

STEPS FOR CORPORATE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

“... so that you will be able to discern what is the will of God.” Romans 12:2

The core concepts are described below and the application of the steps for our church are described on the next page.

1. Before embarking on the discernment process all are invited to pray diligently, to maintain a spirit of love and humility and to create a climate of honoring God.
2. When an opportunity or concern is identified, it should first be clearly described, including any relevant history.
3. Work together to shape the opportunity or concern into a core question needing to be answered. The question may change as the process progresses.
4. Invite all who are participating in the discernment process to maintain a “holy indifference” to the outcome. Having holy indifference doesn’t mean a person doesn’t have an opinion, but rather it means that a person is willing to set aside his or her opinion for a time for the purpose of being open to God’s direction.
5. All conversations should be kept “soft” in order that creativity may be present and contribute to the process. Listen carefully to one another and be alert to any new ideas and possibilities.
6. Gather all possible data and factual information, identifying alternatives and possibilities, pros and cons.
7. All possible information is made available to everyone who will be engaged in the deliberation.
8. Spend time in reflection and prayer, listening to God’s intimations and hints of God’s direction. Consider fasting after the pattern of Daniel who fasted when he needed revelation and an answer to prayer (Daniel 10:1-3).
9. Share with the community what has been seen, heard, and felt in the reflection time. At this stage there is no right or wrong, but rather a desire to hear God. Frequently, insight and wisdom come in the dialogue.
10. Humility is crucial. Each one must be constantly aware that God may have spoken through another person.
11. Wait for God’s timing. Sometimes there is silence during the wait. Continue to ask God for direction during the wait.
12. At this stage, when opinions begin to take shape, remember again to keep a holy indifference to the outcome. Even as conclusions are forming, be willing to receive new ideas and consider them.
13. When consensus begins to emerge, continue to offer all plans and commitments to God for reshaping. A concluding prayer of thanksgiving is given, along with a commitment to carry out the decision.

APPLYING THE STEPS TO FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF TULSA

The congregation prays together. The entire congregation enters the first step, a time of prayer and fasting for direction for the future of the congregation.

Research by a small team. A team has been named to help with steps 2, 3, and 6. It is called The Study and Facilitation Team for the Future of First United Methodist Church. Team members are Brad Burkhalter, Jason Charles, Chace Daley, David Dyson, Sarah Everett, Jacob Odom, Tom Junk, Stephanie Mitchell, Dave Steensland, Bruce Riddle, Gail Runnels and Chris Tabberer. The team will shape the opportunity into a core question that our church needs to answer. Example: When we look at the mission of our church, our unique DNA and our future, what structure, form, polity, doctrine and order best suits our church? The team will meet often to gather all possible data and factual information, identifying alternatives and possibilities, pros and cons.

Presentation of options to the Church Council. In step 7, the Study and Facilitation Team will offer to the Church Council the results of the research, making available as much information possible about the options, including known consequences of each option. Clarifying questions are received from the Council, but opinions forming are not yet expressed. The Council maintains a spirit of openness to God's direction.

Focused prayer and fasting by the Church Council. The Church Council enters into Step 8, a focused time of seeking prayer and fasting.

Holy conversation with the Church Council. Using the principles in steps 9, 10, 11 and 12, the Church Council is given an opportunity to express what has been seen, heard and felt in the prayer and fasting time. As the conversation progresses, there will be opportunities to "test" whether or not there is a "sense of leading" in the Church Council. Is consensus beginning to form? If not, is there a need for more information, more time or more conversation?

Holy conversation with the Congregation. If consensus has formed and a conclusion has been reached in the Church Council, the conclusion is offered to the congregation with openness and humility. A summary of the reasons for the conclusion, along with the research, is offered to the congregation for consideration. The congregation enters a focused time of prayer and fasting, followed by conversation in small gatherings. The church continues in a posture of openness to the Holy Spirit. The Study and Facilitation Team begins to test the congregation for consensus and a "sense of leading". If consensus has not been reached, prayer and conversation continue. We are bound by the Annual Conference to conclude the process with a church member vote if any direction other than remaining in the United Methodist denomination is chosen.

Gratitude. In the spirit of step 13, the congregation enters a time of gratitude and hope as we turn our attention to the future and the fulfillment of our calling. A concluding time of thanksgiving is offered to God, and we reaffirm our commitment to carrying out the mission of Jesus Christ.