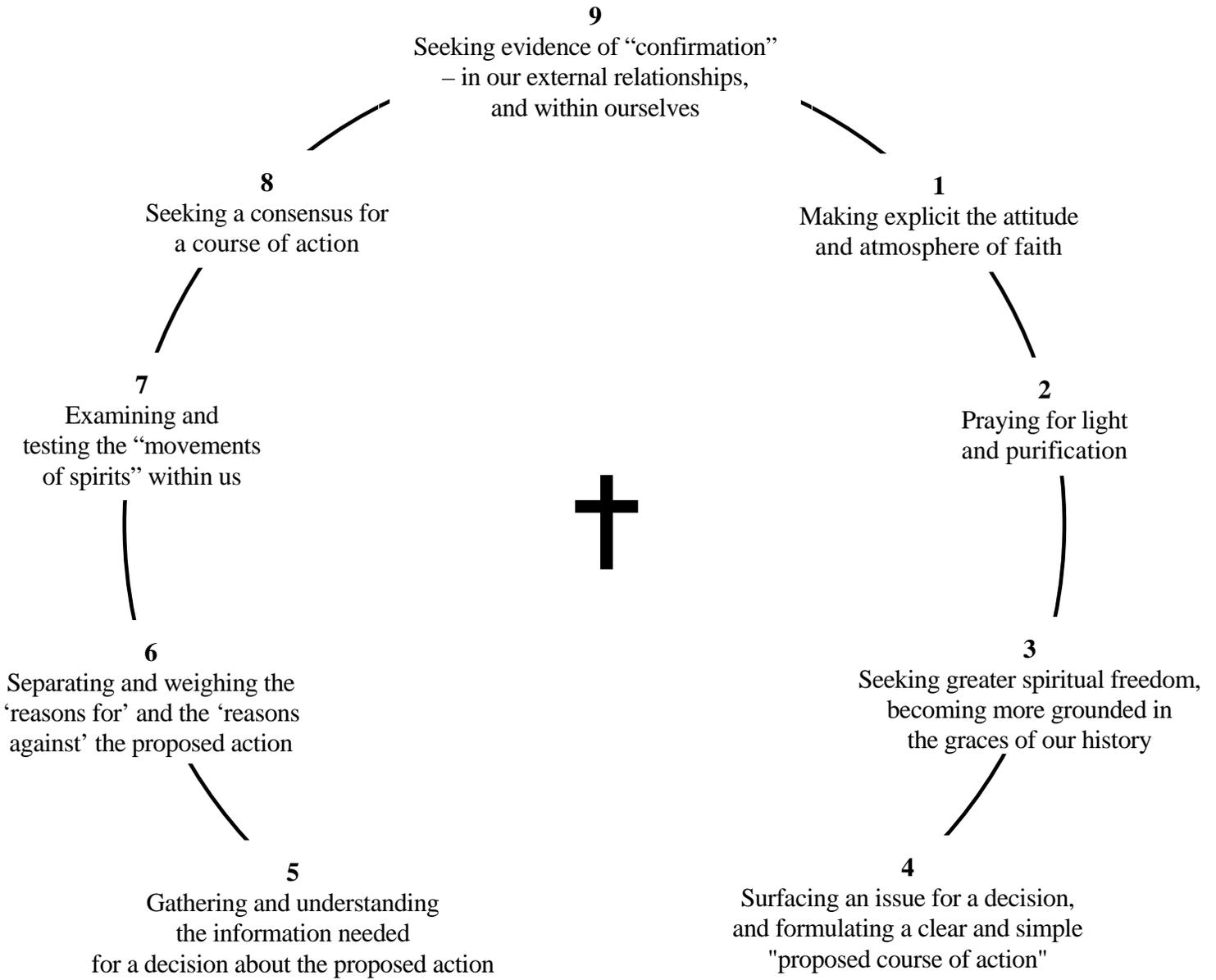


Nine Essential Elements of Communal Discernment

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Communal discernment is not essentially a "method" and it is not mainly about some "thing".

Communal discernment is a "manner of knowing" –

knowing ourselves as a body, with collective attitudes and behaviors, graced and sinful, in a relationship to God – in a relationship with God as we consider a specific "course of action"...

a manner of knowing our relationship with God as the ground of our true self as we receive and embody / incarnate God's grace...

as manner of knowing the state of our "spirit" and the movements of spirit within us toward and away from what we perceive as God's call to us...

and a manner of knowing the congruence of a course of action with our graced Identity and the consequences for an ongoing conversion of attitudes and behaviors in ourselves that engaging in a particular course of action will bring to light.

Communal discernment is a "manner" and way of knowing more clearly where and how to more faithfully incarnate our shared "corporate mission".

Discerning the spirits that are moving in us can shed light on the attractions and obstacles that exist in us, what their sources are, and the means that may prove fruitful for cooperating with God's grace, so that the true "qualities of our charism" may become more incarnated in the particular course of action.

Communal discernment involves

- an appropriate context – a group with shared values and shared issues
- a focus toward a desired "grace" to be incarnated regarding a particular issue
- a viable method – including a clearly formulated statement of what needs to be decided
- monitoring of the movements of spirits in the group during the discernment process
- moving toward "consensus" – with a degree of "spiritual freedom" in the group – at whatever level there is actual clarity and commitment, without being "impelled" or "forced" or "obligated" to a "constrained acceptance".

Nine Essential Elements of Communal Discernment

“Elements” – not discreet “steps” –
“organic elements” which flow throughout the process...

1. Making explicit the “attitude” and “atmosphere” of faith

The quality of our relation to God / relationship with God
is foundational for discerning God’s call to a course of action.

Since mission is an expression of our Identity and our central values,
reflecting together on statements relating to our communal Graced Identity and Mission
can provide a “grounding” for our attempt to discern a particular course of action.

2. Praying for “light” and “purification”

By examining ourselves in light of Mission and Vision statements and core values
God can shed light on what thoughts and ways are "our thoughts" and "our ways"
but which are not "God's thoughts" and "God's ways".

3. Seeking “poised spiritual liberty” – remembering our *Core Consolations*

Seeking greater spiritual freedom
by becoming more grounded in the graces of our history

4. Surfacing an ‘issue’ and formulating a "proposal for a course of action”

Stating clearly and simply a "proposed action" to be discerned

It is important that the proposed course of action be formulated
as a “simple positive statement” –
not formulated as a question,
and not as a series of actions in a complex sentence with several clauses and “conditions” –
but framed with a verb in the future tense, as “We will...”

It is important that everyone in the group has the statement in the same wording.

5. Gathering the facts needed for a discernment about the issue, and understanding them:

Facts about internal needs and limits, external needs, internal and external resources

It is important the those who participate in the communal discernment process
have the needed information and are able to understand the implications of these facts.

6. Separately gathering the "reasons against" and the "reasons for" the proposed action

a. A sufficient amount of time for private prayer in which each one records “reasons against”
focused by a statement such as “what I see as a reason against the proposed action”

- b. Followed by a sufficient time for each one in the group to share, one reason at a time, and for each one to record each reason against that surfaces in the group, until no further “reasons against the proposed course of action” are present to the group.
 - c. A sufficient amount of time for private prayer in which each one records “reasons for” focused by a statement such as “what I see as a reason for the proposed action”
 - d. Followed by a sufficient time for the same process of sharing and recording these reasons as was done for the “reasons against”.
7. Examining and testing the "movements of spirits" within us as we discern:
Acknowledging, identifying, attending to the “movements of spirits” in us

It is important to be aware of the movements of spirits that will naturally occur throughout the discernment process. At this point in the discernment process it is especially important to take some time, with the help of the guide, to reflect on our readiness to seek consensus.

8. Seeking consensus for a ‘course of action’
- a. A sufficient amount of time for private prayer in which each one ‘weighs’/ ‘sifts through’ the ‘reasons against’ and the ‘reasons’ for the proposed course of action in order to identify principal reasons which lead toward a personal stance / inclination regarding the proposed course of action.
 - b. Followed by a sufficient amount of time for each one to share their personal inclination, and in listening to one another and to be guided toward identifying where a consensus lies within the group.
9. Seeking evidence of ‘internal confirmation’ and ‘external confirmation’ –
"confirmation" within us, and “confirmation” in our relations with others

This process of confirmation begins with the recognizing the spirits in each one and in the group which follow the time of consensus, and continue in the process of communicating the consensus about the course of action to those who will be affected, and subject to whatever accountabilities may exist to other groups and the larger community.