



Welcome to Module 4B

Faith Leadership and Discernment



Opening Prayer

Let us pause and call to mind
God's presence within and among us,
today and always.

Brief pause

God of mercy and infinite love,
we place ourselves before You.
Help us to be open to Your Word,
responsive to Your Spirit,
and alert to Your call.
May Your peace be with us.

We make this prayer through
Christ our Lord.

Amen.



Introduction

Discernment is a vital aspect of faith leadership. We look to robust processes of dialogue and reflection, guided by the Holy Spirit, in support of the best possible outcomes being ensured.

Our **objectives** for this module are:

- to explore the importance of the process of discernment
- to investigate the steps of a discernment model



Discernment

In this following video clip, we hear Pope Francis implore us to be far-sighted, to contemplate events and not to make hasty judgements. Pope Francis, *The Art of Discernment*: https://youtu.be/XnRa_6Jsiel

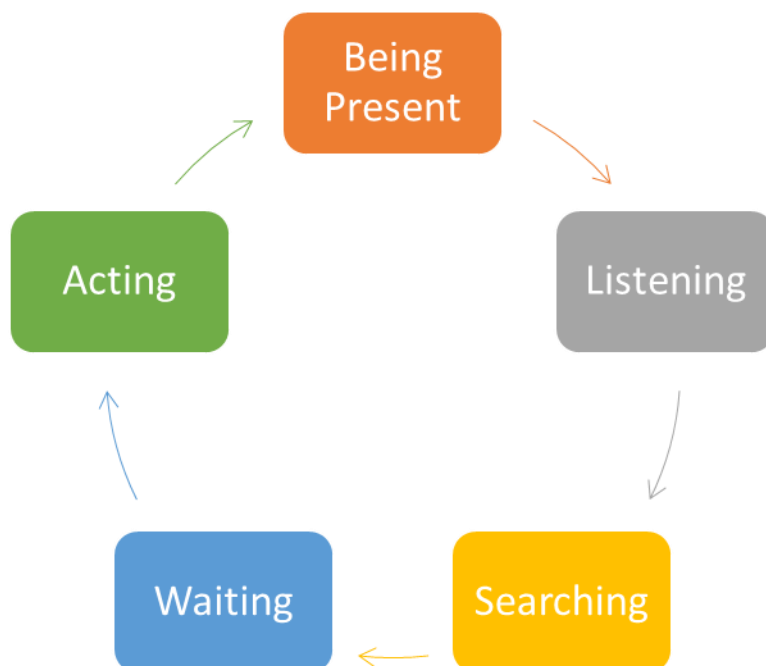


A Model of Discernment

Br David Hall FMS cites five steps in a model of discernment which he calls: **God-conscious Ministry**: 1) Being Present, 2) Listening, 3) Searching, 4) Waiting and 5) Acting.

Our true identity is a gift, given in the form of an unfolding invitation, a call, a vocation. It is God's work in us. The vocational way of Marcellin is marked by questionings and doubts. His pilgrimage to La Louvesc is a time of prayer and discernment. Marcellin experiences his search for identity and human growth as a time of grace. (WFTR, #59)*

So too, do we in Marist ministry experience our common search for good governance, as a time of unfolding invitation and grace. We will explore these five steps in more detail in the next section.





1 Being Present



Every model of faith leadership incorporates the importance of the aspect of presence. It has been said that eighty per cent of leadership is turning up! Marcellin was always very keen for leaders to be present to those whom they served. He also expressed in his life a deep belief in the presence of God in everything.

Being present both with God and to creation, allows us to discern, work, and make decisions. When we speak of discernment, we also acknowledge that the very first and critical step - is to be present. In the Christian Tradition there is an added dimension to this aspect of Presence which is the belief that encountering the presence of another, is a sacred encounter. We understand that we meet the face of God in the

presence of another. Marcellin was always very keen for leaders to be present to those whom they served. He also expressed in his life the presence of God in everything he undertook.

Patty Fawkner SGS, speaks of the *'Sacrament of the Present Moment'* – a place of yearning and yielding – a heart space where we notice the mystery in the ordinary. The present moment is the only place that we can actually live our lives - and so to bring ourselves fully to the present moment – is to live our lives more fully.

A person of presence is one who acts as though each person is important, valued and deserving of respect and connection. A person who reverences the divine mystery in the other (Huebsch, *The Art of Accompaniment*). This is all more easily said than done – the constant rush of our lives, the many expectations placed on us – all contribute to taking us away from being present.

What practices can we put in place that will support us to be present? Self-observation? Meditation and prayer? Photography? Mindful walking? Adoration?



Activity

Take one minute of silence to be here now ...

Be still and know that I am God. Psalm 46:10



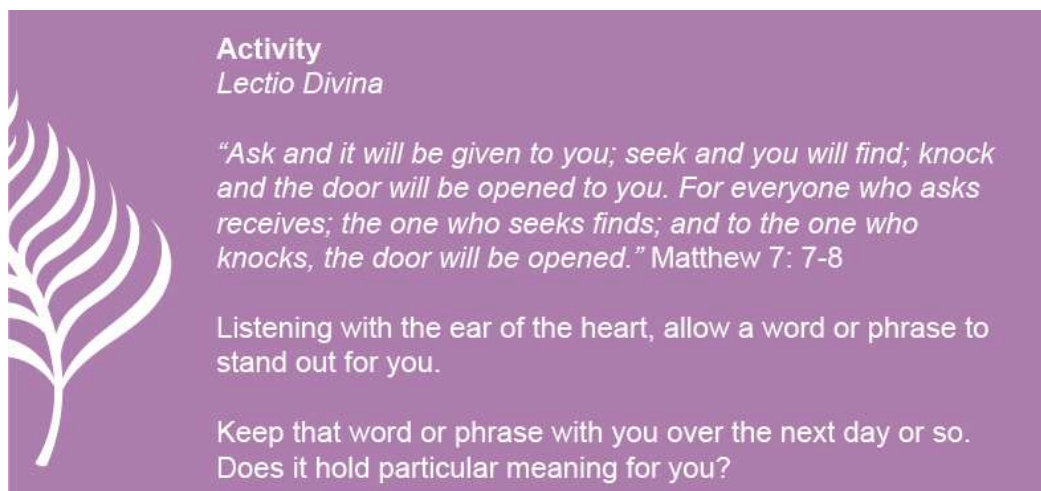
2 Listening



Listening is the ‘other’ part of a dialogue especially sacred in the process of discernment. This is a sacred and merciful listening to people’s life situations and is always done in the context of relationship. In the prayer of *Lectio Divina** – we are invited to listen with the ear of the heart. In the process of discernment, we are invited to listen with the ear of the mind and with the ear of the heart. Not only do we hear the words that are spoken – we listen for emotion, attitude and nuance and at times - for what is not being said. As David Hall states – listening is an exercise in humility.

It is also an exercise in honesty. When we listen honestly and with humility to our own beliefs and attitudes, we are sometimes able to uncover prejudices, difficulty to embrace change and perhaps a lack of openness. As faith leaders and as Marists, we

endeavour to listen from the receptive space of the heart, rather than the ego – the contemplative space. We are reminded of the theology of the Trinity – the call to be receptive, open, loving and hospitable.



Activity
Lectio Divina

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” Matthew 7: 7-8

Listening with the ear of the heart, allow a word or phrase to stand out for you.

Keep that word or phrase with you over the next day or so. Does it hold particular meaning for you?

Lectio Divina - <https://maristbrothers.org.nz/spirituality/lectio-divina/>




3 Searching



We all understand the need to gather data and ‘do research’. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Generally, we would ensure that we have read from a variety of sources in order to bring us to a point of discernment. Uppermost in our minds will be the need to be familiar with the mission and vision statements, policies, practices and procedures, current research as well as scripture and relevant church documents. We would also seek out wise counsel from mentors and companions. In the prayer of accompaniment, we listen deeply for the voice of Jesus. As Bill Huebsch reminds us, *grace is the voice behind accompaniment.*

Ultimately, we will want to brainstorm as many ideas at this time as we can and to go beyond the obvious. Some may seem completely left field – but as Mark E Thibodeaux SJ states: *‘do not leave this line of questioning until you have come up with a thousand new ideas.’* Thibodeaux also reminds us to reflect on the timing of the searching and in the words of Pierre de Teilhard de Chardin, SJ: to ‘above all, trust in the *slow work of God.*’

Importantly, we listen to the voices which are not in sync with our own for they have much to teach us in the process of discerning. Monty Williams SJ speaks of discernment being a time to work to understand what our feelings are telling us. In our searching, we pay attention to what is so different from our habitual state that it stands out.



Reflection

To whom would you go for wise counsel?

Have you ever worked with a Spiritual Director or spiritual companion?

Discuss.



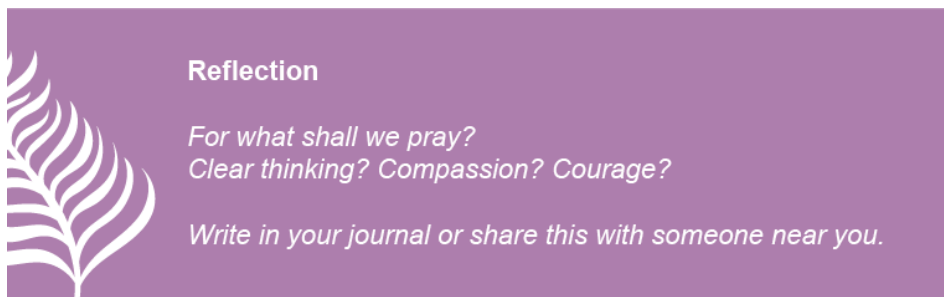
4 Waiting



Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened (Matthew 7: 7-8). These words from the Gospel of Matthew remind us of the importance of prayer; of bringing all of our learnings from our searching and listening and presence to prayer – a contemplative step in the discernment process for faith leaders. We are also reminded that Mary, Our Good Mother, our example of faith and love and courage: *treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.* (Luke 2:19) Mary shows us the importance of prayer, of waiting.

David Hall, in his paper *Friends of a Compelling God: God-conscious Ministry*, recounts to us this important step: *Most importantly we pray, individually, and in community. Like the prophet, we wrestle with alternatives; we seek authenticity. At this stage we are particularly open to surprises and fresh ways that emerge through our individual and collective prayer, reflection and dialogue.*

Bill Huebsch suggests that discernment is couched in prayer.



Reflection

*For what shall we pray?
Clear thinking? Compassion? Courage?*

Write in your journal or share this with someone near you.

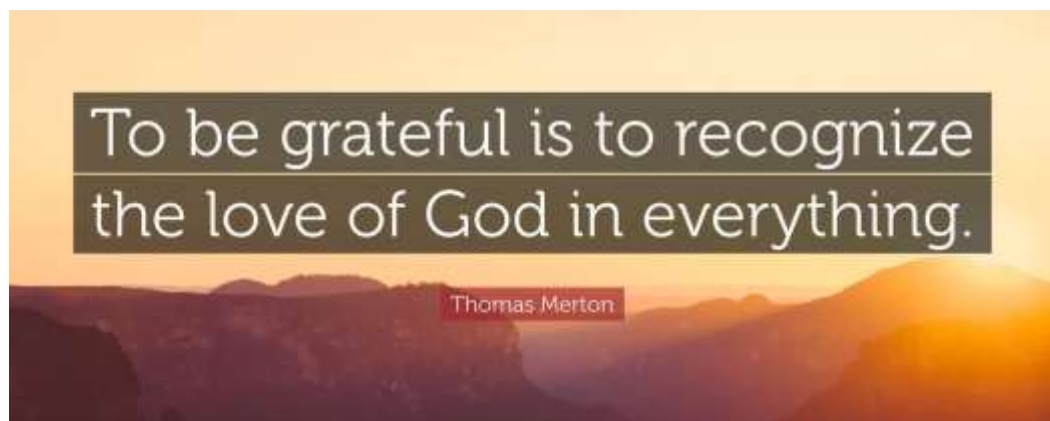
In the words of *Water from the Rock*, our guide in Champagnat Marist spirituality, we are also reminded of the importance of prayer in building community and relationship.

In our times of solitude, we cultivate an interior life that strengthens our love of, and communion with, the world. In this way we become more sensitive to life. Though we

experience the poverty of our limitations and failures, we also recognise the beauty and wonder of humanity and of all creation. (WFTR, # 89)

As we move from a time of waiting, David Hall also reminds us that changes may occur, that this may be a time when we consider adjusting or amending our policies and procedures, our previous work. In the process of discernment, we are also invited to move to a spirit of gratefulness for all that has been offered to us, that which is difficult and that which makes our path of discernment more clear or compassionate or loving.

Take some time to reflect on this quote from Thomas Merton.



Why We Pray

“One reason we pray is because we sense that this right relationship is to be found only in the mystery we call God. We intuit that ‘everything belongs’ and that all life is interrelated and interdependent. In prayer we seek to come close to the heart of that wholeness, and allow our own lives to be touched by it, and even transformed by it.” (Silf, 2005)





5 Acting



As Marists, we ‘enact our decisions with courage, hope and apostolic zeal. We are careful to do this ‘at the right time, in the right way, and in the right place.’ Our action is characterised by a Marial-like optimism that exudes confidence without arrogance, and belief without a lack of realism. Where appropriate, we ritualise and celebrate what we enact’. (Hall)

Creating the Future

“The future is not some place we are going to but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found but made, and the making of those pathways changes both the maker and the destination.” (Silf, 2009)

**What do these words ‘changes both the maker and the destination’ mean for you?
Discuss.**



Indifference

When we have gratitude for the present moment and are not committed to a specific outcome – we can say that we are practising indifference. The work of faith leaders is to remain open to possibility; to hear points of view other than our own so that we are not unconsciously steering our position to a desired outcome.

As Monty Williams SJ asks of us, ‘*Why discern at all if I’m not actually open to more than one possibility? But to be indifferent, I am even more than open to other possibilities.*’ Williams goes on to say that the basis of discernment is a relationship with God. St Augustine spoke of the need for love – ‘Love not only reveals to us what is possible but shows us the path to make it real’.



Summary



Effective discernment requires the disposition and time for decision-makers to carefully weigh up all elements of their decisions and enable the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Right structures and processes enable discernment. Taking the time to think through reporting and accountability relationships gives a clarity to decision-making.

Pope Francis' chapter on discernment in *Gaudete et Exsultate: On the Call To Holiness In Today's World* states that discernment, *calls for something more than intelligence or common sense. It is a gift which we must implore. If we ask with confidence that the Holy Spirit grant us this gift, and then seek to develop it through prayer, reflection, reading and good counsel,*

then surely we will grow in this spiritual endowment." (GE, #166)

This following quote is attributed to Fr. Pedro Arrupe, who was a Superior General of the Jesuits:

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how to spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love; stay in love, and it will decide everything.



Prayer

Lord look lovingly on this group gathered here.

During this meeting as we discuss and deliberate on issues of importance to this (name the facility) help us to be guided by your Spirit.

May we be wise in our discernment, balanced in our judgement, fair in our decisions and visionary in our planning.

Though we may, at times, have differing views
may we listen to one another and be guided by our common goals.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



References

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WATER FROM THE ROCK

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