

RESOURCE 1

RESOURCES FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL GUIDE

Serving as the Spiritual Guide for your Self-Study or Discernment Committee is an honor and a sacred responsibility. You have been chosen because your peers see something special in you, sense that you can guide them through this significant time of discernment and transition in the life of your parish. You already have what you need or you would not have been chosen. My hope is to give you some extra tools to add to your own to help you fulfill the responsibilities that lie before you.

First, your own devotional style is the best place to start. How do you pray? How do you make decisions? Relating how you pray and make decisions will be helpful to those who have asked you to serve in this role. In addition, I hope that you have read *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* by Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen and that you have gleaned new ideas related to decision-making in groups. This book can be used to inform the decision-making that will occur in your committee.

In *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders*, Charles M. Olsen outlines specific prayer methods that can transform vestries and other church committees into spiritual communities. Most of us are familiar with what he calls “book-end prayers”—praying at the beginning and end of a meeting. This type of prayer is of limited use, relegating the spiritual as separate and distinct from the “business” of the meeting. Instead, he suggests turning meetings into “worshipful work” in which prayer is used throughout. While serving as chaplain to several regional and national conferences, I have used methods one through four outlined below with positive results and commend them to you.

1. Rotate prayer

At the beginning of the meeting, give one person a sacred object like Anglican rosary beads, a cross, or a symbol of your church. Ask her/him to hold it and pray for approximately five to ten minutes, or for as long as the Spirit moves. When through, he/she can silently pass the object to the person next to her/him so that person can begin to pray. During their time of prayer, they can pray for each person on the committee as well as about what is being discussed.

At the end of the gathering, ask members what it felt like: a) to pray silently during the meeting; b) to know that someone was praying at all times. I have witnessed nothing less than the transformation of group discussion by using this simple method of prayer. In large groups, three to four objects can be passed around simultaneously.

2. Gleaning prayer

As chaplain, without telling other participants, I have kept four lists during a meeting—for thanksgivings, intercessions, petitions, and works of the Spirit of God.¹ As conversation unfolds, I fill in the lists based on the type of prayer that would aid in the subject discussed. At the end of the gathering, a meaningful prayer is given that sums up all that occurred as well as sets it within the context of prayer. It is difficult to describe the power of this type of prayer and the effect on conference participants or committee members. Try it! For another gathering, you might want to ask four different people to be involved, each keeping one list and offering their prayers at the end.

3. Offer prayers of confession

“Naming ‘how things really are’ and ‘what is left undone’ are healthy processes for a board,” writes Olsen.² How refreshing this would be for a Self-Study or Discernment Committee! With this work in particular, conflict can arise for a multitude of reasons. Naming it, by naming how things really are, can help a committee move beyond it. As Spiritual Guide you may be the right person to bring up such topics. Doing so within the understanding of confession can begin to turn a situation of conflict into a situation of healing.

4. Draw upon model prayers of scripture

Consider the psalms, the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus’ prayer for his friends in John 17, and Paul’s heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving for his friends in Philippians 1:3–11.³

5. Committee prayers

Ask a different committee member to write a prayer to be used at critical times in the next committee meeting. When needed, stop the meeting and call for this prayer to be read.

6. Time for reflection

Study the reflection chapters in this book ahead of time and plan to discuss them with committee members at the meeting that follows.

7. Spiritual support

Above all, make sure you have the spiritual support you need either from your interim, a trained spiritual director, or a spiritual friend. Keeping your own spiritual house in order is critical to being able to lead others.

8. Use the Book of Common Prayer often

It holds within its pages some of the most beautiful prayers ever written and they are there for you to use lavishly. Some suggested prayers are:

- ♦ “For the Church,” “For the Mission of the Church,” “For Clergy and People,” and “For the Parish” (BCP 816–817);
- ♦ “For the Election of a Bishop or other Minister” and “For the Unity of the Church” (BCP 818);
- ♦ both prayers “For Guidance,” and “For Quiet Confidence” (BCP 832);
- ♦ the collects for Advent (BCP 211–212);
- ♦ “Of a Pastor” (BCP 248);
- ♦ “For All Christians in their Vocation” and “For the Mission of the Church” (BCP 256–257); and
- ♦ “For Vocation in Daily Work” (BCP 261)

Add your own favorites or those of particular relevance to your committee’s discussions.

9. Use the prayers below from Women’s Uncommon Prayers⁴

For Leaders

Almighty God, you have given us the responsibility for the leadership of the Church for a season. Grant us patience, courage, and wisdom to discern your will amidst the many competing claims and conflicts of this present time. Give us an appreciative memory for all who have gone before, and a strong clear vision of the church of the future. Let us exercise our stewardship with energy and enthusiasm, so that, when the time comes, we may joyfully relinquish our tasks to those who come after. We ask this in the name of our redeemer, Jesus Christ, who calls us into fellowship and sends the Holy Spirit to guide and inspire us, generation after generation, that we may do all to your greater glory. Amen. —Dr. Pamela P. Chinnis

For Times of Change

Assist us, Lord, in living hopefully into the future. In the face of change, help us to set unnecessary fears aside and to recognize our potential for creative response. Help us to develop a reasonable optimism when confronted by “the new” and to guard us against our own defensiveness. Be with us as we remember and celebrate former times, and keep us from unreasonable yearning for them, which takes us from the work you have set before us in our time. All this we ask in the name of your Child, our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. —*The Reverend Linda C. Smith-Criddle*

Notes

1. Charles M. Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders* (Virginia: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1995), 21.
2. Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 21–22.
3. Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 23.
4. Elizabeth Rankin Geitz, Marjorie A. Burke, and Ann Smith, eds., *Women's Uncommon Prayers* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 2000), 362–363. Used with permission.