

The Four Step Process of Discernment

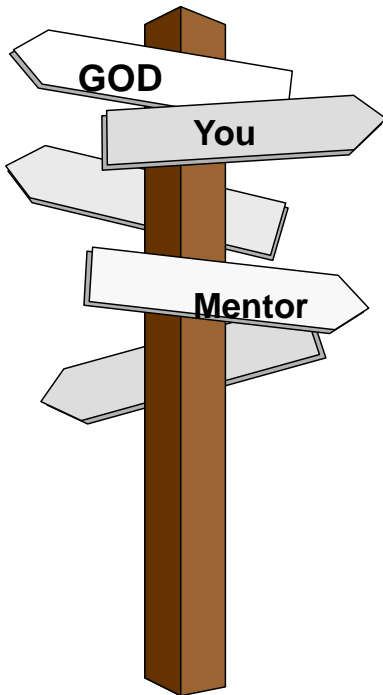
The process of making a decision about your life with the help of the Holy Spirit is called "*discernment*." It is a process of discovering and uncovering God's will for your future.

In this process you deal with two persons: you and God. During the process you will get to know both better, especially yourself. As you begin, remember that both you and God desire the same thing – your happiness. Therefore, you and God are not working at odds but with and for one another.

The process of discernment, though often a struggle, does not need to be an insurmountable task. The following four steps may be of help to you as you journey through the sacred process of discernment.

- **STEP 1 -- BE IN TOUCH WITH YOURSELF**

Know your likes and dislikes, your fears and dreams, your hopes and interests, your abilities and limitations. Reflect on how you work under stress, what kind of leadership you respond to, how much structure you need in your life.



Check out how others view you in the work situation, under stress, and at leisure. Reflect on how you view others. Are you able to accept others – to work with them?

One way to look at an inner call from God is to see God "acting and speaking" through all aspects of your life. God created you with a unique personality and allowed you to experience a personal history which has impacted who you are today.

As you get to know more about yourself you may want to change some aspects of yourself in the future; but for now, accept yourself as you are.

You might want to keep a journal to record your feelings over a period of time. Going back over this journal and reflecting on changes in your feelings and ideas will give you a picture of the person you are.

Another road to self discovery is to develop a relationship with a spiritual director/mentor or with someone else whom you can trust and who can be objective with you. He or she will help you to reflect on what you are considering and how God is moving your process. A spiritual director will walk with you as you make this journey of discernment.

- **STEP 2 -- BE IN TOUCH WITH GOD**

Develop or strengthen your life of prayer, not just in times of crisis, but on a regular basis. No relationship develops between persons unless they listen to each other. You must learn to listen to God in prayer and not merely ask God to listen to you. You have to spend time with God, listening, waiting, being honest in the quiet of God's presence.

Prayer is a highly personal response to the personal love that God holds for you. Your prayer response or style of praying will be as unique as you are. Don't hesitate to try various forms of prayer until you find one that best expresses your relationship to the Creator, the source of life and love.

Many good books on prayer are available today. Ask your spiritual director/mentor for some suggestions.

Look for traces of God in nature, in the circumstances of your life, in other people. The better you get to know God, the more you will be able to see and feel the movement of God in all things.

- **STEP 3 -- CONTINUING THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

As you become more in touch with yourself and with God, prayerfully gather the facts about your decision. Consider alternatives. Write out the pros and cons of each alternative. Try to project what effect each alternative will have on you five and ten years from now.

In considering the priesthood or religious life, search out information about the diocese or religious communities. Inquire about the ministries and lifestyles. Ask to visit a parish and spend a day with the priest to learn firsthand how a day is spent. Visit various local communities so that you can experience how life is lived out on a daily basis. Consider other careers which might fit your talents and gifts. Ask yourself "*Where will I feel most at home?*"

Talk to people who have chosen the priesthood or vowed life in a religious community. Try to envision yourself as a priest in a parish or ministry, or as a member of a religious community, as a married person, and as a single lay person in the church. Where will you be most "at home"? Where is your heart calling you?

As you gather the facts about the different life choices open to you, be attentive to your feelings. If you have been open and honest with yourself in Step 1 and with God in Step 2, you can trust your feelings. Consider what appears to be the best choice for you and what seems to be God's will.

- **STEP 4 -- CONFIRM YOUR DECISION**

After you have made your decision, spend some time in prayer for an extended period of time to let the decision sink in and see if it still seems best for you. If it is, there should be a continued sense of inner peace and satisfaction. This period of confirmation should go on for an extended interval of several weeks or more to be sure that the peace you feel is true tranquility and not simply the relief that follows making a difficult decision.

You can also be confirmed in your decision by sharing it with your spiritual director/mentor or someone else with whom you have worked through the process.

If you have any questions or would like to spend a day at a Seminary or with a priest in a parish or sister in a religious community, please contact Father Mark O'Donnell, Vocation Office, Diocese of Norwich, 201 Broadway, Norwich, CT 06360 (860) 887-9294, or you can E-Mail him at: vocations@norwichdiocese.org. www.God-calls.org