

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DOING A SAMPLE SESSION FROM *LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT*.*

These instructions take you through the first half of Stage 1 (pp. 16-20) and will give you a brief taste of how this book can help a small group use Scripture for discernment rather than debate. Since part 2 (pp. 20-26) is colored specifically to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we have included a copy of *Scripture in the Community of Christ* developed by the Theology Task Force. This can be adapted for discussion in small groups.

Begin with the opening liturgy. The grace of this book lies in framing biblical reflection in a real experience of worshipful discernment. You can't pretend to create that - you do it. So, even in practice where we are pressed for time, begin with the opening liturgy on pp. 15-16, reprinted here.

Please note the times indicated below. In our practice session it is essential that we stay on time even though this may compress our discernment process a bit.

10 Minutes OPENING WORSHIP

Litany of the One Spirit

We call upon the Spirit of God to gather us together

We honor the Spirit of God, dwelling in each of us.

We come to listen to one another.

And we come to listen for the Spirit who dwells within us all.

We honor this space as the place where God calls us together.

We cherish and protect what is shared in this space.

We find our unity in the One God, not in doctrine or argument.

We honor our unity in Christ. To the One whom we honor and praise, the One God who is love. Amen.

Invocation (in unison)

O God, we have come together to walk with you, as did the disciples of old, along our own Emmaus Road. We pray that the fears and uncertainties that cloud our minds may be dispelled by your words. Bless our shared journey in the simple and sacred act of speaking the truth of our hearts within the common covenant of our baptism. Amen.

Lighting of a Candle

God's Word is a lamp to our feet.

and a light to our path.

We light this candle to remind us that we do not make this journey alone.

(Light the candle here.)

May God light our way. Amen.

Introductions

Ask each person to introduce herself or himself and to share a self-descriptive word or phrase.

Statement of Covenant

God, as facilitator of this discussion, invites us to enter into a covenant with God and with one another.

In response to God's invitation:

I will honor and respect every participant as a person of faith.

I will claim a shared belief that the Holy Spirit is present and at work in this community.

I will examine the whole of scripture, not just isolated verses.

I will earnestly seek to hear and understand perspectives different from my own.

I will seek to retain a unity of Spirit even when I disagree.

As God's church, this will be a safe and confidential place where people can discuss sensitive issues freely without feeling that they will be attacked or rejected. Amen.

BEGIN THE STUDY ITSELF.

10 Minutes

“We turn to Acts 10 to discover how the early church discerned the will of God. As you listen to the text being read, note the discernment process taking place and the factors that led to the making of a decision.”

Invite one or more persons to read the Acts 10:1-48 passage (pp. 17-19) out loud at a pace that allows persons to really listen in to the narrative.

REMEMBER that discernment requires attentive listening.

Turn to the three discussion questions on pp. 19-20. Question 1 needs to be done quickly.

- (1) Many different people are involved in this text, which speaks of a change in how God's people understood God's will. As a group, list the different persons and groups of people named in the text.

The obvious persons / groups (necessary to identify as they'll be used in Q 2) are: Peter, Cornelius, and the believers from Joppa.

15 Minutes

- (2) Divide into three groups. One group is to discuss the following questions from the perspective of Cornelius; one group from the perspective of Simon Peter; and the other group from the perspective of the believers from Joppa. Remember that the focus of this Bible study is on the process of discernment.

- (2a) What was the process of insight for you in this text? By what means did you perceive the direction of the Spirit?

- (2b) What were the obstacles that you encountered? What hindered your capacity to perceive the Spirit's guidance?

- (2c) The book explains (pp. 3-7) that discernment: (1) involves attentive and intentional listening to the Spirit in order "to discover how God is acting in the world"; (2) is an unpredictable process (the Spirit is free) that requires listening to one another, the Bible, and the "still, small voice you encounter in worship and communion"; and (3) involves the often unfamiliar "language of the Spirit" so that it can feel "chaotic, at times nebulous."

What aspects of your experience in this text fit this model of discernment? What doesn't?

- (2d) What conclusions/questions from your discussion of this text are pertinent to our discernment about the gospel message to our church as we relate to lesbian and gay Christians? Note: this is the point at which this session shifts from a study of discernment to a practice of discernment. How do you feel the Spirit leading you through this text and/or this discussion?

10 Minutes

Re-gather the groups and take 10 minutes to process the insight from the small group discussions.

It is essential to develop an atmosphere of openness, honesty and safety. Each person must be honored as a person of faith even if we disagree. To assist in this, each session should open and close with worship.

The text has provided opening liturgies which contain a statement of covenant that includes fundamental principles for discernment. It is very important that this covenant be renewed each time so that discernment rather than debate will take place.

Since many differences of opinion will be expressed during the session, it is important that each session end with worship that reaffirms that every person in the group is a member of the body of Christ and an object of the love of God. The text offers simple Communion liturgies which may be developed or expanded or used as it is. If in our faith tradition priesthood members are not available to administer the sacrament a simple EMMAUS meal may be substituted.

*Adapted from *Listening to the Spirit – A Handbook for Discernment*, Christian Board of Publication, ISBN 0-8272-2131-2; pp 15-20.