

The Discernment Night

The DISCERNMENT NIGHT is typically held one week after the INFORMATION NIGHT. The entire DISCERNMENT NIGHT is couched in the context of prayer to the Holy Spirit for guidance and is a night for listening to the Holy Spirit and to each other.

A facilitator may be chosen beforehand who will guide the people through the process.

Environment

It should be obvious as people enter the room, that this gathering is different from the INFORMATION NIGHT.

- The room should be very carefully arranged. Participants should sit in chairs arranged in a circle. The facilitator also sits in the circle.
- A small table sits in the center with a cloth that reflects the current liturgical season.
- The table contains a candle, a Bible, a crucifix or other symbols.
- This creates an environment of prayer and is a sacred place for conversation.

Gathering Prayer

A worship aid/brochure should be prepared locally to outline the steps of discernment.¹

- The opening prayer is conducted by the facilitator or the pastor and should include a prayer invoking the Holy Spirit to be with the group.
- The scripture reading may be proclaimed by one of the council members.
- After a moment of reflection, a faith sharing question that makes connections with the participants and the scripture message is asked. After stating the question and encouraging others to share their ideas there will be a time of silence. It is normal and someone will speak first eventually. Not everyone needs to speak, but leave enough time so that those who wish to speak have had an opportunity.
- Participants must be continually reminded that we are looking for the Holy Spirit to guide the group in *discerning the gifts* (not the people) that are needed at the table at this time. This helps to depersonalize the process so that everyone is affirmed.
- *Faith Sharing* provides the opportunity for people to view this process in light of the gospel, and to talk to each other in an open and honest fashion. It would be helpful to remind the group that, while those being discerned will be asked to respond to questions later on, faith sharing is not mandatory and it is open to all in the room who wish to respond.
- At the conclusion of the faith sharing, the pastor is called upon to briefly describe the mission of the parish and the council's recent history with regards to the progress of their pastoral plan, the parish's financial status, etc. He announces the call for _____ new council members.

¹ A sample is attached.

The Discernment Process: *Getting to know the Nominees*

In the first round, the questions are straightforward and may be asked in sets of 3. Anyone can begin to respond, but once someone begins, continue around the circle in order. As people answer, take note of their name. The night should be done in a prayerful pace, but it must also keep moving.

1. Tell us your name, and about your life today - family, employment, and your participation in parish life.
2. What talents and skills could you bring to the ministry of parish pastoral council?
3. What limitations do you have that you could share with us? (ex. "I am employed daily from 9 to 5"; "I have a sick parent in my care," etc.)
4. What are some assets of our parish that you could describe to a visitor or an inquirer?
5. What aspects of our parish life might need growth into vibrancy?
6. What hopes and dreams do you have for our parish for the next 3 years?
7. What are the pros and cons that you have personally about taking up ministry on the Parish Pastoral Council?
8. What excites you about membership?
9. What, if any, reservations do you have?

The Discernment You will need a blackboard or newsprint for the consensus process.

- The next rounds form the heart of the discernment. The role of the facilitator is to ensure each person being discerned has the opportunity to respond. *The facilitator should accept what was said and ensure that people do not spontaneously begin a dialogue over what someone has shared. They are encouraged to affirm one another, however.*
- Ask if there is anyone who would not like to be named in the process. Those who do not want to be considered for selection should make themselves known. They may still participate in the selection though, by naming others.
- It is important that the process be transparent. It is recommended that the affirmation of gifts be done aloud. *Go around the room and ask each person to name three people whose gifts they feel are needed at this time on the council. After each person speaks the group affirms them and prays for them.*² As participants engage in the process, people's gifts are affirmed and in a transparent process, people's focus moves outward as they consider others.
- Each named person should be written once on the newsprint. When the name is repeated, place a mark next to it until you have a list of names with marks.
- Once there is a list of names, step back and ask those present to say what they see emerging. If consensus is clear, circle those names that emerge. If you have circled as many as needed, the discernment concludes as below.

² A simple prayer response, such as: "Thank you, God, for the wisdom of _____ (John, Mary, Tom). Bless him (her) with your Spirit as we discern together this evening." This could also be listed on the worship aid.

- If one person clearly emerges but others do not, circle the emerging name/s and continue to another round of affirmation.
- The second round repeats the process. Begin with a blank newsprint sheet. Go around the circle in the opposite direction as the first round, asking for names of three people, excluding those circled in the last round. Follow each contribution with prayer for that contributor, and continue to list as above. Once again, step back and ask for consensus on what is emerging.
- If there is a tie for the final place on council, it may be necessary to caucus with the two about who will serve, or consult with the pastor to add another member to the Council.
- *Additional option:* If names do not emerge naturally and the group cannot come to consensus, consider placing the names in a chalice or a basket. Far from considering this a random selection, make it clear that we are asking God to show the group what they need to see, to reveal to them the name that eludes them. Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, choose a symbolic representative, perhaps the person who has been on the PPC the longest, and ask for the affirmation of everyone in the room before having that person choose the name.

Concluding the discernment evening

- A final prayer is included in the worship aid.
- The sign of peace is offered among the members.
- The pastor thanks everyone for their participation.
- The date and time of their Installation is announced.