

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Discernment

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, February, 2005

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

If we are to participate in the unfolding process of the universe, we must let life flow through us, rather than attempt to control life. ~ Joseph Jaworski

Reflection/Personal Sharing (approximately 30 minutes)

Focus Readings:

1. Excerpts adapted from *Created and Called* by Jean Morris Trumbauer:

The processes of discernment help us to discover our gifts and call and to surrender to our vocation at each stage of our life. Today we are faced with increasing choices – in relationships, careers, and ministry involvements within the church and the world.

Discernment necessitates paying deep attention to who we really are – our most authentic self. Such attention leads to a deeper understanding of the unfolding of the universe.

Discernment is a gift. It allows us to uncover the deeper questions of life, see and explore new possibilities, and sift through options as one chapter of our life unfolds into the next.

Discernment engages the whole person, senses, intellect, emotions intuition, and imagination. Thus even in the process of discernment we use many of our gifts.

Discernment allows us to move beyond mere intellectual analysis, as well as, to avoid compulsive action based on temporary feelings or the desire to reach a quick conclusion and avoid the tension of waiting.

It requires us to sort through layers of wants and wishes as we gradually uncover our deepest desires and most authentic self and align our commitments with these discoveries.

Pierre Wolf, author of *Discernment, the Art of Choosing Well*, suggests that an ultimate criterion for discernment is whether our decisions and choices foster life and growth.

2. From Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*

There are all kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of god... By and large a good rule for finding out is this: The kind of work god calls you to is the kind of work a) that you need most to do and b) that the world most needs to have done.

Focus Questions:

How have you made choices in the past?

How do you make choices now?

Are there any patterns of recurring comments or events in your life?

What doors seem to be closing in your life? What doors are opening for you?

In what directions are the large and small decisions in your life leading you? – toward greater self-esteem, aliveness, wholeness, health, love, and justice? Or toward isolation and alienation, fear, prejudice, resignation, and a gradual death of self?

Checkout/Likes and Wishes:

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

I don't know who – or what - put the question. I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer to someone or something. And from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life in self-surrender has a goal.

~ Dag Hammarskjöld