

Prayerful Voice

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

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THE SPIRITUAL BASIS OF ALL WE DO

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1. We act. We act out of our faith, our gospel beliefs. As baptized Christians and Catholics we are called by the Spirit into action in building up the reign of God.

2. We act in communion with others in the Spirit. The earliest disciples were sent forth, two by two. We understand that it is the act of building up community that enlivens and strengthens our mission. We are the body of Christ, active in the world. We believe God is equally present to all of us in the activities of human life. We need the gifts of the many. Sometimes the gifts of the Spirit are easily [The Spiritual Basis of All We Do](#)

TO PRAY AS JESUS PRAYED

From the beginning, VOTF's mission has been "To provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit." This is the heart of VOTF. As people of faith, we want to be grounded in the Spirit. We want to undertake this campaign as Christians, as Catholics, as the Body of Christ, as Church. We want to follow Jesus, to pray as he asked us, to love as he loved, to walk in his steps. We become "attentive to the Spirit" as we turn to God in prayer.

Prayer unites us in the rhythm and power of the Eucharist, which is central to who we are as Catholics. We also pray as individuals. We pray together in our VOTF groups. We pray for one another and for the Church. We pray for the poor and the suffering, including the victims of sexual abuse. We pray for priests and bishops, that their hearts and minds be open to genuine holiness and truth. We aspire even to pray for our opponents. "Pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5:44 - NIV). Believing in the power of the Risen Christ, we want to "always pray" (Lk. 18:1 - NIV). We want to let prayer permeate everything we do. It is through this prayer and attentiveness to the Spirit that VOTF came to this place of embarking upon the Campaign for Accountability, but our prayer work is far from over.

Each individual VOTF member and each group must find ways of praying that best helps them to be centered in the Spirit during every step of the campaign. By being open and attentive to the Spirit, we allow the Risen Christ to lead and us to follow. We have dedicated several pages of this handbook to preserving our Christ-centeredness. Please refer to *Appendix D: Spiritual Guidance*.

TO LOVE AS JESUS LOVED

Jesus commanded his disciples: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (Jn. 13:34). The same commandment he gave to his disciples, he gives to us: Love one another. Love means to go out of oneself for the sake of the other. That is what God did in Christ for our sake. That is what Christ did for us. That is what he asks us to do. As Jesus said, the easy part is to love those who love us. The hard part is to love those who oppose us, ridicule us and say all kinds of awful things about us (Lk. 6:27-36). "Love your enemies" is a tough commandment.

This is especially important for VOTF. As we try to carry out VOTF's mission, we find many who oppose us. Not a few are members of the Church's hierarchy. When we face such opposition, misunderstanding and refusal to meet with us, anger is a natural response. When we listen to abuse survivors' stories or read about bishops' cover-ups, we are outraged. From even before the sex abuse crisis, many of us carry deep anger, or a sense of hopelessness resulting from Church officials treating us in ways that don't honor our adulthood, experience, gifts or intelligence.

In our anger, or in our hopelessness, we can find ourselves making sweeping and scornful generalizations about members of the clergy and hierarchy. We can have trouble seeing anything redeeming in them, or in their designated posts within the Church. We can find ourselves

referring to them with complacency or negativity. Bishops and priests can come to be seen, not as individuals with a range of experience and opinion, but as an amorphous, closed-minded “they.” We find ourselves scoffing at any positive vision for the hierarchy.

Direct action carried out in an angry spirit, says Sr. Mary Lou Kownacki “runs the risk of being superficial or worse – hypocritical, masking deep hostility, self-righteousness, and a desire to defeat and humiliate others.” Such attitudes can wound a Christian community, even tear it apart, as has happened so often in the past.” Seattle VOTF’s Paul Post wrote: “We can unwittingly find ourselves becoming mean spirited and full of rage. Our outlook can become dark and our joy and lightness of heart becomes heavy....I believe this is a great danger to us spiritually, to be drawn into a path of hardheartedness, lovelessness, anger and darkness.”

This is not to say that anger and love are at opposite poles. More than once, Jesus “looked around at them in anger, and deeply grieved at their hardness of heart” (Mk. 3:5 - NASB). St. Augustine wrote: “Hope has two lovely daughters, anger and courage; anger that things are not what they ought to be, courage to make them what they might be.” Anger can be rooted in a passion for justice, and can be transformed into necessary courage and determination to bring about that justice.

For us Christians, anger must always be at the service of love. To follow Jesus, anger must be transformed into creative, strong, *agape* love. Obedient to Jesus, we make a choice. We choose to act with respect and goodwill toward opponents, in spite of our anger or discouragement. We don’t have to feel affection toward them or like what they do. We have to love them as God loves them and because God enables us to love them. “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” (1 Pet. 2:21 - NIV).

So this brings us back to prayer. Without prayer, such love is impossible. But in prayer we find that “love is from God” and, as we determine to love others, “His (God’s) love is perfected in us” (1 Jn. 4:7-12 - NASB). We can be transformed so as to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Eph. 4:32 - NASB)

THE EARLY CHURCH

As the early Church was known as “*koinonia*,” which means “community, fellowship (sic.)” in Greek. This is the earliest word used to try to name what was happening in the cities and towns of the Mediterranean when people got together, when people opened their homes and hearts to each other.

Over the last four years, we, as members of Voice of the Faithful, have experienced this very sense of community and fellowship in “upper rooms” all over the country and the world. We have experienced and spoken of the activity of the Holy Spirit in our midst. We understand that it is the act of building up community that enlivens and strengthens our mission. We are the body of Christ, active in the world. We believe God is equally present to all of us in the activities of human life. And so, we continue to gather. We pray. We discuss. We disagree. We agree. We reach a common ground of understanding. We *act* out of this understanding.

The disciples and apostles met with anyone who would listen, they had to speak. They bore witness to the truth they had experienced. They changed hearts. Then they changed minds. So must we. Like the disciples and apostles of scripture, we go forward “two by two,” we “shake the dust from our sandals” and get about the business of “speaking”, and *acting* as a voice of the faithful. And when rebuffed, we will shake the dust from our sandals, and proceed forward, dressed in our truth.

An Articulation of What We Do

Created as an affiliate resource by Prayerful Voice Working Group visible, other times, it is only through the ongoing discernment of the group.

3. We come together. Like the first disciples and apostles we meet in homes or in any available “upper room” that is open to us. Wherever we meet becomes “holy ground.” *“For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in their midst” (Mt. 18:20).*

4. We go forward, simply putting on our truth and witnessing to that truth in all we do. We engage everyone we meet in conversation, in dialogue. We are not afraid. The disciples met with anyone who would listen, they had to speak. They bore witness to the truth they had experienced. They changed hearts. Then they changed minds. So must we.

5. We return to each other. As the early church was first known, we are “koinonia” Greek meaning “community, fellowship (sic.)” This is the earliest word used to try to name what was happening in the cities and towns of the Mediterranean when people got together, when people opened their homes and hearts to each other. When rebuffed, we shake the dust from our sandals, and proceed forward, dressed in our truth. What have we learned? Where is the hope? What is the future? What is the next action to which we feel called? How can we strive toward our objectives while building up our community?

The Benefits of Integrating Prayer into All VOTF Activities

In 2004, at a VOTF Representative Council Meeting held in Newburyport, the first 30 minutes of the meeting was devoted to prayer. Prayerful Voice prepared a prayer session, using the spiritual practice “Lectio Divina,” that focused on the role of discipleship and call. The sixty or more people broke up into smaller groups and facilitated by a VOTF member, prayed over and discussed a particular passage from Scripture. These passages were chosen ahead of time with consideration given to this particular group and the agenda that had brought them together that day. No one seemed to care that they were crowded inside in a tiny little meeting place. The quiet and discussion was infused. It was difficult to end the session! People didn’t want to break up their groups. People reported back to the larger group as to what “happened” in the smaller groups. The most common exclamation was.... “I had never seen that story in quite this way before. It was like it was written out of the experience we have had at VOTF!” The Council meeting continued. On the agenda were contentious items and the need to act on them. At the end of the meeting the chatter was the same. People exclaimed about what a good meeting it was, how much work was accomplished, and how different the mood and disposition of the members appeared from so many previous meetings. **Acting out of our collective truth, being grounded in prayerful discernment, brings forth the fruit of the Spirit! Our campaigns need to be designed in such a way that VOTF members can continually experience this powerful truth!**

Discernment: Partner in Action

Created as an affiliate resource by Susan Troy, Co-chair Prayerful Voice Working Group (prayerfulvoice1@aol.com)

[Ed: From coast to coast, VOTF affiliates are employing prayerful discernment as they consider initiatives in the furthering of reform in our Church. "Discernment of spirits" scriptural foundation can be found in *Gal 5:1, 1 Cor, and 1Thess 5, 12.*]

The term "discernment" has found its way into everyday contemporary spiritual and secular "speak." Yet, the practice of "discernment" has a very particular meaning and place in life of the Christian faith and very specific "Spirit-filled" understandings for modern application. What is the genuine goal of all discernment for the faithful? It is our effort to discover God's activity in our life and to keep Christ at the center of all we are and all we do; no more or no less.

As people of faith what we are truly speaking of is the "discernment of spirits." This is a term and practice that finds its origins in the earliest days of the Christian faith. It embodies an understanding *that God is a God of revelation and activity* in all aspects of life, for all times. It speaks to an understanding that the Spirit of God moves within us and within the community. As Paul says in his letter to the Galatians after he enunciates the "fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." He states, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit." This is a very early understanding and declaration that, as we accept the presence of the Spirit active in our lives and communities, we must allow ourselves to be guided by that Spirit.

How do we allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit? And, very importantly, how do we know that the Spirit is present in our decision making and resulting actions? This is the "stuff" of discernment. Discernment of the Spirit is a practice. It is applied to our decision making processes, internal and external. It needs to be learned, and its value increase with practice. The fruits and rewards of discernment are often very subtle. This must be expected and understood.

There have been several great spiritual leaders of the Church who have expanded our understanding of what Paul proclaimed in Galatians. The one who has had the greatest impact on the concept and practice of discernment of the spirits is Ignatius of Loyola (1556.) It is because of his *Spiritual Exercises* that we use the language of discernment in all decision-making. Part of the Second Week of the Exercises is learning specific elements that enable us to attempt to understand the working of the Spirit in our lives. There are very clear guidelines and language.

Discernment is a thoughtful examination and evaluation of the presence or absence of God in decision making. Is this of God and how do we know? These are always the central questions. We do have tools for use in discernment. First and foremost we have prayer and contemplation, as individuals or as a group. Essential is the *assent*. We need to want to discern, to seek God's guidance and believe it is attainable. Discernment is not about a quick prayer, but a prayerful, ongoing process. There must be thoughtful examination and commitment to the process. There is an assent to the value and necessity of the process. Discernment is not something that happens to you, but is something you are committed to, desire, and make happen.