will require more information, time, and energy. If you are discerning about a significant issue in the church, you will want to take the time and effort to build filters that will bring about the most clarity. Your church or ministry may have already established some things needed for filtering. If the work has not already been done, take the time necessary.
Setting Up Your Contextual Filter

At the heart of this filter is your team’s ability to recognize and describe what the Lord is already doing in and through your ministry. The Lord has been leading and using you all along. While he may now lead in what appears to be an exciting new direction, that direction is not detached from your past or your current setting. By gathering the following information or formally stating it, you can answer some essential questions when it comes time to filter each of your options.

EXERCISE: AS A TEAM, WALK THROUGH THE FOLLOWING STEPS.

Section A

State your church’s or ministry’s mission (Your mission is a statement of what you do. It captures the core function of your church or organization. For example, the mission of the United Methodist Church is that we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world):

State your vision (Vision is a statement of what you expect to happen as you live out your mission):
**List out your values** (Values are criteria or standards that drive beliefs and behaviors. Values are often used to help individuals or groups determine what is right and wrong):

You can begin figuring out your church’s core values by answering the following question:

- What is important to us?
- What is non-negotiable for us?
- What is it that we would risk it all for?

Sometimes we have preferred or stated values, but we actually value something very different in day-to-day life. An example would be a church that says it values ministry to kids in the community but stops having VBS because the carpet in the fellowship hall had Kool-Aid spills that left stains. The preferred value is a ministry to children, but the existing value is actually a clean, nice carpet in the fellowship hall. Spend some time honestly listing what you believe are your church’s or ministry’s preferred values and existing values.
Identify and list essential factors in your internal context (Some context pieces help make almost any decision. Accurate information about your size, attendance trends, financial position, demographic makeup, and unique ministry assets is generally beneficial. Depending on the question you are discerning, you may need additional or more detailed information. For example, suppose you are looking to build a gym in the church. In that case, you may need additional demographic information about the financial position of your church’s members and regular attendees. However, if you are looking to start an outdoor soccer ministry, it will be more important to know if you have enough flat land.)

Identify and list essential factors in your external context (Here, you want to list external factors that might be important to your decision-making process. Once again, general demographics tend to be helpful. Things like population growth, education levels, family makeup, poverty level, and average income are generally beneficial and available through the Annual Conference. Sometimes it is important to look at other churches or ministries in your community to see what the Lord is already doing. For example, if five other churches are already doing a ministry, perhaps the Lord is calling you to something different or new.)

Now that you have collected this information, have a team member summarize and consolidate it onto Section A of the Ministry Summary Sheet (page 53).
Setting Up Your Theological Filter

As United Methodists, one of our key tenets is the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Given its importance in our Wesleyan theology, it stands to reason that it should be a crucial cornerstone of the discernment process. (Interestingly enough, John Wesley never used the term “Wesleyan Quadrilateral.” It was coined by the 20th-century Methodist theologian Albert C. Outler.)

Before we go further, here’s a quick review of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: The components or “sides” of the Quadrilateral are (1) Scripture, (2) tradition, (3) reason, and (4) experience. According to information on umc.org, the concept originates in the Anglican theological tradition, although John Wesley himself added the fourth emphasis, experience.

United Methodists consider Scripture the primary source and standard for Christian doctrine – the four sides of the Quadrilateral are not regarded as equal (BOD ¶105). It was not Outler’s intention to present the four areas as equal. John Wesley writes in his Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament, “The Scripture, therefore, of the Old and New Testaments is a most solid and precious system of divine truth.”

As for tradition, Wesley’s Anglican background is shown. One of our team members for this document recalls that during a previous appointment, his best friend in town was a second-career Anglican priest, Father Bob. Whenever there was a mention of “tradition,” Father Bob liked to quote Jude 1:3: “Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”

Reason “is the individual’s understanding and appropriating of the faith in the light of his or her own life,” according to the UMC website. Through reason, “the individual Christian brings to bear on the Christian faith discerning and cogent thought.” Some of us find this element positive, emphasizing our faith as one where you don’t have to park your brain at the door.

The case could be made that experience is the most subjective of the four elements. When divorced from the primacy of Scripture, who is to say that any particular “experience” is proper or improper? However, the Holy Spirit can and does use human experience in the discernment process.

The Quadrilateral is helpful as we discern how the Lord might lead us individually, as a ministry, or as a church.
**Build Your Theological Filter**

We will now process a set of questions that will help us build a theological filter that can later be used to process the options we identified earlier. While you may have a “theological expert” on your team, the whole team must contribute to this filter. Each person’s perspective is essential and valued in this process.

**EXERCISE: AS A TEAM, WALK THROUGH THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.**

**Section B**

**What are the theological issues at stake with the question your team is addressing?** (It will be essential to think broadly at this point. Theological matters like the nature of the church, the mission of Jesus, an understanding of sin and grace, and an understanding of justice, faith, and salvation can all be critical to your decision.)

Narrow your list to what you believe will be the core theological issues. Set the others aside for now but know that you might have to consider them later.
How does Scripture address each of these theological issues? (As you consider Scripture, look not only at the text that specifically addresses the subject but also narratives or stories that speak to the topic. Also, be sure to look at Scripture in context and as part of the larger narrative of the Bible.)

How has Christian tradition addressed each of these theological issues?

What is your reasoned response to each theological issue?

How do we experience the leading of the Holy Spirit on each theological question?

Reminder: Where there appear to be differences between Quadrilateral elements, we are to look to the primacy of Scripture.

Once you have collected this information, have a team member put it into Section B of the Ministry Summary Sheet (page 53). This information will be used later to filter your options.
Setting Up Your Potential Outcome Filter
The third filter we want to use in our discernment is to consider where the Lord might be leading. We call this our potential outcome filter. We cannot predict the future, but we can make some educated guesses about what might happen if we choose a particular option. We teach kids and teenagers to consider the consequences as they make decisions, and we want to do the same thing. Sometimes it is as we consider the outcome that space is made for God to speak to us and lead us in one direction.

EXERCISE: AS A TEAM, DISCUSS AND CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING ITEMS.

List outcomes that would disqualify an option from final consideration.
(Example: Acquiring so much debt that we could not do key ministries.)

List outcomes that would be preferred. (Example: A decision that would result in the growth of our children’s ministry.)

Once you have collected this information, have a team member put it together into Section C of the Ministry Summary Sheet (page 53). This information will be used later to filter your options.

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, “this fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” NRS Luke 14:28-30
FILTERING YOUR OPTIONS

You have determined the core questions, listed some options, gathered information about those options, developed three discernment filters based on your ministry, and now you are ready to begin filtering your options. All the prework will help your team discern where the Lord might be leading. It will be essential to cover this portion of your work in prayer. Remember, discernment is faithful living and listening to God’s love and direction so that we can fulfill our individual calling and shared mission.

You will now want to run each option through each filter, determining if it qualifies as a viable option. You may need a little space for this. Lay out our Ministry Summary Sheet next to one of the Option Summary Sheets, and then answer the questions found on the Filter Sheet (page 55).
The questions on the **Filter Sheet** are simply helping your team to compare what you have learned about any given option against what you know about your ministry to determine if that is a viable option for your ministry. You are filtering based on your context, theology, and potential outcomes. Be mindful of what the Lord is already doing, what the Lord is saying, and where the Lord may be leading.

Using the corresponding section letters and numbers on the three sheets, you can clearly and quickly respond to each filtering question. Take time as a team to discuss and process each inquiry. After completing sections, A, B, and C, you will need to answer the two questions at the bottom, determining if this is a viable option for your ministry and worthy of further consideration.

Do this same process for each of the options that you are considering.

Following the filtering process, you will likely have a shorter list of possible options or be left with just one option. If you discover none of your current options make it through the filtering process, you will need to return to one of two places. You may need to reconsider if you are asking the right question, go through the “gathering your options” process, or consider one of the options you did not initially explore. Do not get discouraged if this is the case. You have grown as a team, learned a lot about your ministry, and avoided some pitfalls.

**List below the options your team has filtered out and the choices you will consider further.**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualified</th>
<th>Filtered Out</th>
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It is likely that the Holy Spirit has been leading and speaking all through this process. Your team may have reached a consensus about where you feel the Lord is leading, and now you are ready to formalize that decision. Or your team may have to listen a little longer. You are looking for an Acts 15:28 moment where it seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us. Below are some exercises that may help the team come to a final decision. These suggestions come from Victoria G. Curtiss’ excellent resource, “Guidelines for Communal Discernment.”

**EXERCISE: AS A TEAM, FLOAT A TRIAL BALLOON AND HAVE PEOPLE SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS THROUGH THE FIVE-FINGER METHOD.**

**Prayer:**
Spend some time together in prayer. One way to approach this time would be to go into the sanctuary or another sacred space within the church or ministry complex. Light a candle to be reminded of the presence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and in your company. Silently or out loud, pray for the following things:

- Give thanks for all the Lord has done and is doing.
- Pray for your community.
- Pray that the Lord may use your church for His larger mission and purposes.
- Pray that your team might clearly listen and discern where the Lord is leading.
- Give thanks again for what the Lord is doing.

**Review:**
Quickly review the definition of discernment, your core question, and the options that have made it through the filtering process.

**Trial Balloon:**
The team leader or another group member uses tentative language to suggest where they feel the Holy Spirit is leading. It might sound like this: “It seems we have had a lot of energy and discussion around option two. Is the Holy Spirit leading us toward this option?” You will now want to have an honest discussion, ensuring that everyone participates.
**Five Finger Method:**
This method is helpful if you have some reluctant people to give their opinion. At one time, all group members hold up a number of fingers to indicate their level of support for one or more of the options.

- **Five fingers** = I am fully supportive.
- **Four fingers** = I am mostly in agreement and am willing to support the majority.
- **Three fingers** = I have questions or reservations but am willing to stand aside, or I am not persuaded and need to hear more from those who support this.
- **Two fingers** = I am somewhat opposed and have concerns.
- **One finger** = I cannot support this at this time.

It is best if the group decides in advance what level of support is needed to determine if you have consensus or agreement. Likely, if most of the group has 4’s and 5’s, you are close or have consensus. If you have 1’s, 2’s, or 3’s, you will need to have additional conversations, consider other options, or circle back through some of the discernment processes.

**Reminder:**
Discernment is not the same as Robert’s Rules of Order. There are times and places when Robert’s Rules of Order are helpful. It works well in larger bodies doing primarily legislative work. A simple majority may suffice for legislative work but is insufficient for discernment. While it may not be possible to get complete agreement, even in a well-formed team, you want a sense that the vast majority of the team tasked with discernment feels that this is where the Lord is leading.

**Rest with the Decision:**
After a decision has been made, take time to rest with it. While talking with people about how they go about personal discernment, many indicated the importance of feeling a sense of peace. After a bit of time, is the team still at peace with their decision?

After coming to a conclusion, agree as a team to rest on the decision. Set a time when you will come back together, even for just a short meeting, to check in and make sure hearts are at peace. If the team is still not at ease, you can revisit one or more steps in the process. If spirits are at peace, you can go on to the final step of GOING.
GOING AND DOING

Taking the next steps is as important as discerning; setting your next steps so that you go where the Lord is leading you is vital. Making the final decision and taking the next steps may not be the job of the discernment team. However, it will be helpful if this team establishes the next few steps that need to be taken and who will be responsible. Sometimes the discernment needs to be ratified by a formal body in the church or ministry. Seeing that your work is appropriately brought before the body will be vital.

Some questions to consider:
What needs to be communicated, to whom, and when?

What official action or actions need to be taken?

Who will lead the efforts to see those actions are taken?

When will these next steps take place?

How will you share what you experienced in this process?

As you end your time together, commit to continue to pray for your church or ministry, and all the Lord might do that is far more than we can ask or imagine.

“Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us; glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, forever and always. Amen.” CEB Ephesians 3:20–21
Appendix A: The Importance of Prayer
By Brenda Branson

Prayer is a vital part of the discernment process as we seek God’s wisdom. As James 1: 5-8 (NLT) says:

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.

In a 1945 essay titled “Prayer,” Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel writes: “Contact with Him is not our achievement. It is a gift, coming down to us from on high like a meteor, rather than rising up like a rocket. Before the words of prayer come to the lips, the mind must believe in God’s willingness to draw near to us, and in our ability to clear the path for His approach. Such belief is the idea that leads us toward prayer.”

We can identify at least four types of prayer while we are in the process of discernment:

• **Continuous prayer:** Start with an open, teachable spirit — open to God’s Spirit and open to challenges that might be uncomfortable or terrifying.

• **Wrestling prayer:** Present your thoughts to God as honestly as possible, expressing your initial inclination, admitting good and bad motives and desires for a particular outcome (much like an opening argument by an attorney at a trial), and asking for God’s wisdom.

• **Surrendering, intentional prayer:** “I need to hear your voice, whatever you might say. I just need to hear your voice. Show me the way.” (lyrics from the song “Shepherd” by Todd Agnew). And honestly mean it. Be willing to hear what you might not want to hear and be willing to do whatever God says.

• **Actively waiting and patiently listening:** Trust that God is good and he will answer. Don’t rush the process.

Once your community has gathered, consider these prayerful approaches:

1. **RESPONSIVE READING**
   **Leader:** As we lean in closer to discern the heart of God, we begin by acknowledging that God is the source of all wisdom and that we are not.

   **All:** We come in humility, acknowledging our brokenness and confusion, asking for your wisdom. We come in honesty, revealing our questions and doubts, holding nothing back. We come in confidence, understanding we are your beloved—deeply loved and accepted. We come in surrender, letting go of our pre-conceived ideas, willing to listen to your Spirit lead us into your truth. We come in faith, leading us to obedience and submission to your will.

   **Leader:** Hear the words in the “Prayer of St Francis”:
   
   All Highest and Glorious God,
   Cast your light into the darkness of my heart.
   Grant me right faith, firm hope, perfect charity,
   With wisdom and perception, O Lord.
   So that I may always and everywhere seek to know
   And do what is truly your holy will.
   Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

2. **LISTENING AS A COMMUNITY**
   The pastor or small group facilitator reads:

   In his book With Open Hands, Henri Nouwen invites readers to release our tightly clenched fists and open our hands to God. He writes:

   “The resistance to praying is like the resistance of tightly clenched fists. This image shows a tension, a desire to cling tightly to yourself, a greediness which betrays fear.
“A story about an elderly woman brought to a psychiatric center exemplifies this attitude. She was wild, swinging at everything in sight, and frightening everyone so much that the doctors had to take everything away from her. But there was one small coin which she gripped in her fist and would not give up. In fact, it took two people to pry open that clenched hand. It was as though she would lose her very self along with the coin. If they deprived her of that last possession, she would have nothing more and be nothing more. That was her fear.

“When you are invited to pray, you are asked to open your tightly clenched fists and give up your last coin. It is a long spiritual journey of trust, for behind each fist another one is hiding, and sometimes the process seems endless. Much has happened in your life to make all those fists, and at any hour of the day or night you might find yourself clenching your fists again out of fear.”

What is your last coin?

What are you clutching tightly in your clenched fist?

EXERCISE:

Write on a piece of paper your concerns that may block your ability to listen to God or others. Fold it up and place it within your clenched fist.

The leader then reads Nouwen’s prayer:

Dear God,
I am so afraid to open my clenched fists!
Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold on to?
Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands?
Please help me to gradually open my hands
And to discover that I am not what I own,
But what you want to give me.
And what you want to give me is love,
Unconditional, everlasting love.

As the leader plays the song “Shepherd” by Todd Agnew (available on YouTube and other sites online) each person places his/her paper in a basket. As the song continues, people place their hands palms up as an act of surrender and worship.

Another valuable prayer approach is known as the “Examen.” We came across this from our Presbyterian friends when we were researching this discernment tool; it is taken from Guidelines for Communal Discernment, by Victoria G. Curtiss, published by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

**PRAYER OF EXAMEN**

**Individual Prayer of Examen**

(Adapted from Lord Teach Us to Pray—A Guide to Prayer, produced by the Office of Spiritual Formation of the Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.), Section on “Seeking the Will of God,” p. 32)

1. Find a quiet spot to sit comfortably where you will be undisturbed. Quiet yourself using a method that works for you, such as attending to the rhythm of your breathing, repeating a simple word or phrase, gazing upon a candle’s flame or other visual centering, or listening to meditative music.

2. Reflect upon the events of the past day, as if watching a videotape of your experiences. Do not rush, but take time to remember fully your experiences, including the more subtle aspects of your day. What feelings did you experience? What insights did you have? What sensations were you aware of? What did you notice? What did you enjoy? What frustrated or disappointed you?

3. Ask God to bring to your heart an awareness of one or two moments or experiences for which you are not grateful—experiences of “negative” emotions such as anger or sadness or guilt—times when you felt drained of energy and alienated from your truest self. What made these experiences so difficult? Be present to these less pleasant experiences as fully as you can, yet without judging or being critical, knowing that God was with you then and is with you now. Allow your mind to
move again into deeper stillness, resting in God’s presence without words or thoughts.

4. Give thanks to God for whatever you have experienced.

**USING EXAMEN WITH COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT**

*(From presentation by Fr. Michael Sheenan, president of Regis University, at the conference on Discerning the Leadership of Christ, January 2006.)*

A. Before beginning a discernment process, it can be helpful for individuals to write about “What is it like for me to feel the presence of God—to be aware of God?” That becomes a touchstone for the inner state in which discernment takes place.

B. Throughout the discernment process, it is helpful for persons to notice any times that they may be blocked from complete openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit. To identify blocks in relation to other participants in the group, persons may ask themselves these questions:

- Whom do I dismiss?
- Why do I dismiss that person?
- Who threatens me?
- Whom do I threaten?
- With whom do I disagree instinctively?
- With whom do I agree instinctively?
- Whom do I find irritating?
- Why am I irritated?

After increasing one’s awareness, one then prays, asking God for greater openness.

C. In relation to the issue at hand, persons may ask themselves:

- About what aspects of the proposal am I afraid?
- Especially if I am not in favor of the proposal: How will the community benefit from this proposal?
- Especially if I am in favor of the proposal: What price will the community have to pay for this proposal?

D. If the group seems to have lost a state of being prayerfully centered, it may be helpful to engage in a few minutes of silence. Another help may be to invite the members to reflect on one or more of the preceding questions by writing their thoughts in a journal.

We hope these sample prayers will be helpful during your church or organization’s discernment process.

*Brenda Branson, a member of Hanson UMC, was part of the Design Team for this workbook.*
Appendix B: Worship Elements for Your Meetings
Compiled by Rev. Troy Elmore

As we have said elsewhere in this document, prayer and worship are crucial components of any God-breathed discernment process. We recommend using some (or all!) of the following prayers, worship songs, and Scripture passages to help set a worshipful and reverent tone during your various meetings throughout the discernment process:

**Introductory Prayers**

Good and loving God, our source of love and light - Thank you for bringing us together today in a spirit of generosity.
May we honor one another by keeping an open mind.
May we voice our truth and listen with an open heart.
May we discern your will to unite in fruitful outcome.
We ask for your wisdom and grace, to use our talents for the betterment of others.
With gratitude, we offer this prayer in your name.

- Debra Mooney, PhD

Father God,
We thank You for this day. You are the same today as You were yesterday, and as You are tomorrow. Since the beginning of humanity, You sought to have a relationship with Your creation, to instruct us in the way that we ought to go. Father, today we pray for discernment. We pray that the Holy Spirit that indwells within us with give us a peace beyond understanding to know precisely when something is You, and when something is not. We want to be obedient to Your call in our lives. We pray for such discernment to not only make wise choices, but in the course of it all to know we can trust Your guiding hand.

In Jesus’ name,
Amen

**Worship Songs**

- Breathe on Me, Breath of God
- Open My Eyes
- Spirit of the Living God
- Word of God Speak (Mercy Me; available on YouTube and other online sites)
- The More I Seek You (Kari Jobe; available on YouTube and other online sites)

**Scripture Passages**

*(All from the English Standard Version)*

- “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.” - Philippians 1:9-10

- Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. - Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV

- If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. - James 1:5

- For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. - Jeremiah 29:11

- And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. - Isaiah 30:21

- Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety. - Proverbs 11:14

- Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed. - Proverbs 15:22 ESV
• I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. - Psalm 32:8

• Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. - Jeremiah 33:3

• Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. - Psalm 119:105

• Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. - Psalm 25:12

• Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. - Philippians 4:6

• For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. - Proverbs 2:6

• Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. - Romans 12:2

• All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. - 2 Timothy 3:16

• When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. - John 16:13

• Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future. - Proverbs 19:20

• Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance. - Proverbs 1:5

• Thus says the Lord: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’” - Jeremiah 6:16

• My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. - Proverbs 2:1-5

• Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. - Proverbs 19:21

• If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. - James 1:5-6

• An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. - Proverbs 18:15

• The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit. Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established. The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble. Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished. - Proverbs 16:1-5

• Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. - Psalm 25:4-5

Troy Elmore, pastor of Lebanon UMC, was part of the Design Team for this workbook.
Appendix C: Resources


• Curtiss, Victoria G. *Guidelines for Communal Discernment.* Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), published online in 2007. Scan the QR code with your smart phone camera to access.


Notes


3 Curtiss, Victoria G. *Guidelines for Communal Discernment*. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), published online in 2007; p. 4.


5 Caviness, Crystal. *The 5 Ws and 1 H of Christian Conferencing*. United Methodist Church, published online at UMC.org.


9 Curtiss, Victoria G. p. 8-10.
Option Summary Sheet

Using the information you gathered or assessed for this option and respond to the following questions. This sheet will later be used along with your Ministry Summary Sheet to filter this option.

Option Name: ____________________________

Brief Description of this option:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Section A: Context</th>
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<tr>
<td>A1  What will this option do or what is the mission of this option?</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2  Where will this option take you or what is the vision of this option?</td>
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<tr>
<td>A3  What are the values of this option?</td>
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<td>A4  What will this option require of us?</td>
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<th>Section B: Theological</th>
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<tr>
<td>B1  What are the theological underpinnings of this option?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Section C: Potential Outcome</th>
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<td>C1  What are some likely outcomes of this option?</td>
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<tr>
<td>C2  Do the second- and third-order consequences appear mostly positive or negative?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Option Summary Sheet

Option Name: ________________________

Brief Description of this option:

A1  What will this option do or what is the mission of this option?

A2  Where will this option take you or what is the vision of this option?

A3  What are the values of this option?

A4  What will this option require of us?

B1  What are the theological underpinnings of this option?

C1  What are some likely outcomes of this option?

C2  Do the second- and third-order consequences appear mostly positive or negative?

Section A: Context

Section B: Theological

Section C: Potential Outcome
Consider the Consequences of Option: ______________________________

In the first-order column list several likely consequences of this option. Mark each choice with a + or – in the circle to indicate if the consequence is positive or negative. Under the second-order list any likely consequences of the first-order consequence and mark them positive or negative. In the third-order column place any likely consequences from the second-order consequences and mark them positive or negative.
Consider the Consequences of Option: ________________________________
**Ministry Summary Sheet**

Using the information you gathered or assessed in your filter-building process, respond to the following questions. This sheet will later be used along with your Option Summary Sheet(s) to filter your options.

**Section A: Context**

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<th>A1</th>
<th>The mission of our church or ministry is...</th>
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<td>The vision of our church or ministry is...</td>
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<td>A3</td>
<td>Our preferred values are...</td>
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<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>What is significant about your internal or external context that might be relevant to your discernment question?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section B: Theological**

| B1 | Summarize your church or ministry’s theological conviction on the issue you are discerning around. |

**Section C: Potential Outcome**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C1</th>
<th>List outcomes that would be preferred.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>List outcomes that would disqualify an option from final consideration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using the information you gathered or assessed in your filter-building process, respond to the following questions. This sheet will later be used along with your Option Summary Sheet(s) to filter your options.

Section A: Context

A1  The mission of our church or ministry is...
A2  The vision of our church or ministry is...
A3  Our preferred values are...
A4  What is significant about your internal or external context that might be relevant to your discernment question?

Section B: Theological

B1  Summarize your church or ministry's theological conviction on the issue you are discerning around.

Section C: Potential Outcome

C1  List outcomes that would be preferred.
C2  List outcomes that would disqualify an option from final consideration.
Filtering Sheet

Using your Ministry Summery Sheet and an Option Summery Sheet, answer the following questions. The corresponding question numbers on each sheet should facilitate answering each question. These questions will assist in discerning your viable options.

Option Name: __________________________

Section A: Context  (What is the Lord already doing?)

A1, A2  The vision of our church or ministry is...Is this option in alignment with our mission and vision?

A3  Is this option in alignment with our preferred values?

A4  Does this option make sense based on our current context?

Section B: Theological  (What is the Lord saying?)

B1  Is this option in alignment with our understanding of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience?

B1  Does Scripture support or disqualify us from choosing this option?

Section C: Potential Outcome  (Where might the Lord be leading?)

C1  Does it appear that this option will result in some of our preferred outcomes?

C2  Does it appear that one or more of the outcomes of this option would disqualify this option?

After processing the filters, is this a viable option for our ministry?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of this option?
Filtering Sheet

Using your Ministry Summary Sheet and an Option Summary Sheet, answer the following questions. The corresponding question numbers on each sheet should facilitate answering each question. These questions will assist in discerning your viable options.

**Section A: Context  (What is the Lord already doing?)**

A1, A2  The vision of our church or ministry is… Is this option in alignment with our mission and vision?

A3  Is this option in alignment with our preferred values?

A4  Does this option make sense based on our current context?

**Section B: Theological  (What is the Lord saying?)**

B1  Is this option in alignment with our understanding of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience?

B2  Does Scripture support or disqualify us from choosing this option?

**Section C: Potential Outcome  (Where might the Lord be leading?)**

C1 Does it appear that this option will result in some of our preferred outcomes?

C2 Does it appear that one or more of the outcomes of this option would disqualify this option?

Option Name:__________________________

After processing the filters, is this a viable option for our ministry?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of this option?