

DISCERNMENT — HOW DOES ONE DISCERN GOD'S WILL IN ONE'S LIFE?

BE AWARE OF YOURSELF / KNOW YOURSELF

- When did you first become aware of your vocation or career or ministry
 - How clear was it?
 - How easily were you able to articulate it?
 - Were you able to express your sense of call clearly — in theological language — or was it simply a sense of call that didn't or wouldn't go away?
 - Did it seem the right fit immediately or did you fight it and say, "No, God, not me."
- How attached are you to the way in which you sensed your call (this may seem like a strange question!) Sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that the way in which we were called is the only way or at least the best way. (Last August ea. of the Sisters shared what drew her to this Community and what made her stay? The ways and means were many and various yet all were legitimate.)

BE AWARE OF YOUR OWN PREJUDICES OR BIASES

- If your own sense of vocation came at a later age or was even a second career, some of the candidates may seem too young and lacking in experience (or vice versa).
- if you're a **strong extrovert** or a **strong introvert**, you may not understand your opposite
 - **Extroverts** have a tendency to think out loud, discovering what they think or believe as they say it; they may even contradict themselves in the process. They often appear more enthusiastic than the introvert.
 - **Introverts** may have greater difficulty finding the right words and take longer to respond, especially if you ask a question they haven't thought about before, because they're trying to figure out what they really believe before they speak. They may not show their passion for a subject so easily especially in a testing kind of situation.
- A candidate may **remind you either of someone you dislike or someone you admire** and without even realizing it, you can assume this person has the same kind of qualities of the person you already know.
- **What about appearances?**
 - Do you feel the candidate is too casually dressed or too formally dressed or "too off-the-wall" in some respect. How does that affect you especially if he or she dresses in a way you don't like? Is it really inappropriate or just different?
 - Many people experience prejudice because they are overweight or too short or have some physical handicap. I know some very good priests in each of those categories.
- **Churchmanship**
 - If you lean towards a more catholic or more protestant or more evangelical or more charismatic or more liberal or more conservative "churchmanship", can you recognize the worth of someone who is the opposite or at least very different from yourself? There are many different kinds of congregations in this Diocese and one person might be a better fit than another.
- **Theological Language**
 - How easily can a candidate express him or herself in theological terms? If the candidate is at an early stage of theological studies, he or she may not be as articulate as someone who is near the end. Personally I don't believe that the person who can use theological language the best is necessarily the best

candidate. (When I was in Japan, I had to use very simple language in expressing theological concepts and in so doing I learned a great deal about my own beliefs.)

The Paperwork (application forms, etc.)

- It's very easy to jump to conclusions after reading the paper work or perhaps you have heard something about a particular candidate that is either derogatory or good. Can you let that go and be completely open-minded? i.e. Can you put aside what you have read or what you have heard and try to listen with full attention to the person in front of you.

The stress of the whole process

Most of the candidates are going to be nervous or tense and therefore probably not at their best. Most of us when we're under stress act from our shadow side. Can you enable them to relax enough to be themselves, to be open and honest. When I'm nervous or stressed, I don't think so clearly. Can you ask questions in such a way that they don't feel judgement in the questions themselves? The questions need to be open-ended. (not, e.g., "Don't you think you should ... Do you really believe that ...") Some people rise to stress and others do not.

THE CANDIDATE

- **What the candidate's deepest desire?**
- **What is the candidate's passion?** I have found when someone becomes genuinely passionate, you can see it in their body language and in their facial expression.
- **What appeals to them most about the priesthood?** What aspect of ministry really makes them "light up" or get excited?
 - Is it about presiding at the Eucharist?
 - Is it about serving the poor?
 - Is it about teaching others?
 - Is it about leading people into a deeper relationship with God?
 - Is it about pastoral ministry?
 - Is it about position or prestige?
 - Is it about sharing the love of God?
- **What appeals to them the least?** What aspects of the job do they dread? What do they think they could do well and in what areas do they feel they lack skills? I would be suspicious of anyone who thinks he or she can do everything equally well.
- **What is the candidate's idea of prayer?** (liturgy, listening, a relationship with God, a whole attitude toward God and neighbour?)
- **Are they aware of their weaknesses / their shadow side?** Henri Nouwen was called "A wounded healer". I have found that I often help people more through my weaknesses than through my strengths.
- **Are there major unresolved issues** in their life that they still need time to work through? (grief, addictions, childhood abuse, etc.)

THE ROLE OF INTUITION: What is your gut reaction to this candidate? I believe in using one's intuition.

- Does the person seem to be a loner? unable or unwilling to relate to others? They don't need to be the centre of attention but can they work together, expressing their ideas without seeking to control or manipulate?
- Is he or she a good listener?
- Does he or she seem flexible?

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- Does this person make your hair stand on end? (abusive, bullying, sexually aggressive, etc.)

My own discernment process — I made a list of two options and acc. to that I would not have entered SSJD but my gut said differently. Your gut feeling may go against everything else you see or hear. At least listen to it — see if other assessors have the same feelings.

Does the candidate seem spiritually mature? This is a difficult question. Spiritual maturity is a life-long journey and perhaps is only discerned at the end of one's life in the way one faces death. However, there may be clear signs of spiritual immaturity, of a lack of self-knowledge, of rigidity of ideas. Does the individual seem to be **self-reflective**. **I think this is an important quality in a priest.**

Discernment by the Community as well as by the candidate:

Does the candidate have a passionate, irresistible sense of call to the vocation of the priesthood? Does the candidate recognize that a sense of call also has to be discerned by the community? Can he or she accept that God may be speaking through the 'yes' or 'no' she receives?