



## Small Group Discernment

February 10, 2011

*First Mennonite Church of Denver*

*[While we don't typically send two e-mails on Thursday, we are sending this in a separate e-mail because the length of this information made the regular FMC Weekly very long and we thought it would be easier to refer back to this important information if it stood apart.]*

If you are not in a small group or if your small group is not going to be discussing the discernment process, please sign up this Sunday to join a discussion group on February 20, 27, March 13 or March 20 at 11 AM at FMC. [Please sign up in advance rather than planning to drop-in.]

### **Questions for Discernment by Small Groups, (and facilitation and congregational round table information) February and March, 2011**

#### **Questions to prompt discussion in small groups:**

As part of our discernment process, focused particularly at this time around the questions of: a) two Sunday morning worship services and b) a third pastoral staff role, we are invited to consider the following questions in small groups.

Question 1) What is your group's sense about the *raison d'être* (heart of the matter; reason for existence) of our FMC community of faith?

Question 2) What is the leading thought (or perhaps 2 or 3 thoughts) emerging from your group's discernment around the question of two services on a Sunday morning?

Question 3) What is your group's discernment (and recommendation) regarding pastoral staffing gifts to complement the ministerial work of Tory and Vern?

#### **Reporting from your small group**

Gathering our thoughts is an important part of this process. Here are steps for joining the consideration of your group with that of others:

1) Appoint both a discussion facilitator (see facilitation steps and touchstones below) and a reporter.

2) Reporters compile summaries of your group's discussion in written form under the heading of each of the questions above. Please send these to our administrator Karen Martin, who will

compile them in preparation for use in our congregational discussions. (You may wish to send your summary back to your group for commentary and editing, in preparation for the congregational discussion.)

3) Reporters also plan to attend and report from your group at a congregational round-table discussion on Sunday, April 3 (see notes about this meeting's structure below).

### **Steps for Group Meeting Process and Touchstones**

(compiled from writing by Annie and Vern)

Step 1) Agree upon who is the facilitator of your meeting. Also choose a reporter. Name the topics for discernment (ie. Two Sunday morning services and third pastoral role)

Step 2) Share an opening prayer, releasing those distractions or misconceptions that may serve as blocks in conversation and inviting wisdom and joy for the conversation to come.

Step 3) Take some moments of silence. Each person writes their guiding statement, key insights, and/or hopes regarding the questions the group is being asked to consider. The goal is to get beyond personal opinion to thinking deeply together about what is best for our shared community of faith.

Step 4) Facilitator assists the group to name a theme or themes that are emerging.

Step 5) Group takes time to ask open and honest (non-agenda-laden) questions of each other about themes.

Step 6) Take some moments of silence again. Perhaps repeat the opening prayer time. Then go around the circle as each group participant names a possible option(s) for the decision we are seeking to make.

Step 7) The group revisits the themes named earlier in Step 4. Does this theme still ring true? If so, what action recommendations might the group bring forward? Is the group in consensus? Are there divergent viewpoints around the issue? Note this as well in your group's report. The reporter will now prepare a written summary of the sense of the group, to share with the congregation on April 3.

### **Touchstones for Small Group Discernment**

~Spiritual discernment makes operational our faith that an ever present Guide...is present to lead us in the way of truth and love as congregations and as individuals. It opens our "church sails" to the Spirit whose winds we believe are always blowing and will always move us closer to Christ, closer to one another, closer to the world that God desires. (MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*)

~Consider that the Holy Spirit has worked to bring us and our friend, sister, and brother in faith to

this place together and that this Spirit goes between you, creating relationship, new possibilities, and hope. (Marlene Kropf's work and the book Sharing Wisdom)

~In the context of these affirmations, open yourself both to listen to the other and to speak from your heart to the other. All true meetings involve careful listening and clear speaking.

~Seek genuine humility. This does not mean considering that you have little to offer. Rather it is awareness of being one among many; awareness of being a valued part of a valued larger gathering. Consider that every human grouping has at least these four types—Preservers, Connectors, Innovators, and Definers—and that each one has something of value for the group. (types – vkr 2004)

~Avoid universalizing statements: “we all know...” or “everybody I talk to...” or “people have been saying...” Your insight has worth on its own, as part of the sharing in the midst of the group.

~Practice the warmth of the Holy Spirit with each other. Our faith affirms that there is some of God's light and God's voice in the other for you. Look and listen for the divine in the other with a commitment to open and generous consideration.

~Find the joy and hilarity in the process. Don't let humorous “rabbit trails” distract too much, but also avoid rigorous seriousness. Good spiritual work is always something like play: flexible, not overly driven, full of satisfaction and joy.

### **Meditations for Joyful Discernment**

from David Whyte

The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America

“The core of difficulty at the heart of modern work life  
is its abstraction from many of the ancient cycles of life  
that allow the silence and time in which true appreciation and experience can take place.  
The hurried child become the pressured student, and finally the harassed manager.  
The process is begun very young, and can be so in our bones,  
depending on the pressure of our upbringing,  
that the inability to pay real attention to our world may be difficult to recognize.” (23)

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“The soul of the world makes its revelations felt not by lecturing us  
that there is something wrong with our endless wanting,  
but by giving us glimpses of a numinous experience of life  
that stops our wanting in its tracks,  
because in that state we simply do not require anything else to complete ourselves, except,  
perhaps, the one continuing desire of all desires,  
to bring that vital celebration of experience into the center of our existence.” (298)

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**“Gathering Our Thoughts”**  
**Congregational Round Table**  
**Sunday, April 3**

The purpose of this meeting will be a first\* occasion for all-congregational dialogue around the questions before us for discernment. The meeting will occur after a shorter worship service, with a time-structure that allows teachers to participate in the meeting as well. (\*Subsequent meetings will be scheduled as seems good to the congregation.)

**Time outline for the morning:**

Sunday worship – 9:30-10:15

Education hour – 10:25-11:10

Congregational meeting – 11:15-12:15

(Kindergarten and up with hired caregivers in worship space with video, eg. Veggie Tales; staff nursery for ages 1-4)

Potluck meal – 12:15

**Structure of the Congregational Round Table:**

~written summaries from small groups distributed to congregation some time before round table meeting

~each table chooses a reporter for the round-table session

pastoral partners serve as listening committee

~begin meeting with prayer-song

~all small group reporters invited to share brief “pearls” of wisdom from each group: thirty to forty-five seconds per group – (20 minutes)

~discussion at round tables about the written summaries and the “pearls” – (20 minutes)

~table reporters share new learnings/integration from round tables at the mike (20 minutes)

~pastoral partners offer two or three “pearls” of wisdom they observed in the course of the meeting

~close with song

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