

LEADERSHIP AND DISCERNMENT

Leading Mission with Wisdom, Freedom and Service

Missionary Situation for Reflection

Fr. Michael has recently been appointed superior of a multicultural formation community. The community is experiencing several challenges. Some members want to preserve long-established customs, while others are eager to introduce new pastoral initiatives. The younger members seek greater participation in decision-making, whereas some senior members believe that the superior should make decisions independently. At the same time, the Province has asked the community to undertake a new missionary project, but financial and personnel resources are limited.

During community meetings, discussions become increasingly polarized. Some members accuse others of resisting change; others complain that decisions are being rushed without sufficient consultation. Fr. Michael feels pressure from every direction. He wants to preserve unity, remain faithful to the Congregation's mission, listen to everyone fairly, and still make timely decisions.

After several weeks, he realizes that the greatest challenge is not simply choosing the "right" solution. The deeper challenge is discerning how God is leading the community through uncertainty.

Questions for Personal Reflection

1. If you were Fr. Michael, what would be your first response to this situation?
2. What external pressures and internal reactions would influence your decisions?
3. How would you distinguish between personal preferences, group expectations, and the movements of the Holy Spirit?
4. What role should prayer, consultation, and community discernment play before making a decision?
5. How can a leader remain faithful to the mission while respecting different viewpoints within the community?

Formation Insight

Leadership in Christian life is much more than organizing people or solving problems. A missionary leader is first a disciple who listens attentively to God, reads the signs of the times, and helps others discover God's will together. The previous modules have shown that discernment is essential for every Christian. This module takes the next step by showing that discernment is also the heart of authentic leadership.

Today's leaders serve in a rapidly changing world marked by uncertainty, cultural diversity, complex relationships, and unexpected challenges. In such situations, technical competence alone is not enough. Leaders need interior freedom, spiritual wisdom, and the ability to discern God's presence and action amid ambiguity. Leadership therefore becomes not merely a matter of making decisions, but of making decisions that are faithful to the Gospel, attentive to people, and responsive to the mission entrusted to the community.

For Claretian missionaries, leadership is inseparable from mission. Authority is exercised not as control over others but as a ministry of service that animates persons, strengthens communion, and guides the community toward its missionary purpose. The formation of leaders is therefore inseparable from the formation of discerning persons. Only those who learn to listen deeply, to God, to themselves, to others, and to reality, can lead with wisdom, courage, and hope.

In this sense, leadership is not simply one responsibility among many; it is the mature expression of a life shaped by prayer, discernment, service, and missionary commitment. It calls the leader to become an instrument through whom the Holy Spirit guides the community toward greater fidelity and fruitfulness. This emphasis also reflects the module's central conviction that leadership

is fundamentally a spiritual and discernment-based process rather than merely an administrative function.

I. Why Leadership Needs Discernment Today

Leadership has never been easy, but it has become increasingly complex in today's world. Missionary leaders often serve in contexts marked by rapid social change, cultural diversity, declining resources, shifting expectations, and growing uncertainty. Formation communities, parishes, educational institutions, and missionary projects all face situations where familiar solutions are no longer sufficient.

In such circumstances, leadership cannot depend solely on experience, efficiency, or administrative competence. Leaders are constantly required to interpret changing realities, balance competing values, make decisions with incomplete information, and guide communities through situations where there are no simple answers. More than ever, they need the ability to discern where God is leading amid uncertainty.

Leadership in a VUCA World

Contemporary leadership is often described using the acronym **VUCA**, referring to a world characterized by:

- **Volatility** – rapid and unexpected changes that require flexibility and resilience.
- **Uncertainty** – situations where the future is difficult to predict and decisions must often be made without complete information.
- **Complexity** – multiple interconnected factors, relationships, and cultural realities that influence every decision.
- **Ambiguity** – circumstances in which the same event may be interpreted in different ways, making clear solutions difficult to identify.

Missionary communities experience these realities in many ways: changing pastoral needs, intercultural living, declining vocations in some regions, growth in others, safeguarding concerns, migration, digital culture, financial pressures, and the call for greater collaboration with the laity. These realities cannot be addressed by applying fixed formulas alone. They require leaders who can read reality with wisdom and faith.

Beyond Technical Solutions

Not every problem has a technical solution. Some difficulties can be solved by applying existing policies or procedures. Others require deeper conversion, renewed relationships, and new ways of thinking.

For example:

- A timetable conflict may require an administrative adjustment.
- Persistent community tensions require patient dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual trust.
- A decline in missionary enthusiasm cannot be solved simply by introducing new programmes; it calls for renewed spiritual vitality.
- Discernment regarding new missionary priorities demands prayerful listening to the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the signs of the times.

Wise leaders learn to distinguish between problems that require efficient management and those that require communal discernment. Confusing the two often leads either to unnecessary bureaucracy or to superficial spiritualization of practical issues.

Discernment: The Heart of Christian Leadership

Christian leadership differs fundamentally from leadership based primarily on power, efficiency, or personal influence. Its primary question is not, *“What is the quickest solution?”* but *“What is God asking of us here and now?”*

Discernment enables leaders to:

- see beyond immediate appearances;
- recognise the movements of the Holy Spirit amid confusion;
- distinguish personal preferences from the common good;
- balance courage with humility;
- make decisions rooted in the Gospel rather than in fear or pressure;
- guide communities toward greater fidelity to their missionary vocation.

Leadership therefore becomes a shared search for God’s will rather than the exercise of personal authority.

The Missionary Leader as a Disciple

Before becoming a guide for others, every leader remains a disciple. Leadership begins by listening, listening to God in prayer, to the Word of God, to the Church, to reality, and to the people entrusted to one’s care.

A discerning leader understands that every important decision is both a practical and a spiritual act. Administrative competence, strategic planning, and organizational skills remain essential, but they are illuminated and guided by a deeper attentiveness to the Holy Spirit.

This attitude reflects the example of Jesus, who repeatedly withdrew to pray before making significant decisions and continually sought the Father’s will in every aspect of his mission. Likewise, St. Anthony Mary Claret constantly examined the signs of God’s providence, adapting his missionary activity according to the needs of the people and the inspirations he received in prayer.

Formation Note: The effectiveness of a missionary leader depends less on having all the answers than on cultivating an interior disposition that seeks God’s will above personal preference. Discernment transforms leadership from merely directing people to accompanying them in discovering God’s call together. Such leadership builds trust, fosters participation, and enables communities to remain faithful to their mission even amid uncertainty and change.

II. Christian Leadership as a Ministry of Discernment

Leadership in the Church is fundamentally different from leadership understood merely as the exercise of authority, influence, or organizational competence. Christian leadership is first a vocation before it is a role. It is a participation in Christ’s own mission of shepherding God’s people and building up the Kingdom. Consequently, its primary task is not simply to manage people or accomplish goals, but to help individuals and communities discover and respond to God’s will.

For this reason, authentic Christian leadership is always a ministry of discernment. Leaders are called to recognize the movements of the Holy Spirit in the life of individuals, communities, and the Church, and to guide others toward decisions that promote communion, mission, and faithful discipleship.

Jesus: The Model of the Discerning Leader

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus reveals that leadership begins with attentive listening to the Father. Before choosing the Twelve Apostles, he spent the night in prayer. Before major moments in

his ministry, he withdrew into silence. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he discerned the Father's will through prayer, surrendering his own natural desire to avoid suffering.

Jesus never acted simply because people expected immediate solutions. He resisted pressures from the crowd, political authorities, religious leaders, and even his closest disciples whenever these conflicted with the Father's plan. His leadership was rooted not in popularity but in faithful obedience. He also formed his disciples to discern. Rather than solving every problem for them, he invited them to observe, reflect, question, pray, and gradually learn to recognize God's action in ordinary life.

Christian leaders are therefore called to imitate not merely what Jesus did, but how he made decisions, through prayer, freedom, compassion, and complete openness to the Father's will.

St. Anthony Mary Claret: A Missionary Leader Guided by Discernment

St. Anthony Mary Claret exercised remarkable leadership because he remained deeply attentive to God's providence. His missionary initiatives were never driven by personal ambition but by a continual search for what would best serve the Gospel.

Throughout his life, Claret demonstrated several characteristics of discerning leadership:

- he remained attentive to the needs of the people before proposing solutions;
- he adapted his missionary methods according to changing circumstances without losing sight of the mission;
- he sought God's guidance through prayer before undertaking important decisions;
- he accepted unexpected changes and suffering as opportunities to continue God's work in new ways;
- he constantly evaluated whether his actions served "the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls."

His leadership combined bold missionary vision with profound humility before God's will. This balance remains a model for every Claretian entrusted with responsibility.

Leadership as Listening

One of the first responsibilities of a discerning leader is to listen.

Listening involves much more than hearing opinions. It includes listening:

- to God's Word in prayer;
- to the movements of the Holy Spirit within one's own heart;
- to the experiences, hopes, and concerns of others;
- to the realities of the local Church and society;
- to the missionary priorities of the Congregation;
- to the signs of the times.

Only after such attentive listening can genuine discernment begin.

Leaders who listen well create an atmosphere of trust. People feel respected, become more willing to collaborate, and participate more responsibly in the common mission. Listening also protects leaders from making decisions based solely on assumptions, emotions, or personal preferences.

Leadership as Service

Jesus redefined leadership when he taught: "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant" (Mk 10:43).

Authority in the Church is therefore exercised through service rather than domination. The purpose of leadership is not to increase one's influence or prestige but to help others grow in freedom, responsibility, and fidelity to their vocation.

A discerning leader asks continually:

- How can I help this person grow?
- What will strengthen the community?
- What best serves the mission entrusted to us?
- What is the Holy Spirit inviting us to become?

Such questions gradually shift the focus from preserving authority to promoting mission.

Leadership as Shared Discernment

Although leaders ultimately carry responsibility for many decisions, Christian leadership is rarely an isolated activity. God often speaks through the wisdom, experience, and prayer of the community.

A discerning leader therefore encourages participation, consultation, and respectful dialogue. Listening to others is not a sign of weakness or indecisiveness but an expression of humility and confidence that the Holy Spirit works through the entire People of God.

This does not mean that every decision requires consensus. Rather, consultation enables leaders to make decisions that are better informed, more balanced, and more readily received by the community. Even when difficult decisions must ultimately be made by the leader, people are more likely to accept them when they know they have been genuinely heard.

Formation Note: Leadership in Christian life is not primarily about directing others but about helping them discover God's action in their lives and mission. Leaders who pray, listen, discern, and serve become instruments through whom the Holy Spirit guides the community. In this way, authority becomes a ministry that fosters communion, strengthens missionary commitment, and enables the community to move forward together in fidelity to Christ.

III. The Interior Life of the Leader: The Foundation of Discernment

The quality of a leader's decisions depends largely on the quality of the leader's interior life. Every decision passes through the mind and heart of the person making it. If the leader is driven by fear, insecurity, personal ambition, prejudice, or emotional reactivity, these attitudes inevitably influence decisions. If, however, the leader cultivates prayer, interior freedom, humility, and self-awareness, discernment becomes clearer and leadership becomes more authentic.

For this reason, Christian leadership begins not with managing others but with governing oneself. Before leading a community, a missionary must first learn to listen attentively to the movements within his own heart.

Self-Awareness: Knowing What Is Happening Within

Every leader experiences a variety of inner movements: enthusiasm, disappointment, anxiety, hope, frustration, confidence, fear, compassion, or discouragement. These are natural aspects of human life. The important question is not whether these movements exist, but whether the leader is aware of them and understands how they influence decisions.

A discerning leader regularly asks:

- What am I experiencing interiorly?
- Why does this situation affect me so strongly?

- Is my reaction arising from faith or from fear?
- Am I responding to reality, or merely reacting emotionally?

Such questions do not make a leader hesitant; they make leadership wiser. Self-awareness prevents impulsive decisions and creates space for thoughtful and prayerful reflection.

Prayer: The First Responsibility of the Leader

The previous modules have shown that discernment grows in a relationship with God. The same is true for leadership. Prayer is not simply preparation for leadership; it is the continual source from which leadership draws its wisdom.

In prayer, leaders gradually learn to:

- see situations from God's perspective;
- place difficult decisions before the Lord;
- recognise their own attachments and limitations;
- receive the courage to act with charity and justice;
- remain peaceful even when decisions are difficult.

Without prayer, leadership easily becomes driven by efficiency, pressure, or personal preference. With prayer, leadership becomes an act of collaboration with the Holy Spirit.

Interior Freedom

One of the greatest gifts a leader can cultivate is interior freedom. This is the ability to seek God's will without being controlled by personal attachments or external pressures.

Leaders may become attached to:

- being liked by everyone;
- avoiding conflict at all costs;
- preserving personal comfort;
- maintaining excessive control;
- defending previous decisions simply to avoid admitting mistakes;
- particular persons, projects, or ways of doing things.

Such attachments can quietly distort discernment.

Interior freedom enables leaders to ask: *"What best serves God's mission?"* instead of, *"What protects my position?"*

This freedom allows difficult decisions to be made with humility, courage, and peace.

Recognising Personal Biases

No leader sees reality with complete objectivity. Each person is influenced by temperament, personal history, cultural background, previous experiences, and unconscious preferences.

For example, some leaders naturally prefer stability, while others instinctively seek innovation. Some avoid conflict, whereas others confront it quickly. Some easily trust others, while others remain cautious.

These tendencies are not necessarily weaknesses. They become problematic only when they remain unrecognised.

Discernment therefore requires leaders to examine their own assumptions and to welcome the perspectives of others. Consultation often reveals aspects of reality that one person alone cannot perceive.

Consolation and Desolation in Leadership

Leadership inevitably brings moments of both encouragement and discouragement. Success, appreciation, fruitful ministry, and deep communion may strengthen the leader's hope. At other times criticism, misunderstanding, failure, loneliness, or fatigue may produce discouragement.

The previous modules have already explored the meaning of spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation. Leaders must now learn to apply these insights to their own ministry.

When experiencing consolation, leaders remain grateful and humble, recognising that every good gift comes from God.

When experiencing desolation, they avoid making major changes simply to escape discomfort. Instead, they persevere in prayer, seek wise counsel, and patiently wait for greater clarity before making important decisions.

This fidelity protects both the leader and the community from decisions made under the influence of discouragement or emotional pressure.

Humility and Ongoing Conversion

No leader is free from mistakes. Every leader continues to grow through experience, correction, and God's grace.

Humility enables leaders to:

- admit mistakes without defensiveness;
- learn from criticism;
- seek forgiveness when necessary;
- revise decisions if circumstances require;
- continue growing throughout life.

Such humility strengthens rather than weakens leadership. Communities trust leaders who acknowledge their limitations while remaining committed to learning and serving faithfully.

Formation Note: The most important instrument of discernment is not a method but the leader's own heart. A leader who cultivates prayer, self-awareness, interior freedom, humility, and ongoing conversion becomes increasingly capable of recognising the movements of the Holy Spirit and guiding others with wisdom. The deeper the interior life, the more faithful and fruitful the exercise of leadership becomes.

IV. Discernment in Leadership Decisions

Every leader makes decisions. Some are routine and straightforward, while others have long-term consequences for persons, communities, and the mission. Christian leadership is distinguished not simply by making good decisions, but by making decisions that are prayerfully discerned, responsibly implemented, and continually evaluated in the light of the Gospel.

Discernment does not eliminate uncertainty. Rather, it enables leaders to move forward with greater wisdom, freedom, and trust in God's guidance.

Distinguishing Different Types of Decisions

Not every decision requires the same level of discernment. Wise leaders first identify the nature of the issue before deciding how to proceed.

Routine Decisions

These involve the ordinary administration of community life or apostolic work and can usually be made using existing policies, experience, or established procedures.

Examples include:

- organizing schedules;
- assigning routine responsibilities;
- managing finances within approved budgets;
- implementing established community norms.

These decisions require prudence and competence but usually do not call for an extensive process of communal discernment.

Significant Decisions

Other decisions have a deeper impact on persons, community life, or mission. These require broader consultation, careful reflection, and prayer.

Examples include:

- appointing persons to important responsibilities;
- beginning or closing a missionary project;
- addressing serious community conflicts;
- responding to major formation concerns;
- developing new pastoral priorities.

Such decisions deserve a more deliberate process of discernment.

A Process of Discernment in Leadership

While every situation is unique, the following steps provide a practical framework for making important decisions.

1. Clarify the Real Question

Leaders should first ask:

- What exactly requires a decision?
- Are we addressing the real issue or only its symptoms?
- What problem are we trying to solve?

Clearly defining the question often prevents unnecessary confusion later in the process.

2. Gather the Relevant Information

Good discernment is never based on assumptions alone.

The leader seeks to understand:

- the facts of the situation;
- the experiences of those involved;
- relevant policies or guidelines;
- the broader missionary context;
- possible consequences of different options.

Listening carefully at this stage helps avoid decisions based on incomplete or inaccurate information.

3. Pray and Reflect

Information alone does not produce discernment.

The leader brings the situation before God, asking:

- What is the Holy Spirit inviting us to see?
- What values of the Gospel are at stake?
- Which option best serves the mission?
- What attachments or fears may be influencing me?

Prayer gradually transforms information into spiritual insight.

4. Consult Wisely

Discernment is enriched by listening to others.

Depending on the situation, consultation may include:

- members of the community;
- the formation team;
- experienced confreres;
- competent professionals;
- those directly affected by the decision.

Consultation does not remove the leader's responsibility to decide. Rather, it broadens understanding and reduces personal blind spots.

5. Decide with Interior Freedom

After sufficient prayer, reflection, and consultation, a decision must eventually be made.

Waiting indefinitely for absolute certainty often becomes another form of avoidance.

A discerning leader makes the best possible decision with the information available, entrusts it to God, and accepts responsibility for its implementation.

6. Review the Decision

Discernment does not end once a decision has been made.

Leaders periodically ask:

- Is this decision bearing good fruit?
- Has it strengthened communion?
- Has it served the mission?
- Do new circumstances require adjustment?

Reviewing decisions is not a sign of weakness but of responsible leadership. It allows leaders to learn from experience and remain attentive to God's continuing guidance.

Signs of a Well-Discerned Decision

Although certainty is rarely absolute, certain characteristics often indicate that a decision has been prayerfully discerned.

A well-discerned decision is generally:

- rooted in prayer rather than impulse;
- faithful to the Gospel and the Church's mission;
- consistent with the Congregation's charism;

- respectful of the dignity of persons;
- made with interior freedom;
- responsible and realistic;
- conducive to communion;
- open to ongoing evaluation.

These signs do not guarantee that every outcome will be successful. Rather, they indicate that the leader has acted faithfully and responsibly before God.

When Clarity Does Not Come Immediately

There are times when, despite sincere prayer and careful consultation, no option appears completely satisfactory. Leaders may feel caught between competing values, limited resources, or equally important priorities.

In such situations, discernment calls for patience rather than haste. The leader should resist the temptation to act merely to reduce personal anxiety. If circumstances permit, it is often wise to allow additional time for prayer, dialogue, and reflection.

When a decision can no longer be postponed, however, the leader acts with humility and trust, recognizing that God continues to guide those who sincerely seek to do his will, even when complete certainty is not possible.

Practical Guide: Discernment Before Making an Important Decision

Before making a significant leadership decision, ask yourself:

1. Have I clearly identified the real issue?
2. Have I gathered sufficient and reliable information?
3. Have I prayed seriously about this decision?
4. Have I listened to those who should be consulted?
5. Am I free from personal attachments or fear?
6. Which option best serves the Gospel, the community, and the mission?
7. Am I experiencing a deep and lasting peace about this decision?
8. How will I review its fruits after implementation?

Formation Note: Discernment does not replace responsible leadership; it transforms it. A discerning leader neither acts impulsively nor hesitates indefinitely. Instead, through prayer, attentive listening, wise consultation, and interior freedom, the leader seeks to respond faithfully to God's invitation in each concrete situation. Such decisions inspire confidence because they arise not merely from personal judgment but from a sincere desire to collaborate with the Holy Spirit in the service of the Church and the mission.

V. Discernment in Leading Communities

Leadership in religious life is exercised primarily within a community. While personal discernment is essential, many leadership decisions affect the entire community and therefore require a communal process of listening, reflection, and prayer. A discerning leader not only seeks God's will personally but also helps the community recognize how the Holy Spirit is guiding it.

Community discernment does not simply aim at reaching agreement. Its deeper purpose is to discover together what best serves God's mission. This requires a climate of trust, openness, mutual respect, and sincere listening.

Creating a Climate for Discernment

Community discernment begins long before an important meeting. It grows gradually through the quality of everyday community life.

Leaders foster discernment by encouraging:

- regular personal and community prayer;
- openness and mutual trust;
- respectful dialogue;
- attentive listening without interruption;
- appreciation of different perspectives;
- freedom to express concerns without fear;
- commitment to the common good rather than personal interests.

When these attitudes are present, discernment becomes a natural way of making decisions rather than an occasional exercise.

Listening to Every Voice

One of the leader's first responsibilities is ensuring that every member has an opportunity to be heard.

This requires special attention because some members speak easily while others remain silent. Cultural background, age, personality, and previous experiences all influence participation.

A discerning leader:

- invites quieter members to contribute;
- prevents dominant voices from controlling the discussion;
- values minority opinions;
- distinguishes facts from assumptions;
- seeks clarification rather than quick conclusions.

Listening carefully does not imply that every opinion carries equal weight, but it recognizes that the Holy Spirit may speak through unexpected persons and perspectives.

Distinguishing Positions from Underlying Concerns

During community discussions, disagreements often focus on proposed solutions. Beneath these different positions, however, members may share the same deeper concerns.

For example:

One member insists on maintaining traditional community schedules.

Another proposes greater flexibility.

At first glance, they appear opposed. Yet both may be seeking the same goal: strengthening community life.

A discerning leader looks beyond opposing positions to discover the deeper values that unite the community. This often opens new possibilities that satisfy the legitimate concerns of different members.

Recognising the Movements Within the Community

Just as individuals experience movements of consolation and desolation, communities also experience collective movements.

A community may experience:

- renewed missionary enthusiasm;
- greater unity and generosity;
- hope during difficult periods;
- openness to new initiatives.

At other times it may experience:

- discouragement;
- fear of change;
- polarization;
- mistrust;
- loss of missionary energy.

The leader observes these movements carefully without reacting impulsively. Rather than asking only, “*What are people saying?*” the leader also asks:

- What is happening beneath these conversations?
- What hopes or fears are shaping the community?
- What may the Holy Spirit be inviting us to notice?

Such attentiveness enables leaders to respond not merely to external behaviours but also to the deeper spiritual reality of the community.

Balancing Participation and Responsibility

Community discernment is collaborative, but it is not leaderless.

The leader has the responsibility to:

- encourage broad participation;
- facilitate respectful dialogue;
- clarify issues;
- summarise the discussion accurately;
- help the community identify common ground;
- make decisions when required by the office entrusted to him.

Sometimes consensus emerges naturally. At other times sincere differences remain even after extensive dialogue.

When this happens, the leader should avoid two opposite dangers:

- delaying decisions indefinitely because complete agreement has not been reached;
- imposing decisions without genuine consultation.

Instead, after prayerful reflection and adequate consultation, the leader makes the decision that best serves the Gospel, the community, and the mission, while explaining the reasons with transparency and charity.

Guiding the Community Through Conflict

Conflict is not necessarily a sign that discernment has failed. Communities composed of people from different cultures, ages, and experiences naturally hold diverse perspectives.

A discerning leader approaches conflict as an opportunity for growth.

This involves:

- encouraging respectful dialogue rather than personal attacks;

- focusing on issues instead of personalities;
- identifying shared values;
- helping members understand one another's perspectives;
- promoting reconciliation where relationships have been damaged.

When conflict is handled with patience and charity, it often leads to greater mutual understanding and stronger missionary communion.

Remaining Focused on Mission

Communities can easily become absorbed by internal concerns. Meetings may revolve around schedules, finances, personalities, or administrative matters, while the missionary purpose of the community gradually fades into the background.

A discerning leader continually brings the community back to its fundamental question: *How does this decision help us fulfil the mission God has entrusted to us?*

This question provides a criterion for evaluating priorities, resolving disagreements, and maintaining unity.

Mission becomes the point of convergence that enables diverse individuals to work together despite legitimate differences.

Community Example

A formation community must decide whether to begin a new apostolic initiative in a nearby parish. Some members are enthusiastic, believing it will enrich formation through greater pastoral exposure. Others are concerned that it will reduce time for study and community life.

Rather than asking the community simply to vote, the superior invites the members to spend several days praying with the proposal, reflecting personally, and discussing it in small groups. During the community meeting, each member shares not only his opinion but also the reasons and values behind it.

As the discussion progresses, the leader notices that everyone shares the same desire: to integrate formation and mission responsibly. The conversation gradually shifts from defending positions to discerning the best way of balancing both priorities. Eventually, the community agrees to begin the apostolate on a trial basis with periodic evaluation.

The final decision is not simply a compromise but the fruit of prayer, attentive listening, and a shared search for God's will.

Formation Note: Leading a community is not primarily about directing discussions or resolving disagreements. It is about creating the conditions in which the Holy Spirit can guide the community toward greater unity and missionary fidelity. Leaders who listen deeply, encourage honest dialogue, remain attentive to the spiritual movements of the community, and keep the mission at the centre help communities grow not only in efficiency but also in communion, freedom, and apostolic fruitfulness.

VI. Obstacles to Discernment in Leadership

Every leader sincerely desires to make wise and faithful decisions. Yet even the most experienced leaders can be influenced by personal limitations, community dynamics, and external pressures that cloud discernment. Recognising these obstacles is itself an important act of discernment. Leaders who acknowledge their vulnerabilities are better able to seek God's will with humility and freedom.

The purpose of identifying these obstacles is not to create fear or self-doubt, but to foster greater self-awareness and openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Personal Obstacles

The first challenges to discernment often arise within the leader.

Fear

Fear is one of the most powerful influences on leadership. A leader may fear:

- making the wrong decision;
- criticism or opposition;
- losing the confidence of the community;
- conflict;
- failure;
- change or uncertainty.

Fear can lead either to avoiding necessary decisions or to making hasty decisions simply to reduce anxiety.

A discerning leader does not deny fear but places it before the Lord, asking for the courage to act according to truth rather than emotion.

Attachment to Personal Ideas

Leaders naturally develop convictions through experience. These convictions become problematic when they harden into rigid attachments.

A leader may become attached to:

- a preferred solution;
- familiar methods;
- personal projects;
- particular collaborators;
- one's own way of exercising authority.

Such attachment limits openness to new insights and prevents genuine listening.

Discernment requires the freedom to ask: *Am I defending this because it is truly best for the mission, or because it is my own idea?*

Desire to Please Everyone

Some leaders avoid difficult decisions because they want everyone to remain satisfied.

While kindness and sensitivity are important, leadership cannot be guided primarily by the desire for approval. Decisions that serve the mission may at times disappoint some members.

Seeking God's will must always take precedence over seeking universal approval.

Fatigue and Emotional Exhaustion

Leadership demands considerable emotional, spiritual, and physical energy. Continuous responsibilities, frequent travel, difficult conversations, and pastoral pressures can gradually exhaust even dedicated leaders.

When exhausted, leaders may become:

- impatient;
- less attentive;
- emotionally reactive;

- unable to reflect deeply;
- inclined to make convenient rather than discerning decisions.

Regular prayer, adequate rest, healthy relationships, and appropriate delegation are not signs of weakness but essential practices for sustaining responsible leadership.

Community Obstacles

Discernment can also be hindered by unhealthy dynamics within the community.

Groupthink

Sometimes communities seek harmony by avoiding honest disagreement. Members quickly agree with the majority even when they have serious reservations.

Although this may create apparent unity, it often prevents genuine discernment.

Healthy communities welcome respectful differences because they recognise that honest dialogue frequently leads to deeper understanding.

Polarisation

Communities occasionally divide into opposing groups that defend positions rather than seeking the common good.

When this happens:

- people stop listening;
- motives are questioned;
- suspicion increases;
- dialogue becomes confrontation.

The leader's task is to redirect attention from winning arguments to seeking together what best serves God's mission.

Resistance to Change

Every community develops traditions that give stability and identity. However, attachment to familiar ways may prevent the community from responding to new missionary needs.

Discernment asks not whether change is comfortable but whether change is faithful to the Gospel and the charism.

Likewise, enthusiasm for innovation should also be discerned carefully. Not every new idea necessarily serves the mission.

Organisational Obstacles

Some obstacles arise from the wider institutional context.

Examples include:

- excessive administrative demands;
- pressure to produce immediate results;
- lack of time for prayer and consultation;
- unclear communication;
- insufficient participation in decision-making;
- limited financial or personnel resources.

These realities cannot always be removed, but leaders should recognise how they influence the quality of discernment and intentionally create spaces for prayerful reflection despite these pressures.

Spiritual Obstacles

Leadership also involves spiritual struggle. As explored in the earlier modules on the Ignatian Rules, discouragement, confusion, false urgency, pride, excessive self-confidence, and subtle discouragement can gradually weaken discernment if they are not recognised.

Leaders therefore remain attentive to questions such as:

- Am I acting from genuine interior peace or from anxiety?
- Is this decision rooted in hope or in fear?
- Am I listening to the Holy Spirit or simply reacting to external pressure?
- Have I sought God's guidance before reaching a conclusion?

Regular spiritual accompaniment, prayer, and the examen help leaders remain attentive to these interior movements.

Responding to Obstacles

Recognising obstacles is only the first step. Discernment grows when leaders intentionally cultivate attitudes that overcome these difficulties.

Helpful practices include:

- maintaining a regular rhythm of personal prayer;
- making the daily examen;
- seeking spiritual accompaniment;
- consulting wisely before major decisions;
- welcoming constructive feedback;
- reflecting before reacting;
- remaining open to correction;
- reviewing important decisions in the light of their fruits.

These practices gradually strengthen both the leader's interior freedom and the community's confidence in its leadership.

Formation Note: The greatest obstacles to discernment are often not external circumstances but the unnoticed attitudes within ourselves and our communities. Leaders who recognise their fears, attachments, biases, and limitations become more receptive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Such humility does not weaken leadership; it strengthens it. It enables leaders to exercise authority with greater freedom, wisdom, and fidelity to the mission entrusted to them.

VII. Servant Leadership: Leadership that Discerns and Serves

Christian leadership finds its model in Jesus Christ, who came "not to be served but to serve" (Mk 10:45). Every exercise of authority in the Church is therefore an expression of service rather than power. A discerning leader does not ask, "*How can I strengthen my authority?*" but "*How can I help others grow and fulfil the mission God has entrusted to us?*"

This understanding is reflected in the concept of **servant leadership**, developed by Robert Greenleaf. Although it emerged in a secular organizational context, many of its insights resonate deeply with the Gospel and with the Church's understanding of authority as service. For missionary

leaders, however, servant leadership is not merely a management style but a spiritual vocation rooted in following Christ.

From Authority to Service

In many organizations, leadership is often associated with control, efficiency, and results. Christian leadership values these qualities but places them within a broader vision.

The leader is called to:

- serve rather than dominate;
- accompany rather than control;
- empower rather than manipulate;
- build communion rather than personal influence;
- guide others toward God's mission rather than personal success.

Authority therefore becomes a ministry entrusted for the good of the community and the advancement of the Gospel.

Qualities of a Servant Leader

Several characteristics of servant leadership enrich the practice of Christian discernment in leadership.

Listening

A servant leader listens attentively before speaking or deciding. Listening includes not only hearing people's opinions but also discerning their deeper concerns, hopes, fears, and aspirations. It also involves listening to God's Word, the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and the signs of the times. Discernment begins with listening.

Empathy

Empathy enables leaders to understand situations from another person's perspective. It does not mean agreeing with every viewpoint but recognising the dignity and experience of each person. Communities flourish when members know they are understood before they are corrected.

Healing

Leadership often involves accompanying people who are wounded by conflict, disappointment, failure, or misunderstanding.

A discerning leader seeks not merely to solve problems but to restore relationships, strengthen trust, and promote reconciliation whenever possible.

Self-Awareness

Servant leaders cultivate awareness of their own strengths, weaknesses, emotions, motivations, and limitations.

As seen in the previous section, self-awareness protects discernment from unconscious biases and personal attachments.

Persuasion Rather than Domination

Whenever possible, Christian leaders seek to convince rather than compel. Dialogue, explanation, and patient accompaniment usually foster deeper commitment than decisions imposed

solely by authority. Although some situations require decisive action, persuasion remains the ordinary path of servant leadership.

Vision

Servant leaders help communities see beyond immediate problems toward the larger mission entrusted by God. They continually remind the community why it exists and how present decisions contribute to that mission.

Vision enables communities to persevere even during periods of uncertainty.

Foresight

Discernment includes anticipating the possible consequences of decisions.

Wise leaders ask:

- How will this affect the community in the future?
- What opportunities might emerge?
- What unintended difficulties could arise?
- How will this strengthen our missionary witness?

Foresight combines practical wisdom with trust in God's providence.

Stewardship

Leaders recognise that authority, people, resources, and ministries are gifts entrusted to their care rather than possessions to control.

Stewardship encourages responsible use of resources while always remembering that the mission belongs to God.

Commitment to the Growth of Others

One of the clearest signs of servant leadership is the desire to help others develop.

Rather than doing everything personally, discerning leaders:

- mentor younger members;
- delegate responsibilities appropriately;
- encourage initiative;
- provide constructive feedback;
- help others discover and develop their gifts.

Leadership succeeds when it forms new leaders.

Building Community

Ultimately, servant leadership seeks to strengthen communion.

Missionary communities become credible witnesses to the Gospel when members experience mutual respect, shared responsibility, forgiveness, collaboration, and joy in serving together.

The leader's role is not simply to coordinate activities but to foster a community where every member can contribute to the common mission.

Integrating Servant Leadership with Discernment

Servant leadership and discernment complement one another.

Servant Leadership	Discerning Leadership
Listens attentively	Listens for the voice of the Holy Spirit
Understands people	Discerns the movements within persons and communities
Builds trust	Builds communion rooted in prayer and mission
Encourages participation	Facilitates communal discernment
Develops others	Helps others discover God's call
Serves the common good	Seeks God's will above personal preference
Leads with humility	Exercises authority with interior freedom

Seen in this light, servant leadership becomes more than a collection of leadership skills. It becomes a concrete expression of Christian discipleship, where authority is exercised through humble service, attentive listening, and faithful discernment.

Formation Example

A provincial superior must appoint a new local superior. Instead of selecting someone solely because of administrative efficiency, he spends time in prayer, consults those who know the candidates well, reflects on the needs of the community, and considers who can best promote communion and missionary vitality. During the appointment process, he also listens respectfully to the concerns of those involved and explains the reasons for the final decision.

His authority is exercised not to impose personal preferences but to serve the growth of the community and the mission. In doing so, he demonstrates that discernment and servant leadership are inseparable.

Formation Note: Christian leadership reaches its fullest expression in service. A discerning leader does not measure success by authority exercised or tasks accomplished, but by the extent to which individuals grow, communities deepen in communion, and the mission of Christ advances. Leadership shaped by prayer, discernment, and humble service reflects the example of Jesus, who continues to lead his Church by giving himself for others.

VIII. Five Indicators of Discernment in Leadership

How can we recognise whether leadership is truly guided by discernment? Skills, experience, and good intentions are important, but they are not sufficient. Christian leadership is ultimately measured by the quality of the leader's relationship with God, with others, and with the mission entrusted to the community.

The following five indicators provide practical criteria for evaluating one's growth as a discerning leader. They are not isolated qualities but complementary dimensions of mature missionary leadership.

1. An Interiorly Aware Leader

A discerning leader is attentive to what is happening within. Decisions are influenced not only by external circumstances but also by the leader's interior movements, emotions, desires, fears, and motivations.

Interior awareness enables the leader to recognise:

- personal biases and attachments;
- emotional reactions before acting on them;
- movements of consolation and desolation;
- areas of strength and vulnerability;
- situations that require greater prayer or consultation.

Rather than reacting impulsively, the leader pauses, reflects, and asks:

- Why am I responding in this way?
- What is influencing my judgment?
- What is the Holy Spirit inviting me to notice?

Such awareness creates the interior freedom necessary for wise leadership.

Signs of Growth

The leader:

- reflects before reacting;
- recognises personal limitations;
- welcomes feedback;
- learns from experience;
- remains emotionally balanced during difficulties.

2. A Spiritually Grounded Leader

Discernment grows from a living relationship with God. Leaders who neglect their spiritual life gradually rely only on experience, personality, or administrative ability.

Spiritually grounded leaders remain rooted in:

- daily personal prayer;
- Scripture;
- the Eucharist;
- regular examination of conscience;
- spiritual accompaniment;
- trust in God's providence.

Their decisions arise not merely from analysis but from prayerful listening.

When facing uncertainty, they seek God's wisdom before seeking quick solutions.

Their confidence comes not from having all the answers but from trusting the One who guides the mission.

Signs of Growth

The leader:

- maintains a consistent rhythm of prayer;
- seeks God's will before important decisions;
- remains peaceful amid uncertainty;
- draws strength from faith rather than from personal control;
- inspires others through personal witness.

3. A Leader Free in Decision-Making

Freedom is one of the clearest signs of mature discernment.

A free leader is not controlled by:

- fear of criticism;
- desire for popularity;
- personal ambition;
- attachment to particular ideas;
- prejudice;

- pressure from influential individuals.

Instead, the leader continually asks: “*What best serves God’s mission?*” rather than, “*What is easiest, safest, or most advantageous for me?*”

Interior freedom allows leaders to make difficult decisions with humility, courage, and charity.

Such freedom also enables them to revise decisions when new information or deeper discernment indicates a better course of action.

Signs of Growth

The leader:

- welcomes differing opinions;
- changes direction when necessary;
- makes decisions without excessive fear;
- places mission before personal preference;
- remains humble after success and hopeful during setbacks.

4. A Responsible Leader

Discernment never excuses irresponsibility or indecision. Prayer and consultation prepare the leader to act responsibly.

Responsible leaders:

- make timely decisions;
- communicate clearly;
- consult appropriately;
- explain important decisions respectfully;
- accept accountability for their actions;
- review decisions and learn from experience.

Responsibility also includes caring for the well-being of the community, promoting transparency, and using authority wisely and justly.

Rather than controlling others, responsible leaders create an environment where each member can contribute responsibly to the common mission.

Signs of Growth

The leader:

- fulfils responsibilities faithfully;
- consults without avoiding decisions;
- communicates honestly;
- accepts mistakes without defensiveness;
- encourages shared responsibility within the community.

5. A Leader Faithful to the Mission

The ultimate criterion of Christian leadership is fidelity to the mission of Christ. Mission remains the constant point of reference for every important decision.

A discerning leader continually asks:

- Does this decision help proclaim the Gospel?
- Does it strengthen our missionary witness?

- Does it build communion?
- Does it reflect our Claretian charism?
- Does it promote the growth of those entrusted to our care?

Such leaders recognise that authority is entrusted to them not for personal fulfilment but for the service of God's Kingdom.

They remain flexible in methods but steadfast in purpose.

Signs of Growth

The leader:

- keeps the mission at the centre of community life;
- encourages missionary creativity;
- remains faithful to the Gospel and the Congregation's charism;
- promotes collaboration rather than individualism;
- inspires hope and commitment in others.

Bringing the Five Indicators Together

These five indicators are closely interconnected.

- **Interior awareness** enables leaders to recognise what is happening within themselves.
- **Spiritual grounding** keeps them rooted in God.
- **Interior freedom** allows them to choose God's will over personal preference.
- **Responsibility** ensures that discernment is translated into concrete action.
- **Missionary fidelity** keeps every decision focused on the purpose for which leadership has been entrusted.

When these qualities grow together, leadership becomes a genuine ministry of discernment, one that guides communities with wisdom, humility, courage, and hope.

Self-Assessment for Leaders

Use the following questions for personal reflection.

Indicator	Reflective Questions
Interiorly Aware	Do I regularly examine the interior movements that influence my leadership? Can I recognise when emotions or personal attachments are affecting my decisions?
Spiritually Grounded	Is prayer the foundation of my leadership? Do I seek God's guidance before making important decisions?
Free in Decision-Making	Am I free from the need for approval, fear of criticism, or attachment to my own ideas?
Responsible	Do I communicate clearly, consult appropriately, and accept responsibility for my decisions?
Faithful in Mission	Do my decisions consistently promote the Gospel, the Claretian charism, and the common good rather than personal preferences?

Formation Note: Discernment is not measured by the number of decisions a leader makes but by the spirit in which those decisions are made. Leaders who grow in interior awareness, spiritual rootedness, freedom, responsibility, and fidelity to the mission become credible witnesses of Christ the Good Shepherd. Their leadership not only guides communities effectively but also forms others to become discerning disciples and missionary leaders in their own right.

IX. Leadership Across the Stages of Formation

Leadership is exercised differently at each stage of formation. While the fundamental principles of discernment remain the same, the leader's role gradually changes as the formandi mature in human, spiritual, intellectual, and missionary responsibility.

A discerning formator adapts his leadership to the developmental needs of each stage, always with the goal of helping formandi become persons capable of discerning God's will for themselves and serving others responsibly.

1. Pre-Novitiate: Leading Through Presence and Guidance

At this stage, formandi are still adjusting to community life and the demands of religious formation. They often require clear guidance, encouragement, and patient accompaniment.

The formator's leadership should focus on:

- creating a welcoming and trusting environment;
- modelling prayer and community life;
- helping candidates develop habits of reflection and self-awareness;
- teaching them to distinguish between emotions and decisions;
- encouraging openness in accompaniment;
- introducing simple practices of discernment, such as the daily examen.

Leadership at this stage is primarily formative rather than administrative. Young candidates learn discernment less from lectures than from observing how their formators pray, listen, decide, and relate to others.

2. Novitiate: Forming the Habit of Discernment

The novitiate is a privileged time for learning to seek God's will more consciously. The novice master helps novices integrate prayer, self-knowledge, and community life into a unified process of discernment.

Leadership during this stage includes:

- guiding novices in recognising spiritual movements;
- helping them understand consolation and desolation in daily life;
- encouraging regular spiritual accompaniment;
- fostering freedom from unhealthy attachments;
- promoting responsible participation in community life;
- helping novices discern their missionary vocation with honesty and generosity.

Rather than making every decision for the novice, the formator gradually helps him develop the capacity to discern responsibly.

3. Post-Novitiate: Promoting Shared Responsibility

As formandi mature, leadership becomes increasingly collaborative. They should gradually assume greater responsibility for their own formation and for the life of the community.

The formator encourages them to:

- participate actively in community discernment;
- assume leadership in community and apostolic activities;
- evaluate pastoral experiences reflectively;

- learn from successes and failures;
- balance personal initiative with obedience and collaboration;
- integrate discernment into academic, pastoral, and community decisions.

This stage prepares future missionaries not only to follow leaders but eventually to exercise leadership themselves.

4. Ongoing Formation: Leadership as Lifelong Conversion

Discernment does not end with ordination or perpetual profession. Throughout life, missionaries continue to encounter new responsibilities, changing ministries, intercultural challenges, and unexpected transitions.

Leaders engaged in ongoing formation remain committed to:

- deepening their relationship with God;
- reviewing their exercise of authority regularly;
- remaining open to feedback and correction;
- adapting leadership to changing missionary realities;
- accompanying younger missionaries;
- discerning new calls of the Spirit throughout life.

The most effective leaders never stop being learners. Their authority continues to mature through experience, prayer, humility, and ongoing conversion.

Characteristics of Formative Leadership at Each Stage

Stage	Primary Leadership Focus
Pre-Novitiate	Welcome, guidance, trust, and basic habits of discernment
Novitiate	Deepening prayer, self-awareness, vocational discernment, and interior freedom
Post-Novitiate	Shared responsibility, apostolic integration, collaborative leadership, and mature decision-making
Ongoing Formation	Lifelong conversion, mentoring, adaptability, missionary renewal, and servant leadership

Helping Future Leaders Grow

Every formator contributes to the future leadership of the Congregation. Leadership formation does not begin when someone is appointed superior; it begins from the first stages of formation.

Future leaders are formed when they learn to:

- pray before making decisions;
- listen respectfully to others;
- accept responsibility for their choices;
- work collaboratively;
- resolve conflicts constructively;
- place mission above personal interests;
- serve with humility and generosity.

Communities that intentionally cultivate these attitudes prepare missionaries who can exercise authority as a genuine ministry of discernment and service.

Formation Example

During a community meeting, a theology student proposes a new outreach programme for migrants. Rather than immediately approving or rejecting the proposal, the formator invites the community to reflect on its missionary value, practical feasibility, and relationship to the formation programme. After prayer, discussion, and evaluation, the community agrees to begin a small pilot initiative with periodic review.

In this process, the students learn not only how to organise an apostolic activity but also how to discern together, weigh different perspectives, and make decisions guided by prayer and mission. The experience becomes an exercise in leadership formation.

Formation Note: Leadership is gradually formed through the ordinary experiences of community life, prayer, responsibility, and service. At every stage of formation, the goal is not simply to prepare future superiors but to form missionaries who can exercise influence with wisdom, humility, and discernment. Such leaders inspire confidence because they have first learned to be faithful disciples, attentive to the Holy Spirit and committed to the mission of Christ.

X. Leadership Discernment Checklist

Leadership often requires making decisions under pressure. In such moments, it is easy to become driven by urgency, emotions, or external expectations. A simple discernment checklist helps leaders pause, reflect, and ensure that their decisions remain rooted in prayer, wisdom, and mission.

This checklist is not intended to replace discernment but to support it. It brings together the principles presented throughout this module into a practical guide that leaders can use before making significant decisions.

Before Making an Important Decision

1. Have I clearly identified the real issue?

Sometimes we respond to symptoms rather than the underlying problem.

Ask yourself:

- What decision is actually required?
- What is the real concern beneath the immediate issue?
- Have I distinguished facts from assumptions?

2. Have I prayed sufficiently?

Discernment begins by placing the situation before God.

Ask yourself:

- Have I spent adequate time in personal prayer?
- Have I reflected on this in the light of Scripture?
- Am I seeking God's will or simply asking God to bless my own plans?

3. What is happening within me?

Before deciding for others, leaders must discern their own interior movements.

Ask yourself:

- What emotions am I experiencing?
- Am I acting from peace or from anxiety?
- Is fear influencing my judgment?
- What personal attachments might be affecting my decision?

4. Have I listened carefully?

Good leadership listens before deciding.

Ask yourself:

- Have I listened respectfully to those concerned?
- Have I sought different perspectives?
- Have I allowed quieter voices to be heard?
- Have I consulted those whose experience could help?

5. What best serves the mission?

Mission remains the primary criterion for Christian leadership.

Ask yourself:

- Which option best promotes the Gospel?
- Which decision strengthens our missionary vocation?
- Which choice contributes most to the growth of persons and the community?
- Does this reflect our Claretian charism?

6. Am I acting with interior freedom?

Discernment requires freedom from unhealthy attachments.

Ask yourself:

- Am I trying to avoid criticism?
- Am I protecting my own preferences?
- Am I delaying the decision because of fear?
- Can I accept another solution if it proves better?

7. Am I ready to take responsibility?

Discernment eventually leads to action.

Ask yourself:

- Is it time to decide?
- Am I prepared to explain this decision clearly?
- Am I willing to accept responsibility for its consequences?
- Have I entrusted this decision to God?

8. How will I evaluate the decision?

Discernment continues after implementation.

Ask yourself:

- How will I know whether this decision is bearing good fruit?
- What indicators should I observe?
- When should I review this decision?
- What adjustments might become necessary?

A Practical Summary

Before making a significant leadership decision, pause and ask:

- ✓ Have I understood the situation correctly?
- ✓ Have I prayed deeply?
- ✓ Have I examined my own interior movements?
- ✓ Have I listened to those who should be consulted?

- ✓ Does this decision best serve the Gospel and the mission?
- ✓ Am I free from fear, pride, or personal attachment?
- ✓ Am I ready to accept responsibility?
- ✓ How will I review the fruits of this decision?

If these questions can be answered honestly and positively, the leader can move forward with greater confidence, trusting that he has sought to cooperate faithfully with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Formation Exercise

Reflect on an important leadership decision you have made recently, or imagine one you may have to make in the future.

Using the Leadership Discernment Checklist:

1. Which steps did you follow well?
2. Which steps did you overlook?
3. Were there personal attachments or emotions that influenced your judgment?
4. What did you learn about your own style of leadership?
5. If you were to make the decision again, what would you do differently?

Share your reflections with a spiritual director, mentor, or trusted member of the formation team, identifying one concrete area in which you wish to grow as a discerning leader.

Formation Note: Discernment is not a technique to guarantee perfect decisions. It is a way of leading that continually seeks God's will through prayer, attentive listening, interior freedom, wise consultation, and responsible action. Leaders who consistently practice these habits become more peaceful in uncertainty, more confident in decision-making, and more faithful in serving the mission entrusted to them. Their leadership reflects not merely good judgment but a heart that seeks, above all, to collaborate with the Holy Spirit.

XI. Missionary Integration: Leading as Christ Led

Throughout this section on discernment, we have seen that discernment is much more than a method for making decisions. It is a way of living in attentive relationship with God, recognizing the movements of the Holy Spirit, and responding generously to God's invitation in everyday life.

This final module has shown that leadership is one of the highest expressions of such discernment. The quality of leadership depends not simply on knowledge, experience, or authority, but on the leader's capacity to seek God's will faithfully and to help others do the same.

Leadership Begins with Discipleship

Every Christian leader remains first a disciple. Before guiding others, the leader must continually listen to the Lord through prayer, Scripture, the sacraments, the wisdom of the Church, and the realities of daily life.

Leaders who remain disciples:

- continue to learn;
- remain open to correction;
- acknowledge their limitations;
- seek God's will above personal preference;
- allow themselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Their authority flows not from position but from authenticity.

Leadership Serves Communion

Missionary leadership is never exercised in isolation. Its purpose is to strengthen communion among persons, communities, and the wider Church.

Discernment helps leaders:

- build trust rather than suspicion;
- encourage dialogue rather than polarization;
- promote participation rather than passivity;
- reconcile differences rather than deepen divisions;
- unite people around the common mission.

Communities flourish when leadership is exercised as a ministry of service, humility, and mutual responsibility.

Leadership Serves Mission

Every important leadership decision should ultimately be measured by one question: *Does this help us fulfil the mission God has entrusted to us?*

Mission remains the criterion that gives unity to all leadership decisions.

This requires leaders who are:

- courageous enough to embrace change when mission requires it;
- prudent enough to preserve what continues to bear fruit;
- humble enough to recognise their own limitations;
- free enough to place the common good before personal interests;
- faithful enough to persevere even when decisions are difficult.

Leadership that loses sight of mission easily becomes centred on administration, structures, or personalities. Leadership rooted in discernment continually renews the community's apostolic purpose.

Leadership Forms Future Leaders

One of the greatest responsibilities of every leader is to prepare others for leadership. This happens not only through formal training but through daily witness.

Leaders form future leaders when they:

- model prayerful decision-making;
- exercise authority with humility;
- listen respectfully;
- encourage initiative;
- delegate responsibility wisely;
- accompany others patiently;
- trust people to grow through experience.

In this way, leadership becomes generative. It does not create dependence but helps others become mature disciples capable of serving the Church and the Congregation with wisdom and freedom.

A Claretian Vision of Leadership

For Claretian missionaries, leadership is always missionary. Authority exists to animate persons, strengthen communion, and advance the evangelizing mission entrusted to the Congregation.

Following the example of St. Anthony Mary Claret, leaders remain attentive to God's providence, responsive to the needs of the people, and ready to adapt their methods while remaining faithful to the Gospel and the Congregation's charism.

Leadership therefore becomes an expression of our vocation as missionaries who listen before acting, discern before deciding, and serve before leading.

Conclusion

The journey through these modules on discernment has moved progressively:

- learning to recognise God's presence in daily life;
- understanding the movements of consolation and desolation;
- practising personal and communal discernment;
- discerning one's vocation;
- and finally exercising leadership through discernment.

This progression reminds us that discernment is not reserved for exceptional moments or for those in positions of authority. It is the ordinary way of living as disciples of Christ.

When leaders cultivate interior freedom, remain rooted in prayer, listen attentively to others, and seek God's will above personal interests, their leadership becomes a source of hope, unity, and missionary renewal. Such leaders do more than make good decisions, they help communities discover where the Holy Spirit is leading and encourage them to respond with faith, courage, and generosity.

Final Formation Reflection

Take a few moments of personal prayer and reflection.

1. Which aspect of discerning leadership challenges me most?
2. What personal attachments or fears most influence my leadership?
3. How do I normally seek God's will before making important decisions?
4. Which of the five indicators of discerning leadership is strongest in me? Which needs further growth?
5. How can I become a leader who helps others discern God's will rather than simply directing their actions?
6. What concrete step will I take during the coming month to grow as a discerning missionary leader?

Appendix A

Leadership Discernment Self-Assessment

This self-assessment is designed to help missionary leaders and formators reflect on the quality of their leadership. It is not an evaluation of competence but an invitation to ongoing growth in discerning leadership.

Instructions: Read each statement carefully and rate yourself using the following scale:

Rating	Meaning
1	Rarely true of me
2	Occasionally true of me

3	Often true of me
4	Usually true of me
5	Consistently true of me

A. Interior Awareness

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I regularly examine my interior movements before making important decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I recognise when fear or anxiety is influencing my judgment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am aware of my personal biases and attachments.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I reflect before reacting to difficult situations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I welcome constructive feedback about my leadership.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Subtotal: ____ /25

B. Spiritual Grounding

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Prayer is the foundation of my leadership.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I seek God's guidance before major decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I regularly pray with Scripture.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I practise a daily examination of conscience.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I maintain hope and trust even during uncertainty.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Subtotal: ____ /25

C. Freedom in Decision-Making

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I am not overly influenced by the desire to please everyone.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can change my opinion when better insight emerges.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I place the mission above personal preferences.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I make difficult decisions with courage when necessary.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I remain open to different viewpoints.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Subtotal: ____ /25

D. Responsible Leadership

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I consult appropriately before important decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I communicate decisions clearly and respectfully.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I accept responsibility for my decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I review the outcomes of important decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I encourage shared responsibility within the community.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Subtotal: ____ /25

E. Missionary Fidelity

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I consistently ask what best serves the mission.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I encourage missionary creativity and initiative.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My decisions strengthen communion within the community.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I strive to remain faithful to the Gospel and the Claretian charism.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My leadership encourages the growth of others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Subtotal: ____ /25

Scoring

Total Score	Interpretation
105–125	Your leadership demonstrates a high level of discernment. Continue nurturing your interior life and mentoring others.
80–104	You show many qualities of discerning leadership. Identify one or two areas for deliberate growth.
55–79	Your leadership has a solid foundation but would benefit from deeper attention to prayer, consultation, and interior freedom.
Below 55	This is an invitation to renew the foundations of your leadership through spiritual accompaniment, prayer, and ongoing formation.

Personal Reflection

After completing the assessment, spend some time reflecting on these questions:

1. Which section received my highest score? What strengths does this reveal about my leadership?
2. Which section received my lowest score? Why might this be an area of challenge?
3. What patterns do I notice across the five dimensions?
4. Which one concrete practice will I adopt during the coming month to grow as a more discerning leader?
5. Who could accompany me in this journey by offering honest feedback and encouragement?

This appendix complements the entire module by transforming the five indicators of discerning leadership into a practical tool for ongoing personal and formative evaluation.

Appendix B

Leadership Case Studies for Reflection and Discussion

The following case studies are intended for use in formation programmes, leadership workshops, community meetings, and ongoing formation. They invite participants to apply the principles of discernment presented in this module rather than simply identify the “correct” answer.

Each case may be reflected upon personally or discussed in small groups.

Case Study 1

Balancing Formation and Mission

A formation community has received an invitation to begin a weekly apostolate in a rapidly growing migrant community. Some formandi are enthusiastic, believing that direct missionary involvement is essential for their formation. Others are concerned that the additional commitment will reduce time for study, prayer, and community life.

The formation team is divided. One formator wants to accept the invitation immediately, while another believes the community is already overcommitted.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are the real issues in this situation?
2. What information should be gathered before making a decision?
3. Who should be consulted?
4. What personal attachments might influence the different viewpoints?

5. How would you lead the community through a process of discernment?
6. Which option best serves both formation and mission?

Case Study 2

Intercultural Community Tensions

A multicultural community includes members from six countries. Differences in communication styles, expectations regarding punctuality, and approaches to authority have gradually created misunderstandings. Community meetings often end with frustration, and some members have begun avoiding common activities.

The superior feels pressure to restore harmony quickly.

Questions for Reflection

1. What may be happening beneath the visible conflict?
2. Which attitudes should the superior cultivate before intervening?
3. How can the leader ensure that every member is genuinely heard?
4. Which leadership responses might worsen the situation?
5. How can discernment help move the community from disagreement to deeper communion?

Case Study 3

Choosing a Community Superior

A Province must appoint a new local superior. Two candidates are being considered. One has excellent administrative abilities and is highly efficient but tends to make decisions independently.

The other has outstanding interpersonal skills, encourages participation, and is deeply respected, but has less administrative experience.

The Provincial Council must recommend one of them.

Questions for Reflection

1. What qualities are most important for this community at the present time?
2. How can prayer and consultation contribute to this decision?
3. Which leadership qualities presented in this module are most relevant?
4. How can the Council avoid making the decision solely on personal preferences?

Case Study 4

Responding to Declining Motivation

Several young missionaries have become discouraged after repeated pastoral difficulties. Community prayer has become routine, enthusiasm has declined, and participation in community meetings is minimal.

Some senior members suggest stricter discipline.

Others believe the community simply needs greater encouragement.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is this primarily an administrative problem or a spiritual one?
2. What signs of consolation or desolation can be recognised?
3. How should the leader begin accompanying the community?
4. What practical steps could renew missionary enthusiasm?

5. How can servant leadership contribute to the renewal process?

Case Study 5

A Difficult Financial Decision

Because of financial constraints, the community must decide whether to discontinue one of its long-standing apostolic ministries. Many members are emotionally attached to the work because it has served the people for decades.

However, maintaining it will significantly reduce resources available for newer missionary priorities.

Questions for Reflection

1. What values are in tension?
2. What information is needed before making a decision?
3. How can the community honour its history without becoming attached to the past?
4. How should the leader accompany members who experience disappointment?
5. Which decision would best serve the Congregation's present missionary priorities?

Guidelines for Group Reflection

After discussing each case, the group may conclude with the following questions:

- What movements did you notice within yourself while discussing this case?
- Which principles of discernment were most helpful?
- Where did different opinions emerge?
- What helped the group move toward greater clarity?
- If you were responsible for the final decision, what would you do and why?

Formation Exercise

Choose one leadership situation from your own experience.

Using the process presented in this module:

- Describe the situation briefly.
- Identify the real issue.
- List the facts and assumptions.
- Describe the interior movements you experienced.
- Identify any personal attachments or fears.
- Explain whom you consulted.
- Describe how prayer influenced your decision.
- Evaluate the fruits of your decision after some time.

Finally, reflect on this question: *If faced with the same situation today, what would I do differently in the light of what I have learned about discerning leadership?*

Formation Note: Leadership skills are best learned through experience that is prayerfully reflected upon. Case studies provide a safe environment in which future leaders can practise discerning complex situations before facing them in real life. The goal is not simply to solve problems but to develop the habits of prayer, attentive listening, wise consultation, interior freedom, and missionary fidelity that characterize authentic Christian leadership.

Reflective Questions for Formators

These questions are intended for personal reflection, ongoing formation, supervision of ministry, and leadership evaluation. They invite formators and leaders to examine not only what they do but also the spirit in which they exercise leadership.

They may be used during annual retreats, leadership workshops, personal planning, or regular review of ministry.

A. My Relationship with God

1. Is my leadership rooted in a living relationship with Christ?
2. Do I regularly bring important leadership decisions to prayer before taking action?
3. How faithful am I to personal prayer, the Eucharist, Scripture, and the daily examen?
4. When faced with uncertainty, do I rely primarily on my own abilities or on God's guidance?
5. How has God been inviting me to grow as a leader during this past year?

B. My Interior Life

1. What interior movements most frequently influence my leadership?
2. Which fears most affect my decisions?
3. What personal attachments make discernment difficult for me?
4. Am I able to recognise when I am experiencing spiritual consolation or desolation?
5. How do I normally respond when I receive criticism or correction?

C. My Leadership Style

1. Do I lead primarily through service or through authority?
2. How well do I balance listening with decision-making?
3. Do I encourage participation while exercising responsible leadership?
4. Am I approachable and available to those entrusted to my care?
5. How do people experience my leadership—with trust, freedom, encouragement, or fear?

D. My Relationship with the Community

1. Do I genuinely listen to every member of the community?
2. How do I respond when opinions differ from my own?
3. Do I foster dialogue and mutual trust?
4. How do I help the community discern together rather than simply solve problems?
5. In times of conflict, do I promote reconciliation and communion?

E. My Leadership Decisions

1. Do I take sufficient time for prayer and consultation before making important decisions?
2. Am I willing to make difficult decisions when necessary?
3. Do I review the fruits of my decisions and learn from experience?
4. Can I acknowledge mistakes and change direction when appropriate?
5. Which recent decision best reflects discerning leadership? Which one would I handle differently today?

F. My Service of the Mission

1. Do my decisions consistently place the mission above personal preferences?
2. How do I encourage missionary creativity and initiative?
3. Does my leadership inspire hope and commitment in others?
4. How do I help younger members grow in responsibility and discernment?
5. In what ways has my leadership strengthened the missionary life of the community?

G. My Ongoing Growth

1. Which of the five indicators of discerning leadership is strongest in me?
2. Which one requires the greatest attention at this stage of my life?
3. Who accompanies me in my own discernment and leadership?
4. What habits or attitudes should I cultivate to become a more discerning leader?
5. What one concrete commitment will I make during the coming months?

Personal Leadership Growth Plan

After reflecting on the above questions, complete the following table.

Area for Growth	What have I discovered?	One Concrete Commitment	Review Date
Relationship with God			
Interior Freedom			
Leadership Style			
Community Building			
Missionary Leadership			

Further Reading

- Greenleaf, Robert K. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. 25th Anniversary ed. New York: Paulist Press, 2002.
- Kouzes, James M., and Barry Z. Posner. *The Leadership Challenge*. 7th ed. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2023.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989.
- Sinek, Simon. *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't*. New York: Portfolio, 2014.