

# DISCERNMENT OF CHARISMS

(Source: Huntington and Weddell, *Discerning Charisms*)

## *What is discernment?*

Discernment is the single most critical personal and spiritual skill for a lay apostle. It is a listening skill, closely connected to prayer, that applies to our whole Christian life and not just to identifying our charisms. An important aspect of discernment for a Christian is the discernment of charisms because these are the special areas in which God has equipped you to serve as an instrument of peace, love and providence for others. Discerning your charisms is way of discovering God's calling in your life. Your charisms are clues to answering the fundamental human questions: *Who am I? Why am I here?*

Discernment is the practice of distinguishing God's voice as different from:

- The tug of our unmet needs and fears
- The urges of personal compulsions (guilt, control, etc.)
- The legitimate attractions and pleasures of created goods
- The weight of our own rationalization
- The urge to do-it-yourself

## *How do I discern?*

Things to look for:

3 signs of a charism (spiritual gift for service to others)

- We may feel an inner experience of peace, energy, and joyful satisfaction when using the gift. We may feel as if we have "found our place" in life or that we "fit."
- We are fruitful and effective without undue strain and struggle.
- Other people directly or indirectly recognize the gift's presence.

These steps sum of the discernment process in a nutshell. When you can honestly say that your inner experience, actual results, and others' responses all point to a specific gift, you can move forward under the assumption that you've discerned the presence of a charism. On the other hand, if any of these three is missing after you've experimented with the gift over a significant period of time, you can be sure that the talent, skill, or ability – while useful in service to others – is not the particular spiritual gift God has given you for service to others.

Looking more closely, we can discover:

4 characteristics of charisms that lie behind the 3 signs of a charism:

Charisms are:

- **Supernatural** – a charism is a gift from God, a form of grace. When using your charism, you feel deeply satisfied in a way you don't experience otherwise. The grace of God flows through you and the impact may surprise you because it's not you but God working through you.
- **Focused outward** – charisms are meant for others, not us. This outward focus helps us to distinguish charisms from other natural talents, skills, and abilities we may have.

- **Received** – a charism is truly a gift. It can only be received (from God through the Holy Spirit), not achieved on our own merits. God gives us those charism that we need to fulfill His purpose for us in the Body of Christ. We can pray and ask for a certain charism if we desire it, but God will give us the charism that are best suited to us and the purpose for which we were created.
- **Lasting** – charisms we can discern are distinct from temporary gifts – those one-time shots of grace the Holy Spirit sometimes provides out of the blue to empower people to respond to a particular situation. Charisms we can discern, on the other hand, are ways God *regularly* uses us in the world, over time, as his eyes, ears, mouth, or hands in service of others.

Things to do:

5 Steps of discerning your gift(s):

- 1) Choose the charism you want to test and try to approach it objectively
- 2) Experiment thoroughly with the gift by using it
- 3) Examine your inner experience
- 4) Evaluate your actual effectiveness
- 5) Weigh the response of others

When you discern a charism:

- Look at your motivations and past experience, and cut away everything except the ways you seem to be called and especially effective in serving others.
- Focus on this special area to determine how God is using you as an instrument of peace, love and providence for others.
- Take action in this area, watching for confirming results.
- Consult other Christians (friends, family) who know you well and pay attention to the feedback of those you serve for confirmation of the gift. On rare occasions, a Christian who doesn't know you well may tell you s/he recognizes in you a particular charism.

**Most important: Infuse your discernment with PRAYER and REFLECTION.**

#### A Discerner's Prayer

Holy One, you are the Good Shepherd who fills the hungry with good things,  
 Who spreads a table before us, who fills our cups to overflowing,  
 who calls each of us by name and leads us out.  
 Thank you for all of your gifts.

Today I am seeking to discern those special gifts you have bestowed  
 To make me a channel of your love for others; and to take these charisms up.

Open my eyes to your ways. Tune my ears to your voice.  
 Teach me what is important for me to know right now  
 As I reflect on who I am and the meaning of my life.  
 Especially, Lord, make the next step clear to me and fire me with the desire to take it.  
 In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.