

**Discerning Gifts and Calling Persons for Ministry  
in the Context of Spiritual Formation:  
Vision, Preparation and Process  
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**Vision**

It seems fairly clear that the Apostle Paul saw the church as a place where all members of the Body of Christ were to be equipped for various works of service or ministry (Eph 4:4-16). Those with oversight ministries were understood to take the lead in this process.

While we do not believe that the New Testament lays out in detail a normative pattern or methodology, we do believe that certain elements in the biblical purview remain viable and that in our context certain approaches comport better than others with the core biblical insights.

Out of this matrix of factors we have come to hold that there are five fundamental principles involved in "equipping the saints for the work of ministry."

First, this work is essentially the work of the Head of the Body, Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a work of grace that proceeds and exceeds all our actions and efforts. This means that we may and must only proceed on the basis of our trust that God will provide all those needed to accomplish the total ministry of the church in its parts (local churches) and in the whole (the church universal). We are called to participate by faith, hope and love not guilt, fear or anxiety. Discernment and equipping is essentially a joyful ministry itself. This trust in the Lord of the Body will naturally exhibit itself in devotion to prayer and scripture study.

Second, this discerning process is essentially an organic process. That is, people are identified and called to various ministries through relationships which involve some significant interaction of listening and sharing which contribute to the process of discernment. Some aspects of this process need

to be deliberate and focused. Special preparation and specially developed interviewing meetings seem to facilitate well this organic process of fitting the members of the Body together in Christ's ministry. Efficiency cannot be the guiding principle of this process.

Third, the discernment process will pay particular attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life as already manifested in (a) abilities and (b) motivation specially given and effective, although perhaps in mustard seed form. Enthusiasm for a particular service is vital.

Fourth, ministry in the service of Christ will be vitally connected to a person's continuing growth as a disciple of Christ. These two dimensions of life in Christ, service and growth should not be separated but always linked.

Fifth, the discernment process is the responsibility of the Body of Christ through a subgroup of its members who carry out this particular ministry on behalf of the whole. This can take place 1-1, in small groups or by a special group who are gifted and motivated to be involved in gift discernment ministry. They might be made up of some elders, some deacons and/or others but need the support of the local leadership.

Sixth, the discernment process should lead to these follow up steps:

- Calling
- Commissioning
- Appreciating
- Overseeing

### **Preparation of the Elders (4-6hrs)**

*We see the preparation of those who would initiate the discernment and calling process involving the following elements:*

1hr. discussion of Biblical basis

1hr. presentation and discussion of vision for discernment and calling

1-2hrs. Consideration of existing tools and development of custom tools (e.g. interviews) and organizational structure (who, when, where, how long) to facilitate and oversee the discernment and follow-up (calling, discipleship) process.

1hr. Practice with tools, discernment of particular congregational needs.

### **The Core Discernment Process: the Interviewing**

*We envision the core process of discerning and calling persons involving the following activities:*

Interviews: 45 min. per person with two specially prepared elders  
Debriefing each interview (in pairs and then with the other elders, 5-30 min per person.  
Confirmation of Calling (or re-interview) (10 minutes-1hr per person)  
Final Report: Calling (with terms specified) and Commissioning  
Planning for Follow-up (overseeing, evaluating and re-discernment/confirmation/re-deployment)

## **“Equipping the saints for the work of ministry”**

### **Foundations**

We are the Body of Christ: one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one ministry.  
There is no ministry except Christ’s.

--and not simply in name. His ministry takes place whether we “do stuff” or not.

We do not create or sustain it--we participate in it.

We do not make it happen.

Our job is to discover the ministry of Christ and participate in it by His Spirit. God is not dependent upon us in any final way.

The Body is made up of many members, each with something unique to offer

Even those with same gifts utilize them differently

Because of their unique person

Because of their place in their spiritual journey (maturity)

### **Implementation**

1. It is the working of Christ, the Head of the Body, by the Spirit to provide the body the members it needs, and the members what they need.

- a. What ever we do to find, identify, call and appoint and oversee people must arise out of a living trust in the present activity and wisdom of Christ.
- b. The signs of this trust is faith hope and love, not guilt, fear and anxiety.
- c. Are we prepared to follow where we don’t anticipate some new development, growth? Flexibility? Innovation? Some gifts may be underutilized or not used at all. May not fit stereotypes?
- d. Are we prepared to let go to sleep (die?) certain cherished traditions, programs, past successes, ways of doing things that were effective?
- e. Will we eschew all motivational and organizational schemes that arise out of our own unbelief, demands, fears, anxieties, points of pride, prejudices?

f. The individual members themselves may not recognize their own place of service in the body.

Their own lack of experience

Their own pride or false humility

Following stereotypes and envy (comparison)

g. Prayerful and joyful ministry of serving and calling as a group  
discernment

2 Discernment is a personal, relational, and interactional process (organic?)

a. Take time to learn and listen

b. With no pressing concern to "fill slots."

c. Have an intentional, disciplined means to listen and discern

d. Have several involved in the process (many ears) listening and discerning

e. An act of love, with person as an end, not a means for running a program or service.

f. Won't be very efficient. May take several rounds initially. Will involve oversight and re-evaluation

3. Discernment will concentrate on the working of the Spirit. The special use of certain abilities to build up individual members of the Body and the fellowship as a whole.

a. This may or may not involve a person's most notable talents

b. It is best discerned in hearing a person's story of the kinds of things they thought did well, even if not recognized or "significant" or even "spiritual"

Look for patterns unique to them, not usual roles, organizational needs.

c. Abilities always in connection with motivation specially given and sustained. (Eg. although not recognized or appreciated or contributing to an established program or activity or service, or even in the face of daunting obstacles (rises up again and again without resentment). Has a sense of freedom and gladness in service. No stoic grit your teeth and bear it or ascetical I'm counting the cost. No messianic complex. Not guilt, fear, anxiety, pride or envy.

Establish ways of listening and interacting with people to get to know their motivated abilities, the ones that align with the working of the Spirit in their lives. Learn to be discerning of the individual's uniqueness and the Spirit's particular working in their life.

4. Their calling to service will be in connection with their own spiritual growth. Equipping is much more than just telling, appointing, instructing, job description.

a. Concern for maturity must be a priority. Can they discern the working of the Lord in such a place of service? See it as participation in Christ's work?

b. Consequently finding them a suitable place that will also be the next place/step for spiritual growth to take place

c. this means encouraging to people to go ahead

d. this also may mean holding people back, decommissioning or Sabbath rest.

e. Some evaluation of maturity necessary to match appropriate ministry.

f. Often a person's motivation will be a key indicator. Too eager? Too burdened? Too much in need of validation? Too naive? Lack of knowledge or experience? Too fearful? A free and flowing awakening of faith: a sense of joyful and simple privilege is key.

g. Teachability and willingness to work with or under others is a key indicator. Desire to know the Lord and be involved in his ministry is crucial.

h. Don't put them in a place of "sink or swim." Burnout is a terrible thing. Don't call them to deliberately exceed their faith in Christ (they may easily under or over-estimate themselves).

i. Some may need rather, primarily, to receive. Especially if they have a need for significant healing, correction, or instruction. This discernment will serve to inform other ministries in the church to come to their aid.

5. Discernment leads to calling on behalf of the Body of Christ.

a. this means radically pulling back on volunteerism

You may start with volunteers, but that will only be the beginning point for a place of discernment by the Body

- b. It will not be primarily filling organizational slots or filling needs. Those may go by the by. It is discerning the Lord's calling on their life by recognizing the working of the Spirit in it.
- c. it means having an accurate and honest reading of the time, authority and responsibility required in a certain service (no playing it down, minimizing)
- d. It means initiative with those who are members, whether there is a need. It will mean know folks and inviting them personally on the basis of discernment. No anonymous general calls or announcements.
- e. The calling will be definite in terms of time, authority and responsibility, length of term.
- f. It will begin with an installation, a commissioning.
- g. It will continue and end with recognition, appreciation, personal input.

Equipping means continuing oversight, accountability

- a. It will involve oversight and accountability for continuing discernment and evaluation.
- b. An overseer will want to continue to interact with them to stay in step with their abilities, motivation, maturity and alignment with the movement of the Spirit.
- c. This will sometimes call for readjustment mid-stream. More than one person should be in on the discernment process.
- d. It involves discerning the input needed and level of support required and adjusting the level of challenge appropriate for them, at the time.

## Sample Interview Questions For Discernment and Calling

### *Short List of Discernment Questions*

What kinds of churches have you been in?

What things have you been involved in with those churches?

What did you enjoy most?

What went well?

What didn't? Why?

What do you think our church needs?

Ask questions that indicated their Christian maturity, their experiences in living out the Christian faith.

We asked about their family life

We asked about trouble in their lives, how it had impacted them and their ability to minister to others.

We asked about moral and spiritual issues in their lives.

### *Longer List of Discernment Questions*

What have you really succeeded at in the past?

What have you found most enjoyment doing?

Where did you mess up and what did you learn from it?

What special interests do you have?

What have you been reading?

Who are your role models in the generation before yours?

What sort of things do you put off?

What roles have you been most uncomfortable with?

(Follow all questions with, *Why?*)

Find out their passions: what are you dreaming about?

Have you ever done something and you lose track of time? What were you doing?

How do you work best with other? Team? On own? Check with leader?

What stages of your life seemed to promote spiritual growth? What factors were involved in bringing that about?

In what context are you being feed and currently experiencing growth?

If you could do anything with and for God, what would that be?

When have you been surprised by what God is doing or by what you unexpectedly enjoyed?

Address their sense of their own personality type: Do you like to be around people a lot?

In what situations are you energized?

What is your pattern in your neighborhood? Tell me about your neighborhood?

Talk about your family. How has God grown you through both negative and positive experience in your family?

What kinds of things keep you from serving as you want?

What fills your day?

What do you do in your free time? (If you had any)

In your idle moments where does your mind tend to drift?

What would be your ideal time off if you had a half-day? a week?

How do you nurture your own spiritual growth?

Describe your current practice of spiritual disciplines.

*Follow-up to Discernment Process (Four Stages)*

-Calling

-Commissioning

-Overseeing (including assignment to another area of ministry or dismissing to Sabbath rest)

-Appreciating

## Discussion

What kinds of process could be instigated to deliberately discern a person's gifts?

What questions? Formats? Tools?

What organizational processes? Who, where, when, how long?

What present needs of the church?

Installing, commissioning in place?

Overseers in place? Accountability?