

Open Space Group on Discernment – contact Madelyn Beard

It appears that most formal discernment takes a minimum of two years.

In Virginia discernment begins with a weekend retreat where the ministry of all the baptized is discussed. Before people begin their conversations with their parish priests, they are required to spend 4-6 months in prayerful discernment with a spiritual director.

In Missouri a three-day discernment conference introduces everyone to the process. It includes a discussion of discernment and formation. Before a parish lay committee is formed, the bishop meets with the person. The bishop only wants to see people we are excited about. (A committee – one priest, one deacon, one lay leader, also meet with the person.)

In Southern Virginia they do the psych early in the process. They use the VA Institute of Pastoral Care process – it helps show both potential problems and potential ministry successes. It is lower in cost (\$500) and they believe it is more effective.

VA has a “Committee on the Diaconate” as a subgroup of COM.

In Arizona a congregation has developed a program for successful discernment. A committee of 18 meets monthly to discuss the discernment of individuals. Subcommittees of three meet with the discerners monthly. 6-12 months is spent in parish discernment.

Central PA has an extensive program (two years): conversation with priest; parish discernment team; exploring your ministry (diocesan program of 8 months); continue to meet with parish lay committee while in internship congregation where there is also a lay committee internship of 6-12 months. Internship is mentored by rector, modeling by deacon.

Recommendations:

- Develop “Discerning Congregations” to serve as internship parishes. Ideally should have a deacon.
- Explore using alternative ways to meet (SKYPE)
- Process should have both flexibility and adaptability.
- Everyone should be in spiritual direction before entering a discernment process and continue in spiritual direction.