

The Fenhagen Model For Corporate Discernment and Consensus

(From James C. Fenhagen, *Ministry and Solitude*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1981)

When a ministry opportunity or project is identified, it should first be clearly described. All possible evidence is gathered and made available to everyone who will be engaged in the deliberation. Then the discernment/consensus process begins:

1. A period of meditation and prayer seeking openness to and guidance from the Spirit.
2. The sharing of “cons” as each person reports the reasons he or she discerns against moving in a particular direction.
3. A period of prayer allowing time to reflect on the seriousness of the “cons” that have been shared.
4. A sharing of “pros,” as each person reports his or her own personal discernment. If no clear consensus emerges, the process continues.
5. A period of prayer allowing time for reflection upon the “pros.”
6. An effort to sort out and weigh the reasons behind the pros and cons, recording those reasons so that they are available to everyone to discern communally, in the light of what has been listed, the direction to which the community is called by God.

“If the conditions of authentic communal discernment have been fulfilled (i.e., if there is genuine openness to the Spirit), the decision should be made clear, and confirmation should be experienced unanimously through shared deep peace... finding God together...”

(John Futrell, S.J. “Communal Discernment: Reflection on Experience,” *Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits* IV, no. 54 [November 1972]: 173).

7. A concluding prayer of thanksgiving and the reaffirmation of corporate commitment to carrying out the decision.

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