**The Impact of Faith-Based Service – Catholic Volunteer Network**

**Ignatian Teach-In**

**Sunday, November 17, 2013**

**What is Discernment?**

*“Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me. “ - Saint Ignatius of Loyola*

No matter where you are in the process of deciding what’s next, the tools of discernment will help you make your decisions with confidence.

It’s easy to understand that God’s will for our lives is to make choices that position us to utilize our gifts, grow emotionally and spiritually, and serve others. But what happens when we have several good options to choose from, when the choice is not a matter of deciding between right and wrong, but rather choosing between different paths that appear equally important and fulfilling? Saint Ignatius of Loyola spent a lot of time asking himself this same question, and the conclusions he came to are still helpful to us today, five hundred years later.

Discernment is simply defined as making choices in the context of faith. It is a way of sorting through all the noise, pressure, and confusion in your life to hear God’s voice. It’s never a one-time decision; it is a manner of living. Pay attention to the process, there is much you can learn about yourself and God through it.

Ignatian discernment is built on the key premise that God is not distant, but instead present in our lives and highly interested in the decisions we make. This practice is meant for those who already have an established faith and wish to grow in it. Rather than pushing our feelings aside to make decisions purely based on facts and logic, discernment encourages us to tune in to our feelings and see how they are guiding us. Saint Ignatius created a habit of looking at his options and paying attention to his feelings whenever he had an important decision to make. He soon discovered that as long as he was in a healthy place, spiritually, his gut feelings were pretty accurate. He felt peace about the right decisions (consolation) and a sense of discomfort about the wrong ones (desolation). This, he determined, was God’s spirit within him.

**Tips for Discernment:**

* Give yourself time. You will not be able to discern properly when you are experiencing feelings of anxiety, fear, or desperation. Similarly, try as best you can to set your own time frame for making decisions and do not allow outside influences to pressure you into making a decision before you feel ready.
* Share about your decision with a trusted friend. It may be more comfortable to keep things inside until you’ve made a decision, but talking it over with a friend will often bring a sense of reassurance and clarity.
* Seek silence. In a fast-paced and noisy world, it may be difficult to slow down and hear the quiet voice of God within you. Be intentional about making time and space for quiet reflection on a regular basis. You may find it helpful to arrive at Mass a half hour early and spend that time in prayer, or take a long walk in a secluded park to experience God in nature. Just be sure to leave your ipod and cell phone at home.

*“We will discover that we find our deepest desire not in our arriving, but in our journeying; not in the finding, but in the searching.” - Margaret Silf*

**Asking the Questions**

When making a life decision, you can begin the discernment process by asking your self the following three key questions. Reflect on each of the questions and jot down your thoughts for each one.

**What gives you joy?**

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**What are you really good at?**

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**What are the needs of the world?**

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Let the answers to these questions be your guide as you engage in the discernment process.

**Additional Helpful Resources on Discernment**

* “What’s Your Decision? How to Make Choices with Confidence and Clarity” by J. Michael Sparough, SJ, Jim Manney, and Tim Hipskind, SJ, Loyola Press, 2010.
* “Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality” by Margaret Silf, Loyola Press, 1999.
* “Let Your Life Speak: Listening to the Voice of Vocation” by Parker Palmer, Jossey-Bass, 1999.

**How do I find the right program?**

We have a lot of resources available to help you sort through the 200+ programs in our Network!

**RESPONSE**

RESPONSE is our annual directory of volunteer opportunities. It gives you an overview of all the programs so you can learn more about their mission and focus. We also have some handy indexes that help you sort through by factors such as location, type of work, length of commitment and more. RESPONSE is available in print and online. Visit www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org to search the online directory or order your free print copy.

**Complete a Volunteer Profile**

The volunteer profile gives you the opportunity to easily share about your interests and qualifications with our volunteer program staff. If you look to be a good match for their program, they will contact you directly. You can complete your volunteer profile on the Catholic Volunteer Network website.

**Check out our Urgent Opportunities**

If you are interested in starting your service within the next couple months, visit our Urgent Opportunities page to see which programs have immediate openings.

**Let us know how we can support you in your journey to service!**

CVN Recruiters:

Michael Garcia – [mgarcia@catholicvolunteernetwork.org](mailto:mgarcia@catholicvolunteernetwork.org), 301-270-0900 ext. 22

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