

Discerning Gospel Abundance as a Community

1. **We focus on GOD WITH US**, ready to guide and empower us toward fullness of *life*. We thank God. We pray to be aware of God's love and help in the present moment.
2. **We discern God's hopes and our own foundational hopes (our mission or vision)**, inviting all to contribute. The facilitator prays for us to become aware of these hopes. One person at a time in consecutive order, everyone states a hope (or passes), until all hopes are stated. We try to state hopes (positive passions), not expectations ("oughts" and "shoulds").
3. When decision situations arise, **we ask God's help to discern 'What's the real issue?' and 'How is this issue an invitation to move toward our hopes?'**
4. If an issue is major, controversial, or scary---e.g., whether for a mission to apply for parish status, whether to start a "risky" outreach program, how to "do" stewardship- **we may discern hopes for that issue, to supplement our basic hopes.**
5. **All pray to identify creative viable options for action**, just as we prayed about hopes.
6. **We gather data on each option.**
7. **We discern the abundance of each option on its own merits.** If the status quo is an option, consider it first-.

We start with one option- The facilitator asks God to help us be aware of reasons *to oppose* that option, and after a few moments calls on someone, who names a (one) "negative" or passes. Going around the group in order, everyone present does likewise. *Do not* make a speech, repeat someone else's negative; rebut others. *When we have heard all negatives, we may ask clarifying questions*-e.g., "What did you mean, _____?" We have a few moments of silence. Then the facilitator asks God to help us be aware of *reasons to favor the option* ("positives"). We follow the same procedure. Finally the facilitator prays for wisdom to evaluate option # 1. Only authorized members vote. Using a secret ballot, we vote "Yes" if it seems abundant, "No" otherwise. (We may also give option # 1 an abundance score (0-10)). The clerk puts the ballots aside *uncounted*.

8. **We follow the same procedure for each option.**
9. Two people count the ballots. **We ask ourselves what the ballots tell us.** Note: it often is easy to amend the chosen option to incorporate wisdom gained from listening to negatives about it or to positives about other options. We discuss, and decide if a formal decision is now at hand, or what further steps we need to take to arrive at a decision.
10. **We thank God.**

1. This procedure honors God; it honors people equally; creative options can emerge; options are thoroughly evaluated; there is no arguing.
2. If we are holding a group election (e.g., vestry choosing a Warden), we discern differently than for an issue. Each person eligible for the position becomes an "option." Reprinted and modified from the Commission on Congregational Vitalization of the Diocese of El Camino Real Sept. 1998
Letters to Leaders, Developed by Arthur G. Stevens, adapted by James C. Rhodenhiser

Ground Rules

1. No "talk back" in response to what someone else said, including "I agree with that statement."
2. No repeating something that has already been said.
3. Give one positive or negative per sharing, in one sentence.
4. We all give positives or negatives for each option, regardless of our personal position.
5. We say "pass" if not needing to contribute, and may speak next time around if so led.
6. Pray and listen throughout.
7. Love one another.