

Communal Discernment

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With today's new awareness of group process, it is not surprising that there has been a growing interest in communal discernment. It is only recently that groups have turned to a more formal use of this practice. We have personally witnessed and facilitated more than a hundred and fifty sessions of communal discernment over the past fifteen years.

Decision-making is the most important activity of any group, but especially of an explicitly Christian group in apostolic service. The decision-making process of a group should be consonant with the nature of that group. Decisions are not only "object-selective," but they are perhaps even more importantly "person-formative," or "group-formative." We are, or we soon will become, our decisions. The quality of decision-making will become the quality of the group.

Although communal discernment is ancient in the Church, the historical precedent for the articulated form which we elaborate in this writing is the experience of St. Ignatius Loyola and his first companions in their

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deliberations about the founding of the Society of Jesus. As a group they worked through questions of community, the need for a superior, the need for a vow of obedience, the procedures for sending each other into apostolic works.

Out of that experience, written in a little paper known as the "Deliberation of the First Fathers," has come a procedure for communal discernment, along with some characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of decision-making. Perhaps most unique in this procedure is the insistence on separating the **con** and **pro** reasons of a question at issue, requiring that each person prayerfully consider and speak to both the **con** and the **pro** reasons in separate sessions. There is, however, more to communal discernment than this.

In the concrete, communal discernment might have many forms. Once some important elements are acknowledged and considered, many varieties of procedures become possible. There are seven essential elements in true communal discernment. In the paragraphs that follow, we are going to talk about each one. The seven essential elements of communal discernment are:

- 1) **An explicit attitude and atmosphere of faith.** A group needs its faith consciousness in full awareness at the time of the discernment process.
- 2) **Prayer: before, during, after for light and purification.** The individuals in the discerning group, and the group as group, need contact with the Lord in the discerning process. The prayer is for light and

purification. It is not simple unthematic or contemplative prayer.

- 3) **Interior freedom: poised spiritual liberty.** The discerning members and the group as a group need to be repentantly aware of their disordered affections and attachments.

- 4) **Information: disseminated, assimilated.** Discernment does not dispense with the need for having concrete information about all sides of the issue.

- 5) **Formulation of the Issue into a simple declarative sentence and the separation into con and pro reasons.** The discerners are asked to give separate and quality time to the consideration and articulation of the reasons against and the reasons for the issue.

- 6) **Attempt at consensus.** Discerners are asked to name the consensus that has formed in the group.

- 7) **Confirmation (congruence) is both the internal and the external.**

- a) Internal: joy and peace in the Holy Spirit
- b) External:
 - (1) How does the decision work out over time?
 - (2) Is the decision congruent with legitimate authority?

The first three elements are habitual modes of mind and heart. They are part of the group's lifestyle rather than

something it quickly does on the morning of a decision.

The next three elements belong to the more formal part of the discernment process. The last element, confirmation (congruence), is monitored in the group over time: even weeks, months, a year, as the new decision is worked out and tested.

1. AN EXPLICIT ATTITUDE AND ATMOSPHERE OF FAITH

Foremost in the consciousness of the discerners now are the saving promises of God in all their fullness; an appreciation of sinfulness as well as the Father's forgiveness; sensing being moved by compelling truth rather than by personal prejudice. The awareness and fearfulness of personal freedom has a searing force, as readiness for initiative and responsibility moves to peripheral concern all small mindedness and passivity. The attractiveness of the truth, especially as seen through the lens of the Incarnation removes all vacillation.

Fundamental to each communal discernment is a belief and growing awareness of our "name of grace," the unique way in which God calls to me individually and to us corporately. Discernment itself rests on the theological belief that God deals personally and individually with each of us. Over the years, as this relationship has grown and been nourished, we have often become aware of those patterns and characteristics, those unique notes which characterize one's own personal relationship with God. This is known as our "Name of Grace."

Remembering that the name of grace encompasses a unique and individual first name as well as a family name,

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or last name of grace, the discerners need to spend more time surfacing this two-faceted identity in grace. It is important that an individual be aware of his or her "name of grace" (fundamental religious orientation). It is likewise vitally important that groups pay attention to their own unique calling as a group, their "last name of grace," or "family name of grace."

Much was said after Vatican II about rediscovering the original grace or charism of the founder. Groups were encouraged to look at their own graces, patterns of call, and apostolic works. Any group, be it family, diocese, religious community, parish organization, has its own charism, its own "last name of grace." There is some common identity that focuses the energies of that group. It is much like a family with several children. For example, the distinction among Bob, Mary, Peter, and Sharon is certainly observable; yet the fact that they all belong to the Parker family is also immediately apparent. They each have their individual name; yet they share a common family name.

Even among the saints there is a great variety of first names of grace. There is Il Poverello of St. Francis of Assisi, The Little Way of St. Therese of Lisieux, or The Angelic Doctor of St. Thomas Aquinas.

In any communal discernment it is very important that the persons within the group be aware of their faith-history and their first and last name of grace. The last name of grace, that special calling we share with each other as members of this particular community, is of special importance during the time of discernment. It is necessary that decisions which involve this group of people flow from their

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awareness of their own group's specific relationship with God - their last name of grace. These awarenesses of the name of grace, first and last, are being deepened at the time of decisions so that all are in touch with this reality during the whole process of discernment.

Notice, too, that we have said "in an explicit atmosphere of faith." Communal discernment is not another group method along with Robert's Rules, management by objectives, paternal or maternal guidance, or any other such process or structure. Discernment demands that we ask the further question: "Where is God leading me and my group in this concrete situation?" This is an important feature of communal discernment, because in discernment we are weighing and deciding among goods rather than choosing between good and evil. We are not asking how much money can we save, how much profit can we accumulate, where can we sacrifice now in order to get ahead later. We are asking quite simply: "Where is the invitation of grace? In what choice do we find God?"

The word explicit is also important. There may have been a time when it was not as important as it is today to make faith explicit. "In the good, old days," when the community was close or the group came out of a well-knit parochial setting, there may have been a more common understanding of faith beliefs. People shared common faith images in a unifying, although perhaps uncritical way. As we become familiar with a wider range of philosophical, psychological and theological systems, the multiplicity of images that these systems engender make it more difficult to have common faith images. Unless I am more explicit about my faith values and the images that try to express

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them, most people will not know of the faith-drama that is going on within me nor will we arrive at an appreciation of the common faith vision. For that reason groups must voice for themselves their beliefs and the distinctions they make between faith-absolutes and cultural relatives. This requires a specific methodology of prayer and faith-sharing in the group during the time of formal discernment.

2) PRAYER: BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER, FOR LIGHT AND PURIFICATION.

Discernment rests of the belief that the human organism is made rightly, and that God actually works perceptibly in one's symbolic and affective consciousness. It also rests on the belief that evil is real. If the deciding body is to sort through and weigh its consolations (those things which bring about an increase of faith, hope, and love — thus urging one closer to God) and its desolations (those things which foster a lack of faith, hope, and love — thus urging one away from God), it must do this searching fortified by prayer. The necessity of being in touch with God through all of this confrontation with sin and sinfulness is paramount. The authentic who-I-am — my first and last name of grace — owning my reality of sinfulness, must come before God to listen. It is difficult to believe that a matter proposed for communal discernment would be so clear as not to provoke a number of positive and negative thoughts and feelings in a group. There is hardly a topic today that can be introduced for group consideration that does not evoke a host of rational and irrational, controlled and spontaneous reactions and responses. Without the authentic, critical spirit fostered by prayer, the third element of discernment is also impossible.

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3. INTERIOR FREEDOM - POISED SPIRITUAL LIBERTY.

In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius spends a considerable amount of time on the topic of "indifference" — that attitude which desires identification with Christ. It equally accepts honor or scorn, riches or poverty, comfort or discomfort so that one can freely be with Christ on mission and experience the presence of the Father in creative and unexpected ways. That attitude is not easy for an individual personally: much less is it easy for a group that is involved in a particular work or prejudiced in a particular direction. We have to be aware of our reluctances, prejudices and fears, prayerfully asking to be freed from their hold on us, at least during the time of discernment. An individual or a group should not make a change or a decision in time of desolation.

These first three elements, 1. faith 2. prayer 3. freedom, are on-going attitudes that need to grow in individuals as well as in the group, as group, before decision-making can begin to share the qualities of authentic discernment. In one group, two facilitators animated a decision-making group and their husbands or wives over a four-month period precisely on these first three elements. They set up a series of structured spiritual conversations in which the group participated in looking at its history together, articulating its gifts and liabilities, reinforcing its individual and liturgical prayer commitments, and sharing all these with each other in preparation for a decision about its parish finances. At the end of that period of preparation, the group expeditiously worked through the remaining four elements and made decisions about how to allocate a \$1,000,000 inheritance which the Church had received.

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Along with these habitual modes of living: prayer, faith, and freedom, but before coming to the actual decision, there is a period of research and fact-finding. This leads us into the fourth element.

4. INFORMATION: DISSEMINATED AND ASSIMILATED

True discernment does not labor under a naive illumination expecting God to infuse us with the answer. There are few, if any direct pipelines from heaven and there is no substitute for study, research, and an awareness of the concrete facts about the subject up for decision. Should the discernment involve persons, information about them as well as from them needs to be included. In addition to the list of facts are the conscious and unconscious feelings and values in the group which are associated with the situation.

If, for example, I am on a studies committee that is trying to decide whether or not to send three persons off to get doctorates, we cannot just meet, expecting God to send us an answer. As a deciding group, we need to know the candidates' talents, their grades, their Graduate Record Exams, the requirements of a particular university, the attraction or repulsion each person feels for graduate studies, the finances involved, the transportation and housing available, the related job opportunities present in our system, the relevance of this type of education for our overall apostolate, the spiritual needs of the persons involved, their mental and physical stamina and on and on. Not only must this data be accumulated, but all the members of the group must have studied the facts. It would be foolish to assume that a person, even though she had spent many years in secondary education but had now been several years away

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from the scene, could assimilate in a matter of a few days the data necessary for a good discernment about a complex educational issue which had arisen.

The question always arises as to who should participate in a given discernment. This requirement of having the ability to be abreast of the facts and information provides a more objective norm by which the assessment of who should be present during the discernment can be made.

Obviously, the cook is more aware of the problems of the kitchen than the administrator. Persons who, for whatever reason, lack time, are enfeebled or lack the capacity to assimilate the information and its context should be relieved of participating in the discernment. This is often painful but always necessary.

5. FORMULATION OF THE ISSUE AND SEPARATION OF THE CON AND PRO REASONS

Once information has been gathered and studied, it is necessary to formulate the subject at issue in a simple statement. It is best not to try to address a multifaceted issue all at once or to attempt to deal with a complicated formula. In other words, keep the issue simple. As a rule, the statement should be a simple, declarative sentence articulating the issue in a manner opposite to the status quo. For instance, if we are presently trying to concentrate our personnel in a few hospitals (this is our status quo), then the statement of our issue might be,

We would have greater apostolic effectiveness by missioning our personnel to as many health services as possible.

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Or, in another example, if our present practice is to elect a president of the board every second year (status quo), our sentence might read,

There will be more effective continuity in our foundation if we elect the president of the board every fourth year.

The practice of writing the proposition opposite to the status quo, arose out of experience. Groups seem to be better able to look at their situation from a new perspective when the proposition is presented to them from a standpoint opposite the status quo.

One of the big temptations in formulating a working simple sentence is to include too many issues at one time. A statement such as,

Five generalate councilors should form an equal-power team in spirituality, apostolate, temporalities, formation, and community life.

is simply too complex. The proposition contains too many items of concern:

1. How many councilors are needed?
2. Should there be team government?
3. Do all the members have equal power?
4. Where does the authority reside?
5. What are the needed areas of responsibility?

In such a case it would be better to work at the many issues one at a time.

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Part of learning to live with communal discernment is learning to live with process. The group needs time and patience to work with its own real agenda and to be satisfied with the sometimes small, but clearer truths that surface from it. In discernment it is necessary to work with clarity and to move as group from one point to another without jumping ahead of the graces actually present. If a group handles one or two major items by communal discernment, it will be amazed how expeditiously it can handle other items on its agenda.

Once the issue is formulated in a simple, declarative statement, it is essential that the structured sharing of the con and pro reasons be followed.

This separation of the reasons into the cons and pros is necessary so that each and all take a fair look at both sides of the issue, separately and in turn, so that at no time does the discernment become merely a discussion or a debate. In this procedure, where each is asked to address both sides of the issue, the timid are given an opportunity to speak; while the loquacious are challenged to be more focused. This procedure allows the many sides of the issue to be explored and articulated. When a group knows that everyone will be giving the cons and everyone will be giving the pros, there is less chance that any one person will be singled out and made to stand alone. In this way, the defensiveness of the group is reduced to a minimum.

Debate is precluded. Obviously, one does not go into a discernment knowing an answer and pressuring the other side into compliance. Rather, in communal discernment the group members are looked upon as partners in an attempt

to discern the leading of grace.

In fact, should one be convinced of an answer before discernment, it would be foolish for that person to proceed through the process. The purpose of discernment: making a decision in accordance with God's Will, is already present. It does not make much sense to discern about something when one has one's mind made up. To go through those motions would merely mean to play games.

When the group finally meets for the more formal part of the discernment, a simple procedure is followed. After a period of prayer, each person in the group is asked to state all and only the reasons he or she sees as reasons against the proposition. At this point the person does not say that he or she is personally against the proposition, but only that one sees good reason against it. Those reasons that one names are real reasons for oneself. No one speaks for everyone else, nor does one "manufacture" reasons.

The group listens to all and only the reasons against, each one giving only one reason at a time, until each person has given one's entire list. There may be a need to go around in the circle of the group several times before this is accomplished. It is helpful for all of the members to write down the various reasons stated so that all have an accurate account of these reasons later on in naming the consensus.

The group is then asked to begin a second period of prayer over the reasons for the proposition. At the end of this prayer time, the group meets again and each is asked to state all and only reasons for the proposition. The process

ture is exactly the same as the first time. Each one gives one reason, and all stay until everyone has had a chance to give one's entire list. It may be necessary to go around the circle several times to accomplish this. Again, the reasons are written by each.

For the sake of fairness, it is good to give equal time to con and pro even if this means sitting in silence together. The quiet time can be an opportunity to consider the new information learned from the group.

The discipline in these first two sessions of giving con and pro is strict. Although one may certainly ask a question about a word or phrase that was not heard or a phrase which was not clear, there is, on the other hand, no discussion or amplification. The assumption here is that the time for discussion and challenge has taken place in the period before the formal communal discernment. At our present point in the procedure, the emphasis is on listening and sorting out the facts and feelings without further dialogue.

Sometimes people ask why we look at the cons first. The reasons for taking the cons first are two-fold:

- 1) Historically, that is what Ignatius and his friends did.
- 2) Psychologically, there is much evidence to support the fact that negative reasons are hard to contain and color our opinions until they are said aloud. It seems best to lay them on the table early.

On one occasion in a communal discernment with two hundred and fifty persons, the total group was divided into twenty-five small groups. The total group used the same issue, half the small groups worked on the positive first,

then negative. All groups came to the same general conclusion, but those doing positive reasons first experienced some stress in holding on to their negative reasons until last.

After a group has looked carefully at con and pro reasons, there is a third period of prayer. At this time each person looks carefully at his or her own reasons in addition to the reasons voiced both against and for the issue in the group. Each then, sifting through the con and pro reasons, touching them against their "name of grace" as a touchstone, comes to a personal tentative decision about the matter. At a third group session all meet to state their decision and attempt to surface the consensus, the sixth element.

6. CONSENSUS

Seldom does it happen that all persons in a group are of one mind right away. It is a good idea at the beginning of this third session to make a quick poll of the group to see its initial stand. Let us say that a group is discerning whether or not to close a retirement home. Seven say "yes" and three say "no" at the beginning of the first round. Perhaps the three who say "no" have certain legitimate fears about the closing: "Well, I can't agree unless all the residents are carefully placed in other homes." "I could agree if we find some other way of Christian witness in this same neighborhood." "I can agree provided we wait two years until the new city home is finished next year."

In listening carefully to these provided's, if's, unless's, and maybe's we can seek areas of agreement. Here the dialog with the group is much freer though still of faith-

sharing quality. All are listening to hear what is really being said by the entire group. Sometimes, at this point, the consensus needs restatement so as to include the new areas of agreement. Often there is a greater facility in reaching consensus once people are assured that their very real concerns can be taken care of in some way that they did not previously imagine.

One of the biggest temptations at this point in the communal discernment is to "form consensus" instead of reading the consensus that is actually in the group. On one occasion, a group came to a standstill over whether three or seven persons would be sent on an African project. On the surface, they thought there was no consensus, and continued to argue over "three" or "seven." However, in this case there definitely was a consensus: all agreed that three persons should be sent. That was clear. It was only that some wanted four more to go.

On another occasion a group was locked over the time of liturgy: 6:15 a.m. or 4:30 p.m. They went round and round giving very convincing reasons for both options. Again there appeared to be no consensus. Yet there was. The consensus was that liturgy was a very important part of their life together. All wanted the liturgy at the prime time of day. The disagreement focused around what time was "prime." Once that detail was realized, and the group acknowledged its common faith convictions, the tension was released, and the detail of time worked out.

There are times, however, when consensus in the sense of "we all feel, think, believe together" cannot be reached. When there is no complete consensus, a group may have to

be content with the resident authority declaring the practical steps to be followed in the group's life concerning this question. This is particularly true when time runs out or the urgency of the matter demands decision. Ideally, one should take the unresolved consensus back to prayer and continue the process. However, there are times when this is just not feasible, and the group has to resort to the expediency of having the consensus declared.

Once the decision has been made and the consensus is reached, it is necessary to take that decision back to prayer and ask for confirmation.

7. CONFIRMATION: EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR

Interiorly, when a good decision has been made, the group should experience peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. There is a rightness in its sense of being, a congruence with the first and last name of grace. This definition of discernment sums up the interior confirmation. "Discernment is an experiential knowledge of self in the congruence of the object of choice with one's fundamental religious orientation." If a good decision has been made, the persons within the group will experience this peace and joy during the following months and there will be a new graced energy to carry out the decision.

Sometimes, a group experiences a "sigh of relief" that at last a decision has been made. "Let's go home!" This is hardly the interior peace which together with joy constitutes confirmation. Rather, confirmation is a growing awareness over time about the rightness of the decision. The decision fits well with who I am personally and communally. It urges

me to a greater service of God. Another note of confirmation is that I can return to my habitual form of prayer.

Note that peace is an intellectual quality. It resides in the intellectual consciousness and not in the affective consciousness. Peace is the comfort of the intellect. Peace obtains when the mind is in comforting possession of the truth without the tendency to go back over the reasons or vacillate in its conclusions. There is no tendency to go around in circles or to continue debating the issue with oneself.

Joy is a quality of the affective consciousness. It is an affective movement outward. It is the highest comfort of the affective consciousness as peace is with the intellectual consciousness. Hence joy and peace together constitute interior confirmation. Either one by itself is not enough to constitute interior confirmation.

Interior confirmation is further corroborated when the decision enjoys exterior confirmation as well. Exterior confirmation is of two kinds:

- 1) how congruent the decision is with legitimate authority
- 2) how well the decision works out over time

Sometimes it happens that a group conscientiously submits the results of a genuine discernment to legitimate authority which says, "no." The discernment lacks the first aspect of exterior confirmation. For the time being the group can be assured that it is not called to proceed in precisely the way it has decided. This does not mean the group was wrong, or the authority right. It just means the group

temporarily has no confirmation from legitimate authority, and they need to plan carefully for their recourse.

It is also important for the group to be clear about whether the discernment it is undertaking is consultative (the group acting as advisor) or deliberative (the group actually being the deciding body). Such distinctions made before the time and energy of the group has been devoted to the process will eliminate strain and misunderstanding later on. Ideally, the legitimate authority in a given situation is part of the discerning group.

Lastly, the practicalities of life add their own kind of confirmation by answering the question, "How does it work over a period of time?" A group may have discerned to take on extra sick calls or catechetical duties, only to find later on that their regular work is being neglected, there is less time for prayer, or they are becoming unduly tired and crabby. All these signs of disharmony suggest that they take another look at their decision. If we set up a soup kitchen, and six months later not too many have come for soup, we can rightly assume that the apostolic venture needs to be re-evaluated; the apostolic possibility we once saw does not seem relevant any longer. The venture lacks the second element of exterior confirmation, how does this decision work out over time.

SUMMARY

In summary then, before coming to discernment, a group needs three habitual attitudes:

- 1) faith - an awareness of God's acting in my life

- an awareness of my own first and last name of grace
 - an awareness of the group's name of grace
- 2) prayer
- an abiding sensitivity to the movements of consolation and desolation
 - a realization of personal and corporate or group sinfulness
 - a willingness to face our hang-ups honestly
 - a practical sensitivity for finding God in the place God is saying to me, "Come here where I am"

- 3) freedom
- a willingness to be responsive enough to go wherever the Presence of God beckons
 - an indifference towards the various good options placed before us
 - a desire to move in the fullness of my being: conscious and unconscious: body, heart, mind, and will.

With these attitudes and awareness at one's fingertips, we then move into the more formal aspect of communal discernment:

- 4) information: disseminated, assimilated
- 5) formulation of the issue and separation of reasons into *con* and *pro* reasons
- 6) attempt at consensus

Finally, as we come to our decision and begin to carry it

out, we monitor ourselves for the next weeks, months, year.

7) Experiencing confirmation as congruence with the object of choice evidenced interiorly by peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, and exteriorly through the reality check of time and congruence with legitimate authority.

These seven elements are integral to the process of communal discernment. It is a specifically christian way of seeking God's guidance on our life and work. If the group has been faithful to the various elements, not only will its decision be well-grounded in faith and reason, but also the lives of its members will have been exercised in the christian mysteries. They will have experienced trust, faith, sinfulness, and forgiveness. In a very real way they have participated in the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord by sharing the work of seeking the truth, facing their sinfulness, and participating in the forgiveness and love necessary to come to consensus. Nothing more identifies the true nature of a group than the way it makes its decisions.

Communal discernment is not only a just process, but a christian process ideally suited for an explicitly christian group to come to decision. Not only does the end not justify the means, but the means flows into, tones, colors, and qualifies the end. Hence an explicitly christian group needs an explicitly christian process to make its decisions.

There is no one "right" way of conducting a communal discernment. As long as the seven elements are observed, the process can take many forms. A group might prepare and study an issue for several months and then come together for a day, allowing forty-five minutes for each part

of the prayer, cons and pros, while leaving the rest of the day for consensus. Or, if time is short, a group may look at cons during one meeting, pros at a second, and consensus at a third. Less complicated situations or smaller groups might use a shorter time.

Not every issue is appropriate for communal discernment. Many of the day-to-day issues of living and working together are too trivial to take to discernment. Communal discernment is best used on those issues which touch the common identity - vocation - mission. Lesser issues can be handled administratively. They do not need the amount of time and effort that is required of an entire group in communal discernment.

In conclusion, in our own day we have come to realize more and more that it takes the entire community to hear the infinitely rich word of God. No one person has ears big enough to hear that Word alone. Most of us also accept committee meetings, task forces, team efforts, total staff participation as a normal part of life. As our awareness of life's richness and complexities increases, we are encouraged to look beyond our personal wisdom and information to a wider group of conscientious people who will be with us in our decision-making. No one wants the burden of closing a school, opening a new department, withdrawing a subsidy, initiating a new field of research, missioning an apostle completely alone. More and more we are relying on a gathering of information and wisdom from friends, experts, or colleagues to decide corporately what is the best way to go.

Most of us, too, have experienced a certain frustration with groups and meetings. Projections and power struggles,

personal contracts, manipulations, and silences so contaminate authentic group interaction that our current skills are not adequate to deal with the complexity. The group becomes a hindrance rather than a help for our endeavors. Yet we live in an age that realizes that collegiality and group process is the way that fragmented bonding and fragmented vision can be unified for purposeful Kingdom-building.

We believe, as Christians, that there is a true interchange and communion between God and humankind. God touches our minds and hearts so that we can know the truth and pursue it in love. Communal discernment offers us a way of participating in this mystery.

At the close of the "Deliberations of the First Fathers," the author has the following remarks that might well be our goal as well as our prayer during communal discernment.

By the feast of St. John, all our business was pleasantly concluded in the spirit of perfect harmony. But it was only by first engaging in prolonged vigils and prayers, with much expenditure of physical and mental energy that we resolved these problems and brought them to this happy conclusion.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Council of Jerusalem in Acts, Chap. 15.
2. We think this method of stating a proposition opposite the status quo aims at unearthing the same dynamic as the four columns suggested by St. Ignatius in [269] of the Spiritual Exercises. It seems that his purpose was to have the persons become aware of what would be lost as well as what would be gained by that decision. While this is an excellent method, we have found it unwieldy for large groups. The use of four columns works better for its original purpose, an individual person.
3. Cf. "To See the Other Side...", George J. Schemel, S.J., Review for Religious. Vol. 45: No. 4, (July/August 1986).