

# DISCERNMENT REFLECTION

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All of us as individuals have an interior life. Often, we connect with others when we feel like we can genuinely share our internal movements with someone else. And yet, as human beings, it is also easy to be stuck in our own heads, our own hearts, our own processes, without stepping back or looking around so we can examine how we think, how we feel, how we choose, and to what it all adds up. Ongoing discernment invites us into not just making choices but engaging that process with intention and purpose.

## What is Discernment?

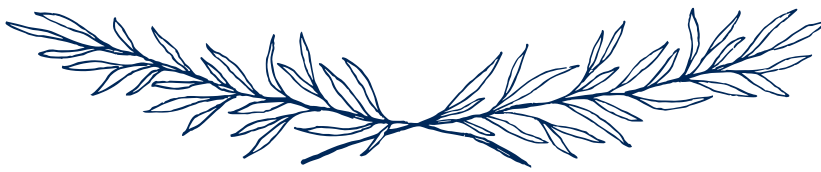
- Process of decision-making
- Involves being in tune with emotions, listening, being honest with oneself
- Teaches us to be aware of ourselves, our emotions, others, and God
  - *What attracts your heart in a deep way?*
  - *Where do I get lasting energy/enthusiasm/joy*
  - *What do I feel drawn to?*
  - *What are my deepest desires?*
  - *What comes up and stays with you?*
- The spiritual interpretation and evaluation of feelings
- Not magical insight or formula, or finding the one right answer
- Helps to decide what is the best way to act. It isn't simply about relationship with God alone; it is about living out your faith in the real world
- Always between good things
- Trusting that through your reason and inner life, God will help to draw you to good decisions because God desires you to make good, loving, healthy, positive, life-giving choices

*The big question - What is your purpose in life?  
What decision (small or big) will draw me closer to this?  
What is the best choice given the situation?  
What will bring most glory to God? (magis)*

## How to Identify Internal Movements?

Consolations and desolations are not just ways of labeling our feelings, but give us insight into what is going on inside of us so when we need to make decisions, whether at the spur of the moment or as part of a process, we are always centered.





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## Consolation vs. Desolation

*Which direction is our life taking us--toward God (consolation) or away from God (desolation)?*

- Moving toward God - increased faith, hope, love (consolation)
- Moving away from God - less faith, hope, love (desolation)

### *Consolation*

- Sense of rightness or peace that comes when making a right decision
- Directs our focus beyond just ourselves
- See the joys and sorrows of other people
- Closely connected to community
- Generates new inspiration and ideas
- New energy
- Does not mean always happy or at peace - we may feel negative pressure from others
- *When in consolation - express gratitude, use energy to work toward true desires*

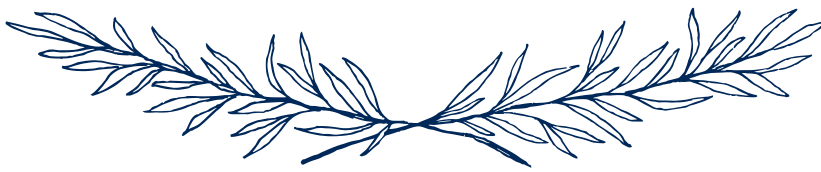
### *Desolation*

- Inward on self
- Cuts us off from friends and family
- Drains of energy
- Growth of resentment, ingratitude, selfishness, doubt, fear
- Giving up on things
- Outlook is gloomy and self-obsessed
- Does not always mean feeling bad - we may try to feel good with unhealthy fillers
- *When in desolation - share how you feel, ask for help, seek out companionship, serve others*

## Questions for Reflection

1. Name a time in the last semester when you felt true consolation. What was this like? What made the feeling different than other highs? What did you learn from the feeling?
2. Name a time in the last semester when you felt desolation. What was different from this and other "lows"? Reflect on how you identified the feeling and what you learned.
3. Think about a time you got stuck in decision-making or discernment. Maybe there is something that is causing you to currently feel stuck. What is causing you to feel stuck? What is hard to figure out? If you have moved past it, what helped you get un-stuck? If you are currently in that place, what might help?





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## Obstacles to Discernment

- Tiredness
- Time
- Attachment to people, place, objects, experiences, etc.
- Rigidity to attitudes - not indifference
  - Indifferent: undetermined to one thing or option rather than another; impartial; unbiased; with decision suspended until reasons for a wise choice are learned; still undecided
- Distorted images of self
- Fear

## Questions to Ask Yourself

- *Whose approval are you seeking?*
- *Do you feel like you need to prove yourself in some way?*
- *What groups, images, labels do you identify with, and are these healthy?*
- *How attached are you to status? Pride? Achievement?*

## Three Strategies for Discernment

1. Imagine making the decision one way for a day, then the other option for a day. Which brings you more peace? How does each feel?
2. What would you tell a friend in your situation? What would you advise another person to do?
3. Imagine how you would look back on this at the end of your life or at some point in the future.

## Simple Steps for Discernment

1. Identify the choice and bring it to prayer or meditate in silence
2. Identify what factors may not make you free to make the choice
3. Pay attention to your inner feelings and movements
4. Use your reasoning - list pros and cons
5. Talk to confidants and/or wise people
6. Make the decision and see confirmation

Created by Spencer Liechty, Faith & Justice Coordinator

