

Discernment Tools for Your Tool Box

Thank you for participating in the Working Men's, Contemplation In Action Retreat in July 2013 at Nazareth Retreat Center, Boise. Our focus is 'Discernment' Models for family, business, vocation & avocation. We are providing this handout to support some of the Discernment ideas presented. In addition we've selected, other "best" Discernment Models from the Churches rich traditions... and other sources that we believe can be of help as you face daily decisions. Organizers appreciate the repairs, maintenance, and painting of buildings that you helped with at Nazareth. Thank you! We hope you will carry the experiences and faith filled "Discernment" tools into your tool box to use for the rest of your life!

The Daily Examen...

The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and *discern his direction for us*. The Examen is an ancient practice in the Church that can help us see God's hand at work in our whole experience.

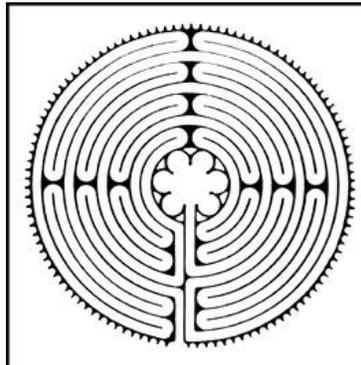
The method presented here is adapted from a technique described by Ignatius Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises. St. Ignatius thought that the Examen was a gift that came directly from God, and that God wanted it to be shared as widely as possible. One of the few rules of prayer that Ignatius made for the Jesuit order was the requirement that Jesuits practice the Examen twice daily—at noon and at the end of the day. It's a habit that Jesuits, and many other Christians, practice to this day. This is a version of the five-step Daily Examen that St. Ignatius practiced.

1. **Become aware of God's presence.**
2. **Review the day with gratitude.**
3. **Pay attention to your emotions.**
4. **Choose one feature of the day; pray from it.**
5. **Look toward tomorrow.**

Accessed July 10, 2013 at:

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>

Labyrinth



Labyrinths have anchored people to the land since before recorded history. They are a hoop of life, a walking meditation, and a case of sacred geometry. Labyrinths have been embedded into the earth for as long as anyone knows, but

their origin remains a subject of speculation. Their spiraling shapes appear in Tibetan sand paintings, tribal basket designs, and early Cretan coins. And when they are laid out on the ground in a soothing spin, they lead walkers into the center and out again. Labyrinths are not mazes as mazes have dead ends and labyrinths do not – It has only one path leading to the center and then out again.

In our own day the labyrinth is being rediscovered as a spiritual tool with a wide variety of interpretations. It is still a metaphor for an individual spiritual journey. Labyrinths are used in leadership development, problems solving and the foster critical thinking around an idea issue or opportunity. Churches, schools, retreat houses, hospitals and other institutions across the country are establishing permanent labyrinths. Portable versions are also being made available. Retreats, lectures, books and numerous websites use of the labyrinth as a management, individual and team building tool, as well as the psychological and spiritual life.

HOW TO WALK THE LABYRINTH

There are as many ways to walk the labyrinth as there are people. Walk at your own pace, and in the spirit of the moment. You will find you may walk it in different ways at different times. It could be for fun, for peace or for healing. You might want to relax from stress, or take to the center a question for discernment or a quest for guidance. You might use it for meditative walking or centering prayer. It may be used for reflection or a

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search for the depths of your own spirit. You may want to repeat a prayer -- a word or phrase with special spiritual meaning for you. If nothing else you may wish to search for the one red cobblestone that the paver, following tradition, has set upside down (with the rounded side down and the straight side up).

Take time beforehand to recollect yourself, or to form an intention or a question. Walk at your own pace within the lines, moving aside only to pass a person moving slower than yourself or coming in the opposite direction. When you reach the center pause there awhile before starting out again. Read some of the abundant literature, or consult any of the hundreds of labyrinth websites to see the great variety of ways in which labyrinths are interpreted and used. Your understanding may not be derived from the Christian tradition; but however you understand and use it, may it bless you abundantly.

Accessed 07/30/2010 at:
<http://www.jcu.edu/CampusMinistry/liturgy/labyrinth.htm>

How to use a labyrinth for Discernment

If you have an opportunity, problem, issue, or ideas, to discern try walking a labyrinth. Focus on one item at a time and give it the time it needs. A "typical" labyrinth experience involves preparing yourself at the threshold, journeying the single path to the center, following the same path out from the center and crossing the threshold as you exit.

Walking the labyrinth is a kinesthetic process it moves your body from right to left causing shifts that provide different views of the scenery on the inside and outside of yourself and the path you are on. From a physiological standpoint it causes change and in many cases amplifies clarity.

Contemplation, prayer, discernment, transformation, joy, grace, processing grief can all take place when using a labyrinth; it depends upon setting your intention and having a clear purpose.

There is no "right" way to pray the labyrinth...praying whatever way helps you connect with God while

experiencing a labyrinth is your "right" way. A few suggestions for praying on a labyrinth include: have a conversation with God about the things that matter most; repeat the words of a favorite prayer, make gestures of praise, recite scriptural phrases such as, "Thy will be done," or present prayer requests. Another simple way is to pray for yourself while returning to the threshold.

Labyrinth Web Resources

Corn Maze and Labyrinth Construction:
[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agdex4770/\\$FILE/888-12.pdf](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agdex4770/$FILE/888-12.pdf)

Enter the labyrinth: <http://www.letusreason.org/Nam30.htm>

Healing: <http://www.labyrinthproject.com/healing.html>

History of Labyrinth: <http://labyrinth.georgetown.edu/>

Labyrinth Walking Guide:
<http://gardendwellersfarm.com/doc/LabyrinthWalkingGuide.pdf>

Laying Out a Labyrinth: <http://www.labyrinthos.net/layout.html>

Maze and Labyrinth Gardens in History:
<http://www.gardenhistoryinfo.com/gardenpages/mazegardens02.html>

The labyrinth society: <http://www.labyrinthsociety.org/special-projects>

What is a Labyrinth:
<http://www.clarityconceptsinc.com/labyrinth.htm>



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Discernment-in-Community, Quaker-style

July 27, 2012 by [Teresa Blythe](#)

If you don't know enough about Quakers to stand in utter awe of their understanding of discernment, it's time you learned. For centuries, The Society of Friends—popularly called Quakers—has been promoting discernment-in-community both for individuals and groups (especially their business meetings).

Say a young Quaker couple wants to get married. They are advised to be part of what is called a “Clearness Committee,” a group of wise and trusted members of the meeting convened to pray in silence and ask them honest, open-ended questions that help them “become clear” about the way forward in their relationship. In the same way, the Quaker meeting (local gathering) might go into a Clearness Committee around an important question facing their church. The goal is to find unity within the greater body before taking the next step. Not everyone has to agree wholeheartedly, but for unity to be found everyone has to agree that the Spirit seems to be moving the meeting in one particular direction.

You don't have to be Quaker to benefit from a Clearness Committee. I've been part of several at the request of seminary students, clergy, spiritual directors and directees. When properly facilitated (Quakers use the term “clerked”), Clearness Committees are beautiful sacred spaces offering the focus person (the one with the discernment question) assistance as they listen for the still, small voice of the Holy in their life. For a wonderful and useful description of Clearness Committee, check out Parker Palmer's classic article on it at:

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/parker/writings/clearness-committee> then, to form one to help with your discernment do the following:

1. Find a clerk to facilitate. You could locate a spiritual director, give them the Parker Palmer article and ask them to be your facilitator. It's relatively easy and spiritual directors have the skills to hold the space and follow the guidelines.
2. Invite 4-6 spiritual “heavy hitters” in your life to be on the committee.
3. Set a date and allow about 3 hours for the process.
4. Write up a one page description of your question and the background for committee members. Email it to them a few days before the committee convenes.
5. Meet with your clerk prior to the committee setting to agree upon how you want the time to go. You have some options for the last 30 minutes of the session.
6. Enjoy the sacred space and the sense of peace that comes from having a group of people sit with you in silence, prayer and inquiry.

Accessed June 11, 2013 at:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/spiritualdirection101/2012/07/discernment-in-community-quaker-style/>

Focus, Opening and Discernment: Spiritual Development & Religious Education in the Early Years

“Hearing the Inner Voice.” This source centers on intuition; on listening to the inner voice. Hart¹² describes two primary internal human voices: the first is the ego's voice which chatters constantly offering commentary and judgment about all sorts of things including self-criticism, fear, judgment of others; the second less obvious voice is what Hart calls the “inner voice” which “lives deeper down” and “recognized throughout wisdom traditions as the still, small voice, inner teacher, Holy Spirit, inner light, genius, or guardian spirit” (p. 205). Hart goes on to suggest (3) three general dimensions of the inner voice: **Focus, Opening, and Discernment.**

¹ Hart, T. (2003). *The secret spiritual world of children*. Maui: Inner Ocean.
² Hart, T. (2006). Spiritual experiences and capacities of children and youth. In E. Roehlkepartain, P. E. King, L. Wagener & P. L. Benson (Eds.), *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 163-177). London: SAGE Publications.

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- **Focus** - involves articulating, voicing, imagining a clear question or *focus* on an issue for which we seek clarity. As teachers we can help children find that focus and articulate it.
- **Opening** - Then, according to Hart, we need to let go, to stop and be still in order to *open* to the inner voice. This might involve the previous step's question, "Where am I now?" and help children find a place of silence or reflection to ponder. Hart goes so far as to suggest that we should, even once a week for fifteen minutes enable a time and space for "wise silence" which can help reinforce the inner voice (p. 206).
- **Discernment** - And finally then, we need to discern and that requires determining the difference between the ego-generated voice and the inner voice. Hart suggests that the inner voice generally feels more generous and limitless working from abundance, rather than feel self-interested, and limited working from lack. If we practice and become more aware or conscious, we are better placed to recognize the differences between the two voices. He adds that the inner voice can arrive in unexpected ways: through a dream, a gut feeling, or a flash of an idea. Teachers need to inform children about these different ways.



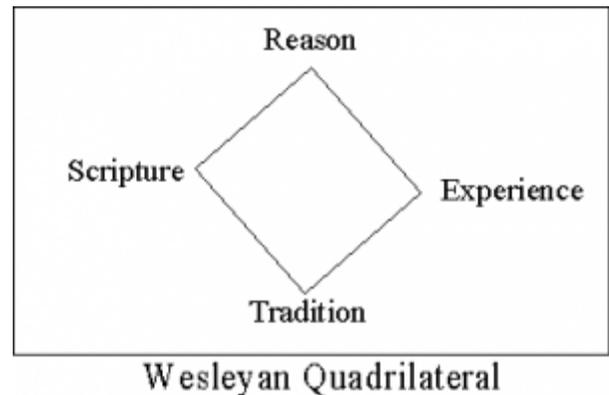
“Listen With Your Heart.” In this final source Hart focuses especially on the preposition ‘with’ arguing that it calls for listening with the heart rather than to the heart. Listening to the heart involves “paying attention to our feelings and sensations about something”, which “is important for staying in touch with the flow or our feelings and sensations.” Listening with the heart on the other hand, “turns the focus outward, toward others” wherein “we listen in order to understand, to appreciate, and to love” (pp. 208-209). In this step we are to assist children to become empathetic, compassionate, and loving.

Spiritual Development and Religious Education in the Early Years: A Review of the Literature. A Project conducted for the. Queensland Catholic Education Commission. Dr Jan Grajczonek, School of Religious Education. Australian Catholic University, McAuley Campus, Brisbane, PDF; pages 28, 29 Accessed July 10, 2013 at:

http://www.qcec.catholic.edu.au/upload/publicsite/Education/Final_Spiritual%20Development%20Religious%20Education%20in%20the%20Early%20Years_A%20Review%20of%20the%20Literature.pdf

Discernment, Wesley-style

August 6, 2012 By [Teresa Blythe](#)



Sometimes you just need a simple, practical way to explore your choices. For that, we turn to our Methodist friends. 18th century preacher and theologian John Wesley—founder of Methodism—believed we needed to take four factors into consideration when navigating choices in the Christian life: scripture, tradition, reason and experience. I like the visual nature of this process. It looks and feels stable.

While Wesley himself probably never referred to this as a process or even as a “quadrilateral” (which is what we call it today), his teachings lead us to use all of our faculties in discernment. We are supposed to approach discernment with our head (reason) and heart (experience) as well as listening to scripture and tradition.

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Here's one way to use the Wesleyan Quadrilateral in discernment:

Begin with a clear understanding of what it is you want clarity on.

Spend time in prayer. Talk to God about this question. Ask God to be especially present to you as you consider the "points" of the quad.

Scripture – Consider your discernment question. What, if anything, does scripture have to say about it? Consider the theme of the question. Look the theme up in a concordance. Or consider biblical stories that may shed light on your question. What guidance does God's word have for you in this matter?

Tradition – What does the history of your strand of Christianity have to say about your question? What do your statements of faith have to say? How have Christians in the past made similar decision? What do your trusted spiritual friends have to say about the question? If you have a spiritual director, what is his or her response to your question?

Reason – Think your question through. What is the rational course of action? What in this matter do you know to be true and not true? List the pros and cons of all the options you have in this question.

Experience – Based on your past experience of God and what God desires for you, how are you feeling led to act in this matter? Where is God's presence most deeply felt when you consider this question?

After putting your discernment question through all four "points" of the quad, reflect on which "point" was most helpful for you. Which point seemed the most difficult? How are you feeling about the question? Does a direction emerge? You can always go back to the quad for more discernment after you make your choice. Once you visually memorize the four sides of the quad, you can use this method without any reference material at all.

Accessed June 11, 2013 at:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/spiritualdirection101/2012/08/discernment-wesley-style/>



Selected Discernment Books

Larkin, E. (2000) Silent Presence, Revised, Dimension Books | Review:

<http://carmelnet.org/larkin/LarkinAdditionalWritings.pdf>
[Francis]

“A Young Teacher teaches even what he does not know, a middle aged teacher teaches only what he knows, and an old teacher teaches what is necessary” Twenty years after writing Silent Presence Larkin penned an epilogue. He notes that discernment has two focuses, process and problem. The use of cognitive, mystical, and affective (true self/false self) discernment to the issues at hand is key. [Kevin has copies of the complete epilogue for those participants interested at the CIA retreat]

Palmer, P. (2004) Hidden Wholeness – The Journey Toward An Undivided Life, Jossey-Bass | Review:

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/books.php?id=9194> [Kevin]

The book is primarily focused on the logic behind and the procedures involved in "Circles of Trust," a method of group interaction Palmer relies on to help people discern the direction their lives should take. What this book describes is a specific method in which people bring their solitude into a community. This is one way for individuals to find integrity between our core selves (which Palmer calls "souls") and our roles (including our families, business, vocation and avocations).

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Discernment & Decision Making; Experiential Learning Model References

God has great plans for you. But what are they?
Prayerful discernment can help us to recognize what
God desires for each of us.

10 Step Decision Making Model (community):

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/files/FY/FY66400.pdf>

A model for shared Discernment (group):

<http://www.drawnear.org/prayerministries/ModelForSharedDiscernment.pdf>

Christophers: <http://www.christophers.org/>

Daydreaming Key to Discernment (American Catholic):

<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/preview.aspx?id=235>

Decision Making (Family):

<http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/family/az1039.pdf>

Decision Making (Family):

<http://agmarketing.extension.psu.edu/begfrms/SmlFrmDecisionMakingWrkbk.pdf>

Discerning Religious Life: http://www.religious-vocation.com/discerning_religious_vocation.html

Discernment (Acts17): http://www.acts17-11.com/dialogs_gift_discernment.html

Discernment (Business):

<http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/PracticalWisdom/PracticalWisdom/Manzonewebpaper.pdf>

Discernment (Community of Christ):

<http://www.cofchrist.org/discernment/whatls.asp>

Discernment (New Advent):

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05028b.htm>

Discernment Making Inspired Choices (Jesuit):

<http://www.loyolapress.com/discernment-making-inspired-choices.htm>

Discernment packet (St. Olaf Lutheran):

<http://www.stolaf.edu/pipercenter/students/ServiceDiscernmentModel.pdf>

Discernment: <http://www.spirithome.com/discernment.html>

Experiential Learning & Learning Styles:

<http://sbaweb.wayne.edu/~absel/bkl/jels/2-3a.pdf>

Experiential Learning Model:

<http://4h.missouri.edu/resources/youth/docs/learningmodel.pdf>

Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development: <http://academic.regis.edu/ed205/Kolb.pdf>

Ignatian Discernment Models (Jesuit): <http://loyolahall.co.uk/lp/wp-content/uploads/Models-of-Discernment-Tad-Dunne-Way-Supplement-23.pdf>

Improving Decision Making Skills (Family):

<http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/bookstore/pubs/MF873.pdf>

Models for Making Decisions in Business (Jesuit):

<http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/bilbao/papers/Clegg.pdf>

Notes on Discernment (Carmelite):

<http://carmelitefriarsocd.com/.../Formation/NotesonDiscernment.doc>

Parish Council Discernment:

<http://pastoralplanning.diobrook.org/wp-content/uploads/files/full-discernment-packet-except-worship-aid.pdf>

Prayer & Discernment Resources (USCCB):

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/discerning-men/prayer-and-discernment-resources.cfm>

Spiritual Discernment (Catholic Doors):

<http://www.catholicdoors.com/courses/discern.htm>

Three Fold Model (Jesuit):

http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/publications/seeingthingsw hole/STW14_Nettifee.pdf

Vocations Resource List:

<http://www.christophers.org/page.aspx?pid=364>

What's Your Decision: <http://www.loyolapress.com/whats-your-decision.htm>

Prepared by,
Kevin M. Laughlin, Ph.D., July 2013