

Vancouverites Discerning God's Will for Their Lives

How do I discern the will of God? How can I figure out what God wants me to do? How do I know that I really heard God's will and am doing what God wants? As Christians, we all struggle with these questions, particularly when faced with big decisions.

My dad was a carpenter so I often imagine Ignatian spirituality as a large tool box full of practical tools which can allow us to build our lives on a solid spiritual foundation. I believe that the most practical of St. Ignatius' tools are his insights on discernment and decision making. These are tools we all need in our lives!

So I was not surprised when we offered a full-day retreat on Ignatian discernment and decision-making at St. Mark's Parish at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver that 40 people attended. The retreatants ranged from young adults to seniors, came from all different Christian denominations and some seekers, and had varying degrees of experience with Ignatian spirituality. For the first time, we offered childminding so that parents could more easily participate.

This retreat concluded a four-part Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality series which Catherine M. Kelly, M.Div. - a gifted retreat leader, spiritual director and member of our newest CLC community in Vancouver – and I co-facilitated.

In the morning, we established a foundation for discernment, introducing themes of preparation and some fundamental truths- that God loves us and *desires* to communicate His will for us, that God calls us to be co-creators with Him in building God's kingdom, and that we each have a unique mission- God calls us for a special purpose that He has not called another.

We then presented the Principle and Foundation, the overriding value which should guide our choices; namely, what better leads to God's deepening life in me or which option will give the most glory to God and express my own deepest self. Then people reflected on the need to approach decision making with an open mind and heart, and to become aware of any unhealthy attachments so as to be freed for the call of collaboration with Christ (spiritual freedom). We encouraged participants to cultivate an ongoing relationship with Christ so as to be in the right disposition for discernment.

Retreatants quietly reflected on the ways in which God has intimately spoken to them and made His will known in the past, to become more aware of such patterns. They also looked at their patterns of decision-making in their lives thus far.

We dedicated the afternoon to imparting the practical tools of decision-making – teaching the fundamentals of the discernment of spirits and Ignatius' three modes of decision-making: 1) the times when “you just know” and then the two methods when the choice is not clear; 2) looking at the movements of consolation/desolation in us; and 3) the four-column method. Finally, we gave

the retreatants a worksheet and invited them to pray through any decision they were facing. I love how practical these tools are and how they embrace both the head and the heart.

While a one-day retreat cannot do justice to all these topics, we offered retreatants a taste of these themes and encouraged them to digest them and go deeper/further in their own personal prayer, with a spiritual director, and/or in future retreats/workshops.

We have been so grateful for the Vancouver Jesuits' support of the various lay Ignatian initiatives in Vancouver (i.e., Jesuit Spirituality Apostolate of Vancouver [lay spiritual directors who offer the 19th Annotation], the CLC communities, and lay-led retreats). In particular we are grateful to Fr. Rob Allore, S.J., the pastor at St. Mark's Parish, for his encouragement, for offering us the beautiful chapel for these retreats and for all of his logistical support (from setting up the microphone to helping prepare the food for the retreatants' lunch!).

At the CLC National Assembly in New Brunswick this May, we announced that the symbol for CLC Rockies Region was a poster of lights with Ignatius' slogan: "Go set the world on fire." There has been a tremendous growth in lay Ignatian spirituality movements in Vancouver over the last few years, as well as a growth in CLC communities. For all of these, we offer God our deepest gratitude and joy. I am so excited about what is happening in Rockies region and will report more in the January newsletter. Please keep the Rockies region, and these various initiatives, in your prayers.