

Appendix 3 Sharing Wisdom Process

SHARING WISDOM AS A DECISION MAKING MODEL

A model of church built on the philosophy of shared wisdom has strong scriptural support. The basic concept upon which the model rests is the presence of the Spirit in the very lives of the people involved and therefore in the functioning of the group. In Matthew 18:20 Jesus tells us: For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them!

If we believe the words of Jesus that He will be with us when we gather in His name, and if we understand that presence as being the very presence of the Spirit in each one of us, we can draw some conclusions that will clarify what goes on in a shared wisdom model of church.

As we come together as a Council, the Spirit, in order to share with us the very wisdom of God, promises to each of us a piece of the wisdom. Repeat: a piece! No one can contain all the wisdom of God, for that would be to be God. However, the Spirit desires to share as much of the wisdom as the group can handle at any given time. To do this, different pieces of wisdom are given to different people.

To say that we each have a piece of the wisdom is to say the following:

1. No one has all the wisdom. No one knows everything there is to know, regardless of how educated or uneducated, involved or uninvolved, experienced or inexperienced, responsible or irresponsible that person happens to be.
2. Everyone has a different piece. Everyone will not agree. In fact, there will be a wide variety of differences and insights.
3. Everyone has some of the wisdom. No matter how strange or even “off the wall” a speaker’s wisdom may seem, in the midst of it there is something the Spirit is calling the group to consider and, therefore, to listen to, respect, and even treasure.

The bottom line of the philosophy of shared wisdom is a deep and operational faith that the Spirit lives in the group through the membership and speaks through the lived experience of each one.

The challenge of this model is the ability to “let go” of our own wisdom and seek the will of the Spirit in the gathered wisdom, rather than the wisdom of any one individual. The call to participate in a shared decision model is a call to spirituality which challenges us to develop a relationship with God that results in a deepening intimacy with the Lord and enables us to recognize the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

Council decisions are guided by the philosophy of shared wisdom, that is, listening, prayer and reflection. However, not every decision requires a formal process. For example, a decision for the Council to participate in the Lenten suppers is a simple decision and a vote is all that is needed.

A decision requiring a more formal approach might be: a decision to restructure our youth programs or go to a family-centered religious education program or to begin a program like the Stevens ministry.

If a quick decision is needed, the process can be shortened by sharing wisdom within the Executive Committee and then returning to the Council for follow up evaluation.

STEPS IN PROCESS

- 1) Gather data - can involve reading, formal presentations by knowledgeable people, listening to parishioners
- 2) Reflect prayerfully on the data. Spend time in prayer and thinking about the issue. Jot down notes, ideas or scriptures which seem to apply to the issue. Ask for guidance from the Holy Spirit.
- 3) Share wisdom -- may be an iterative process.
- 4) Make the decision by consensus or majority vote with minority acceptance.

PROCESS IN THE COUNCIL

MEETING 1:

An issue of interest is presented during the report segment of the meeting by one of the Council members

Executive committee decides whether to delegate to a committee for further data gathering or to add to the agenda for the full Council for the next meeting. If delegated, the committee begins data gathering and shared wisdom in their group.

MEETING 2:

Issue presented to full Council along with any feedback from the committee. Begin the process of further data gathering, prayer and reflection by Council members. Communicate issue to parish and individual members and get input from as many parishioners as possible. Reflect on issue in light of individual experience, insights and promptings of Holy Spirit.

MEETING 3:

Sharing wisdom -- Pastoral Council Coordinator facilitates the sharing of wisdom -- each member of the group shares his/her reflections and the responses are recorded on a flip chart.

Go around the table with each person sharing as the others listen.

After everyone has shared, facilitator tries to identify trends and commonalities as well as differences; synthesizes and summarizes data and restates what seems to be the majority thought on the issue.

Ask if the group sees it this way. If there are areas of differences, explore them further through questions to the group and again record answers.

When consensus seems to emerge, ask the question, if a vote were taken now, how many would vote "yes" to the decision.

If no consensus, are there several who disagree? What are their reasons? Share and reflect again.

Test for consensus again. If there is a clear majority, ask if those who disagree can "let go" and live gracefully with the decision. Strike balance between sharing wisdom and letting go. If things are not going well, stop for prayer.

Final result should be a spirit of peace and contentment in the group. Some members may disagree but they should be willing to accept majority decision as from the Holy Spirit. Put aside emotions, personal attachments etc. e.g., if discerning Life Teen program, someone may be particularly attached to the format of 6 PM Mass as it is. This preference can either become stumbling block or surrender personal preference to data and reflection on needs presented by other members.

This process can be time consuming and hard work. It calls for a great amount of humility and simplicity of heart, a willingness to struggle with oneself and with one another, and, perhaps, most importantly, a willingness to grow on the part of everyone involved. But it will result in decisions based on spiritual discernment rather than the secular model based on power and influence.