

What is the Discernment Process? (Adapted from Chapter 9 of Fruitful Discipleship)

OK, so here we are in the third of three steps of the Charism journey. The introductory workshop introduced us to the various charisms and prepared us to dive into the second phase of the interview. The personal 1:1 interview with someone who listened to our experiences and heard signs of our charisms through our stories.

This interview process helped to identify the possible presence of one or more charisms and to narrow them down to one particular charism to actively discern.

We have been talking a lot about discerning and discernment, but what does it really mean? It's probably not unusual for some candidates to not be familiar with the term or understand what it really means. Let's take a moment to briefly examine this term.

The process of discerning our Charisms is more than making a decision...you will be moved to feel the effects inside yourself

Discernment describes a wise way of judging between things, or a particularly perceptive way of seeing things, understanding the obscure with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Consider the Ignatian definition of discernment:

Pondering and noticing interior movements of attraction and heaviness are at the heart of Ignatian discernment. Discernment involves prayer and weighing facts and feelings about the several good choices which ultimately leads to a choice about what is the best fit for an individual in their role as part of God's plan.

It is important to point out that taking the inventory is NOT a discernment. The inventory is merely the most fruitful place to start the discernment process.

So how does one discern a charism? Experiment. You must take action. While there may be some exceptions, part of experimenting is exercising your charism for someone else.

Draw Me Into Your Friendship: by David Fleming, SJ, offers Helpful Attitudes for entering into an authentic discernment process seeking God's will.

Openness: approach the Experiment/decision with an open mind and open heart. We can't find God's will for us if we enter into the process with a pre-conceived outcome based on our self-will.

Generosity: enter the process with openness, putting no conditions on what God might call us to. This is like writing God a signed "blank check" letting God fill in the amount and content of the check.

Courage: Such openness and generosity require courage, for God might be asking something difficult, challenging, and risky of us. It takes courage to give up control and trustingly put the decision in God's hands while seeking God's will over our own.

Interior freedom: Deepest desire is to do whatever God's will is with no conditions attached. This is the attitude necessary to authentically find and follow God's will for us.

Our Priority – to seek and to find how God is calling me at this time of my life, and to respond by cultivating our Charism.

The three signs of the charism – your personal experience, your objective effectiveness and the positive feedback of others, indirect or direct, should be consistently present over time.

This is why you need months to discern a charism. If all the signs are present on a consistent basis, it is very likely that you are dealing with a charism.

And failure to discern a charism at first is OK. It just means that you are not there yet. Continue to experiment and pray about one your other likely charisms.