

OEF Book of Norms

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1. Collection of terms to be clarified

2. The Spiritual Discernment Process

[Taken directly from OEF Statutes Proposal 2015, Article VIII: Spiritual Discernment]

A. Process

We come to the Chapter Business Meeting with an open mind and heart, as none of us, individually, can know before Chapter what the Holy Spirit has in store for us.

The gathered body is served by a “Listener” and a “Recorder” appointed by the Council. These two servants do not speak personally, nor do they share their own opinion. Their work is primarily to listen attentively for the Leading of the Spirit through the gathered community, and to faithfully record this Leading. If either one feels that he or she must speak to an item of business, a replacement must be found until that particular item of business has been addressed and the meeting is ready to move on to the next item of business.

We pray and sit in silence, at the beginning of every meeting, at the end of every meeting, and during the meeting whenever we seem to have drifted away from our central concern, the work of the Holy Spirit, in our midst and in our hearts.

The opening and closing periods of silence are a simple way to acknowledge the presence of God with the whole of our being. The opening silence also affords us an opportunity to let go of egocentric needs, personal opinions and private

agendas, and thereby clear the way for each person to wait patiently for the Spirit to speak to our hearts.

This time of settling into the presence of God is invaluable, for therein we encounter the Beloved and the Love necessary to bear with one another through the myriad complications human nature cannot help but ‘bring to the table’, even when seeking to serve God with chastened hearts.

Being committed to faithfulness to God through Christ Jesus, the well-being of the Order, and respect for each member of the Order, let the Holy Spirit purify each of our hearts, let everything brought forward be sanctified. In this way all our speaking in Chapter will be of this spiritual nature, and each of our contributions will have something of the ‘promptings of the Spirit’ about it.

When so moved, we raise our hands and await acknowledgment from the Listener, whereupon we may respectfully and lovingly offer insights, questions or statements. Let us do so loud enough for all to hear, perhaps by standing, with a clear voice that respects one’s siblings.

We always address the Listener, speaking with care what we hope has been prompted by the Spirit. A time of silence should follow to hold in prayer each offering.

The Listener listens deeply to every message offered, hopefully messages that have been prompted by the Spirit, and seeks to facilitate the meeting. Sometimes the Listener calls for silence and prayerful reflection to help us listen for the Leading of the Spirit.

Passionate discussions can generate more heat than light. Anyone in attendance may request that we return to silence for prayer. One may stand in silence to denote strong objection to aggressive behavior.

All who are gathered are welcome to share their thoughts, questions and concerns, and these offerings received by the gathered body as prayers in and of themselves.

Normally one speaks only once to an issue, and only to bring new light to the discussion. The Leading of the Spirit is not the collected wisdom of those present,

but the collective discernment of God's will. Let us all hold our opinions lightly and be more interested in the voice of the Spirit speaking through the gathered community.

The Recorder also engages in prayerful listening and helps the Listener express in words the sensed Leading of the Spirit. This Collective Discernment is then offered to the gathered body for potential approval. These two servants may often confer quietly with one another while the gathered body continues to hold all in prayerful silence.

Thereafter the Listener may be enabled to speak the Leading of the Spirit, even just provisionally, and perhaps after further labor in the spirit, and with the help of the Recorder, a decision or a call to action may be tested with the gathered body (again and again if necessary) and approved.

Records of discernments which reflect the Leading of the Spirit are only approved when the gathered body comes to an expressed Unity in the will of God.

B. In Case of Disunity

Sometimes a sibling may disagree with what the gathered body believes is the Leading of the Spirit. They may disagree and 'step aside', accepting the Chapter's decision while expressing a disagreement with it. Or they may feel led to 'stand in the way', humbly and courteously insisting that the Chapter consider their concern before action.

When a sibling feels led to 'stand in the way' the gathered body and the individual will patiently and lovingly labor together in hope of coming to a truer understanding of God's will. In our labor we acknowledge that our sibling may have some truth or light that the rest of the body does not yet see. We are willing to remain teachable and trust that our dissenting sibling is also teachable.

When the gathered body allows the truth offered by a sibling to 'stand in the way' it is not granting the equivalent of 'veto power'. The gathered body remains free to implement any decision the community has prayerfully discerned. It may discern the truth of one 'standing in the way' and include this concern in its decision. It may, through the Listener, call upon the dissenting sibling to 'step aside', and this may be noted in the record of discernments. Or it may decide to

lay over the decision for another time. Ultimately, it is up to the gathered body to name the Leading of the Spirit and to follow that Leading.

There is no claim for infallibility in this process. It is always possible that Chapter failed to let the light of Christ shine fully into our Order and into our hearts, or that the Spirit has not moved to grant clarity at this time. Chapter discernments may certainly be revisited to seek more light. The Order may ask Council to include such a concern on the agenda again at a later date.