

Incarnate Word Confirmation Sponsor Conversation Form D

Actions:

1. Read "Topic D: Discernment."
2. Talk with your sponsor.
 - How do you make decisions?
 - Does your faith and the Holy Spirit involve your decisions?
 - What are you doing when you feel "most fully alive"?
3. Write a summary of what you discussed in two paragraphs or more, and attach to this form as a separate sheet.



Confirmation Candidate's Name: _____
Please print first and last name.

Date Sponsor Meeting Occurred: ____ / ____ / ____

Sponsor's Name: _____

Sponsor's Signature: _____
**If the interview took place by phone or email, parent may sign for sponsor.*

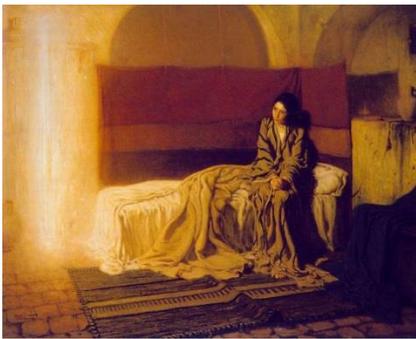
Topic D: Discernment

The practice of **discernment** is making a habit of bringing God into your decisions. This will be especially important after Confirmation – how else will you know what exactly God is asking **you** to do with the Holy Spirit?

We know that all people are called to do the works of mercy, and to love our neighbor.

The very first paragraph of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (our “handbook” for our beliefs) says that God “*calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength.*”

That call sounds simple and obvious enough, until you start thinking... How? When? What does loving God with all my strength mean? When should we say yes or no to an opportunity that’s put in front of us? Where do we find opportunities to show God’s mercy? How do we know if an activity is the way that you and God can best use your time? Luckily, the Holy Spirit is there to help with the decision-making process!*



Each of us has a “particular vocation” – a specific way that we are called to know, love, and serve God - a vocation that we’re living **now**.

Yes, now. How many of your friends are 13 or 14 years old? That's about how old Mary was when she said her biggest “yes” to God’s will and agreed to be the mother of Jesus, no matter how hard it would be for her.

And she had to keep saying that “yes” throughout her life. We believe that Mary was without sin her whole life – and even though God spared her from original sin, not sinning takes practice and a *lot* of work.

Sometimes we are tempted to think of our vocation only as our eventual job, or whether we should be a priest or a nun, married or single, but that would miss out on a lot of what’s happening in your daily life. We’re not just waiting for the future to serve God – you can do that now.

You can practice daily discernment: Am I called to do this or this today? This or this next week? This or this next summer? Discernment is never done. It’s a process that we repeat many times over our lives.

Step 1: Prayer

Prayer is first. You can’t get away from it. In short, if you don’t talk to God, and practice listening for him, or ask him to spend any time with you... naturally, it might be very difficult to know when he’s speaking to you or what he wants from you. He’s basically a stranger to you... one who knows you very well and who wants to love you desperately, but not someone *you* know well.

So, getting into a habit of daily prayer is the first and best step. Ask your parents and your sponsor if they have ideas to help you, if you’re not already in this habit. Maybe begin by practicing calling on the Holy Spirit, like the saints and Fr. Hesburgh?

* This lesson is not about your conscience – knowing how to avoid evil. We’re assuming you already have a decent idea about that from your previous faith formation. The Holy Spirit, your sponsor, parents, priests, etc. can certainly help you figure out the difference between a good action and a sinful action, if you need it. But since one person is unable to do all good things for all people, **discernment** is about how can decide between multiple good opportunities.

However, knowing that we often need some direction about how to talk to God, St. Ignatius of Loyola gave us some tools to practice discerning, to be used together with our prayer. The categories he asks us to look at when deciding how to serve God are our particular **gifts**, our particular **desire**, and whether something we would do is **needed** by the people of God.

Consider: Do I have a gift or ability for this?

The work of a Beethoven, and the work of a charwoman[†] become spiritual on precisely the same condition, that of being offered to God, of being done humbly “as to the Lord.” This does not, of course, mean that it is for anyone a mere toss-up whether he should sweep rooms or compose symphonies. A mole must dig to the glory of God and a cock must crow.

– C.S. Lewis

Whatever good or honest work we do can be a gift to God, if we choose to offer it. That’s comforting. But what we do as a service to God *does* matter. How do we begin to see what our specific gifts, talents, and abilities are, so we can use them to give the greatest service to God?



Hopefully, you can identify certain things that you are good at, especially if you seem to be better than most people. It doesn’t have to be obvious how they can be used yet, but any skills or personality traits (from compassion to soccer) can serve the glory of God.



Compliments are another great help in identifying your gifts. Sometimes other people can see your abilities more clearly than you can see yourself. When was the last time someone gave you a genuine, meaningful compliment on something you did? What might that tell you about what talents you have?

If you can’t think of a recent compliment for yourself right now, think of a gift you have observed in a classmate, and make a point to compliment them the next time you see them.

Consider: Do I find joy in this or a desire to do this?

Your capacity to find joy in what you do is equally important as what gifts you have. When discerning, both what you’re good at and what you like to do are important, and they don’t always overlap.

For example:

Seeing my abilities in math and my grades in science classes, many people suggested that I become a doctor. Sure, I’d be really good at medical school. However... do I want to do a lot of math for the rest of my life? No. Do I *want* to be a doctor? No. In that case, maybe I wouldn’t actually be a very good doctor, because to do something very well you have to have a reason to care about it. So I found another line of work that I both had talent for *and* cared about.

But we have to be honest with ourselves. Vocation has everything to do with what we desire, but not always how you’d think. Many, many wise saints and philosophers have noticed a difference between **happiness**, which is more of a pleasing (and passing) emotional state, and a deep **joy**, where doing something, even if it’s not always pleasant, makes you feel *fully alive*.

[†] “charwoman” is a British word for maid

A priest's vocation to the celibate life doesn't consist in not liking marriage. Probably the opposite. Every true vocation probably means giving up something you care deeply about. But there's desire, and then there's Desire. I can think about what I want — companionship, intimacy, pleasure — and those things are true and good, those things are worth wanting, but that's not the deepest kind of desire. This deepest Desire actually takes work. There's a Buddhist story that my mother once told me:



A young man goes to a Zen master and says he wants to see God. The Master takes him to a lake and says, Okay, kneel down. So they both kneel down by the lake. Then the Master grabs the young man's head and shoves it under the water. He's pretty strong for an old man! He holds him there, notwithstanding the poor guy's increasingly desperate struggles. Finally, after a good minute or so, he lets him up. When he does — the guy is gasping and spluttering, can't believe that a great sage would do something like that — the Master says: "You want to see God? When you want to see him as badly as you wanted to breathe ten seconds ago — that's when you'll see him."

Desire takes strength. Desire takes patience. **Desire isn't what you want at the moment. It's what your whole heart wants.** If you think you feel yourself being drawn or called to something that doesn't seem fun - don't fear it. If that is where you are called, that is where your joy will be.

Compliments can be useful here too. If anyone ever notes that you seem like the best version of yourself when you do a particular thing, that's a pretty good indicator that your joy in that thing is showing through.

Consider: Is it needed?

Hopefully, this criterion for deciding to do something is the most obvious.

If you go around giving your clothes to people who already have plenty of clothes, that's not really an effective work of mercy. That's not "clothing the naked."

So, what do other people need? Can you do it?

Filling a need can also influence your joy. There is a special kind of joy that God gives to most people in knowing that they have done something which was truly needed and has significantly helped someone else. If you see a need and know you have the ability to fill it, but aren't sure whether it will bring you joy because you've never tried it before, **try it.**

Ultimately, through discernment, we discover that God wants only whatever is good for us, whatever brings wholeness and leads to holiness. In John 10:10, Jesus says, "I have come that you may have life, life in abundance."

It may be a comfort to know that there are really few ways you can choose "wrongly," as long as you are genuinely trying to love your neighbor and practice mercy. However, since we will be more effective at certain types of work, we should look to find where God can *best* use us.