

## Shepherd of the Hills Discernment

Discernment is a term you've heard by now; it has many definitions, such as:

- ) The process of aligning our lives, personally and in community, with the divine vision;
- ) Distinguishing the presence of God at work in our world;
- ) Pursuing God's will together.

At its heart, discernment requires deep listening to the voice of the One we are seeking. Since February, Pastor Rock, Bill Janiga, Anne Sheehan, Gabi Young and Liz Mullen (the Core Group) have been meeting with Rev. Larry Mcguire of the Community of Christ Church to learn about discernment and how it can be used in decision making at SOH. It's a multi-step process: pray for spiritual freedom, articulate an accurate question for discernment, gather relevant data, take it all to prayer, come to a tentative decision, seek confirmation. It requires personal discernment first - embracing deep listening for the voice of the spirit - and an open heart, to engage with others on the same journey. We will cultivate awareness via the quality of presence (being genuine, authentic, open and compassionate) and the quality of engagement (creating space for others to share their feelings and experiences). It is both personal and communal; everyone's voice is equally important.

The goal of this journey is to chart a path for the future of SOH. It's an unfortunate reality that our congregation is changing. We have fewer attendees, few young families and Church is a smaller part of everyone's lives. We are fortunately in a good position financially due to the sale of the Parish House but we need to ask ourselves who we are, what do we want to be and how do we get there. The Visioning Committee is also addressing these questions. First and foremost, we need to listen for God's voice in our decision making. The heart of discernment goes beyond any specific decision; it will be an ongoing guide. Every member of SOH will have input in this process. We will engage our community and outreach partners as well.

Since we're at the beginning of summer when many of our members depart, we'll move slowly for the next few months. The Core Group will meet a few more times with Rev. McGuire before beginning the process with the congregation. We will most likely meet in small groups with a leader, in person or via zoom. We'll move forward as a community, seeking a "Groupheart" and listening for God's voice as we sift out other thoughts.

There is a wealth of information on discernment. A link on our website will take you to a number of resources. Take a little time to review some of it and start thinking about how you can embrace personal discernment.

Ruth Hayley Barton, an expert in this field, has said, "If we are not pursuing the will of God together in fairly intentional ways, what are we doing?". As summer progresses, updates on the discernment process will be sent. If you have questions or comments, please contact any of the Core Group. As Pastor Rock has said, we are intentionally on a journey together.

EAM

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