

INTRODUCTION TO DISCERNMENT

Missionary Situation for Reflection

Listening for God's Voice Amid Many Voices

Michael had been in the novitiate for several months. He was sincere, generous, and eager to become a missionary. He participated faithfully in prayer, community life, and apostolic activities. Outwardly, he appeared to be adapting well.

Over time, however, he noticed conflicting movements within himself. A close friendship in the community brought him happiness and encouragement, yet he found himself becoming emotionally dependent on the other person. At the same time, he experienced a growing desire for deeper prayer, but also an increasing restlessness during times of silence. When he received fraternal correction from his formator, he initially accepted it calmly, but later felt hurt and began questioning whether he truly had a vocation.

Some days he felt deeply drawn to Christ and to the missionary life; on other days he imagined leaving formation and pursuing another path. He wondered:

- *Which of these desires truly come from God?*
- *Why do my feelings change so frequently?*
- *Should every strong emotion be followed?*
- *How can I distinguish between God's invitation, my own preferences, and the influence of other forces?*

These questions are not unique to Michael. Every person in formation experiences moments of attraction and resistance, clarity and confusion, enthusiasm and discouragement. Such experiences are a normal part of the journey of growth. They become opportunities for deeper formation when they are approached with prayer, reflection, and wise accompaniment rather than with impulsive reactions or fear.

Christian formation is not merely about acquiring knowledge, observing rules, or developing good habits. It is a gradual learning to recognize God's presence in the ordinary events of life, to understand the movements of the heart, and to respond freely and generously to the Holy Spirit. This lifelong process is called **discernment**.

Formation Insight: The quality of a missionary vocation is determined not simply by the decisions one makes, but by the spirit from which those decisions arise. Mature formandi gradually learn to listen beneath changing emotions and immediate impulses, to recognize the deeper movements that lead toward God, and to respond with interior freedom. Discernment is therefore not an occasional activity reserved for major decisions; it is a way of living attentively in God's presence every day.

Reflection Questions

1. Recall a recent situation in which you experienced conflicting thoughts or emotions. How did you respond?
2. Have you ever made an important decision based mainly on passing feelings? What was the outcome?
3. What helps you recognize God's presence and guidance in your daily life?
4. When you experience confusion or discouragement, to whom do you turn for guidance?
5. What qualities do you hope to develop in order to become a more discerning missionary disciple?

I. The Call to Discernment

Learning to Seek God's Will

Every day we make countless decisions. Some are simple and routine, while others shape the direction of our lives. We decide how to respond to a community member, how to spend our time, whether to persevere through difficulties, or how to use our gifts in service of others. Over time, these daily choices form our character, deepen, or weaken, our relationship with God, and influence the quality of our missionary witness.

Christian life is therefore not merely about making good decisions but about seeking and responding to God's will in every circumstance. Discernment is the process by which we learn to recognize God's invitations amid the many voices that compete for our attention. It enables us to distinguish what leads us toward greater faith, hope, and love from what gradually draws us away from God and our vocation.

Throughout salvation history, God has guided His people not by removing all uncertainty but by inviting them into a relationship of trust and attentive listening. Abraham discerned God's call to leave his homeland. Moses learned to recognize God's voice in the burning bush. The prophets continually sought God's will before speaking to His people. Mary listened with openness and entrusted herself completely to God's plan. Jesus Himself lived in constant communion with the Father, seeking not His own will but the Father's in every stage of His mission. The early Christian community also relied on prayer, dialogue, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit when making important decisions.

This same invitation continues today. God does not cease to call, guide, encourage, correct, and strengthen those who seek Him. Discernment is therefore not reserved for extraordinary moments or major life choices. It is a daily attitude of openness that enables us to recognize God's presence in ordinary experiences, relationships, responsibilities, successes, and struggles.

For those in formation, discernment is especially important. The years of formation are not simply a period of acquiring knowledge or developing pastoral skills. They are a privileged time for learning how God speaks through prayer, Scripture, community life, personal experiences, interior movements, and the guidance of the Church. As formandi gradually grow in discernment, they become capable not only of making wise decisions but also of living with greater interior freedom, fidelity, and missionary availability.

Discernment is ultimately an expression of love. A person who truly loves Christ desires not merely to know what is permitted or required but to discover what most fully responds to God's invitation. This search becomes a lifelong journey of listening, responding, and continually allowing the Holy Spirit to shape one's life according to the Gospel.

Formation Insight: The primary question of discernment is not, "*What do I want to do?*" but "*What is God inviting me to do at this moment?*" Formation gradually helps the formandus move from self-directed choices to Spirit-led decisions, enabling him to respond with greater freedom, generosity, and fidelity to his missionary vocation.

Practical Application

Throughout this week, before making any significant decision—whether in prayer, study, community life, or ministry—pause briefly and ask:

- What is leading me to make this choice?
- Does this choice draw me closer to God and to my vocation?
- Am I responding out of faith and freedom, or out of fear, impulse, or self-interest?

Cultivating this simple habit begins to form a discerning heart that seeks God's will in the ordinary events of daily life.

II. What Is Christian Discernment?

Listening, Recognizing, and Responding to God's Voice

Discernment is the spiritual capacity to recognize God's action in our lives and to respond to it with faith, freedom, and generosity. It is the process of prayerfully distinguishing what leads us closer to God from what draws us away from Him, so that our thoughts, decisions, relationships, and actions increasingly reflect the mind and heart of Christ.

In its deepest sense, discernment is not simply choosing between what is good and what is bad. Often, the real challenge is choosing between several good possibilities and discovering which one best corresponds to God's will at a particular moment. It seeks not merely the right decision but the most loving and faithful response to God's invitation.

Christian discernment is rooted in the conviction that God continues to speak through the Holy Spirit. He guides His people through Scripture, prayer, the teaching of the Church, the events of daily life, the wisdom of others, and the movements of the human heart. Discernment requires learning to recognize these various ways in which God communicates and to distinguish His voice from the many other influences that shape our thoughts and desires.

This process involves three closely related movements:

- **Attentiveness** – becoming aware of what is happening within and around us. We notice our thoughts, emotions, desires, fears, attractions, resistances, and the circumstances of our lives without immediately judging or reacting to them.
- **Understanding** – prayerfully reflecting on these experiences in the light of Scripture, faith, reason, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We ask what they reveal about God's invitation and whether they lead toward greater love, freedom, truth, and service.
- **Response** – choosing to act according to what we have recognized as God's will. Discernment reaches its fulfilment not in understanding alone but in a concrete response expressed through faithful action.

Discernment is therefore much more than careful analysis or psychological self-reflection. While reason, emotions, and human experience all contribute to the process, Christian discernment remains fundamentally a work of grace. It is a dialogue between God, who continually calls, and the believer, who seeks to listen with an open heart. Prayer, therefore, is not simply one element of discernment; it is the atmosphere in which discernment grows.

For those in formation, discernment gradually becomes a way of living. It shapes how one prays, studies, relates to others, receives correction, exercises responsibility, and responds to missionary challenges. Rather than reacting impulsively or merely following personal preferences, the discerning formandus learns to pause, pray, reflect, seek guidance, and choose what best serves God's Kingdom.

The goal of discernment is not certainty about every decision but growing fidelity to Christ. As one matures spiritually, discernment becomes less about finding perfect answers and more about cultivating an intimate relationship with the Lord, trusting that He faithfully guides those who sincerely seek His will.

Formation Insight: Discernment is not a technique to predict God's will or eliminate every uncertainty. It is a grace-filled process of attentive listening, prayerful reflection, and faithful response that enables us to grow in communion with Christ. The more we know Him, the more readily we recognize His voice amid the many voices of daily life.

Practical Application

At the end of each day, spend a few minutes reviewing one significant event or decision. Ask yourself:

- What happened?
- What thoughts, desires, or emotions arose within me?
- Where did I sense greater peace, freedom, faith, or love?
- What might God have been inviting me to recognize or do?
- How can I respond more faithfully tomorrow?

Practised consistently, this simple exercise helps form a discerning heart that becomes increasingly attentive to the quiet guidance of the Holy Spirit in everyday life.

III. Why Discernment Is Essential in Formation

Forming Missionaries Who Seek God's Will

The purpose of formation is not simply to prepare candidates for ministry but to help them become missionary disciples who know Christ deeply, love Him wholeheartedly, and follow Him faithfully. This transformation requires much more than intellectual learning, pastoral training, or the acquisition of good habits. It requires learning to recognize God's voice and to respond to His will with increasing freedom and generosity. This is the heart of discernment.

Every stage of formation presents new questions, challenges, and choices. A formandus must discern not only major vocational decisions but also the countless daily choices that gradually shape his character and missionary identity. How does he respond to correction? How does he use his freedom? How does he deal with disappointment, success, friendships, loneliness, or failure? Each of these situations becomes an opportunity to grow in discernment.

Discernment helps the formandus move beyond external conformity to interior conviction. Instead of acting simply because a rule requires it or a formator expects it, he gradually learns to act because he has recognized God's invitation. Obedience becomes a free and loving response rather than mere compliance. Prayer becomes a dialogue rather than an obligation. Mission becomes participation in God's work rather than personal achievement.

Formation also seeks to develop interior freedom. Every person enters formation with personal histories, strengths, wounds, expectations, fears, and unconscious patterns that influence decisions and relationships. Without discernment, these influences may remain unnoticed and quietly shape one's choices. Through prayer, reflection, accompaniment, and honest self-knowledge, the formandus gradually learns to recognize these inner movements and to respond with greater freedom under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Discernment is equally important for building healthy community life. Living with others inevitably brings differences of personality, culture, expectations, and opinions. A discerning formandus learns to listen before reacting, to seek understanding before judging, and to place the common good above personal preferences. Such attitudes foster dialogue, mutual respect, reconciliation, and genuine communion.

Missionary life also demands continual discernment. Every apostolic situation presents new needs, changing circumstances, and unexpected challenges. Effective missionaries are not simply active or efficient; they are attentive to where God is already at work and ready to respond creatively to the promptings of the Spirit. Discernment enables them to choose not merely what is possible but what is most faithful and fruitful for the mission entrusted to them.

Ultimately, discernment is not an optional skill reserved for specialists in spirituality. It is an essential dimension of integral formation. It gradually shapes the way a missionary prays, thinks, relates, decides, serves, and leads. A person who learns to discern throughout formation is better prepared to remain faithful amid the changing circumstances and demands of missionary life.

Formation Insight: The deepest goal of formation is not simply to produce capable ministers but discerning missionaries. Skills, knowledge, and pastoral competence bear lasting fruit only when they are guided by a heart that sincerely seeks God's will and is free to respond generously to His call.

Practical Application

During the coming week, choose one ordinary aspect of your formation, for example, community life, study, prayer, or apostolic ministry. At the end of each day, reflect briefly:

- What choices did I make today?
- What motivated those choices?
- Did they lead me toward greater love, freedom, humility, and service?
- How was God inviting me to grow through today's experiences?

Notice how discernment begins not with extraordinary decisions but with faithful attention to the ordinary events that gradually shape a missionary life.

IV. Foundations of Authentic Discernment

Rooted in a Living Relationship with God

Discernment does not begin with methods or techniques but with a relationship. It is the fruit of a life that seeks to know, love, and follow Christ. The more a person grows in communion with God, the more readily he recognizes God's presence and guidance in the ordinary events of life. Authentic discernment therefore rests on several essential foundations that support and sustain the entire process.

1. Prayer: The Heart of Discernment

Discernment grows in an atmosphere of prayer. It is in prayer that we learn to listen attentively, to bring our desires and struggles before God, and to become receptive to the movements of the Holy Spirit. Prayer gradually forms a listening heart that seeks not merely personal satisfaction but God's will.

Prayer also creates the interior silence needed to distinguish God's gentle voice from the many competing voices within and around us. Without a regular life of prayer, discernment easily becomes driven by personal preferences, emotions, or external pressures.

2. Sacred Scripture: God's Living Word

God continues to speak through His Word. Scripture is not simply a source of information but a living encounter with the Lord who reveals His ways and invites a response of faith. As formandi become familiar with the Gospel, they gradually acquire the mind and heart of Christ, which becomes the primary criterion for discernment.

The Word of God also purifies our desires, challenges our assumptions, and provides light when we face uncertainty or difficult decisions.

3. The Holy Spirit: The Principal Guide

Christian discernment is fundamentally the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who enlightens the mind, touches the heart, strengthens the will, and gradually conforms believers to Christ. Rather than forcing decisions, the Spirit gently invites, enlightens, encourages, and leads toward greater love, truth, and freedom.

For this reason, discernment is always approached with humility and prayerful dependence on God's grace rather than confidence in one's own wisdom.

4. Self-Knowledge: Knowing the Heart

To discern God's voice, we must also become familiar with our own inner world. Every person carries personal strengths, limitations, desires, fears, expectations, emotional wounds, and habitual patterns that influence decisions. Without self-awareness, these inner influences can easily be mistaken for God's guidance.

Honest self-knowledge enables the formandus to distinguish between authentic inspirations and personal reactions, between genuine zeal and hidden ambition, between generous love and emotional dependence. It fosters the interior freedom necessary to respond more faithfully to God's call.

5. Spiritual Accompaniment: Walking with Another

God often guides us through the wisdom and experience of others. A spiritual guide or formator helps the formandus to recognize recurring patterns, identify blind spots, and interpret spiritual experiences with greater clarity and objectivity. Accompaniment does not replace personal responsibility for discernment; rather, it supports growth through attentive listening, prayerful dialogue, and prudent guidance.

The willingness to seek and receive accompaniment is itself a sign of humility and openness to God's action.

6. Community: A Place of Shared Discernment

Christian vocation is lived within the Church and, for religious, within a community. Community life becomes an important context for discernment because it continually invites listening, dialogue, mutual correction, shared prayer, and common mission.

Often, God confirms or challenges personal insights through the wisdom of the community. Learning to discern with others prepares the formandus for collaborative ministry and responsible participation in the mission of the Church.

7. The Church: Safeguarding the Journey

Personal discernment is never isolated from the faith of the Church. The Scriptures, the teaching of the Church, the sacraments, the wisdom of the saints, and the living tradition of Christian spirituality provide reliable points of reference that protect discernment from becoming merely subjective.

The Church reminds us that authentic discernment always leads to greater communion with Christ, deeper charity, faithful service, and generous participation in God's mission.

Formation Insight: Authentic discernment grows where prayer, Scripture, openness to the Holy Spirit, honest self-knowledge, spiritual accompaniment, community life, and the wisdom of the Church are held together. When any one of these foundations is neglected, discernment can easily become one-sided or self-directed. Together, they form the stable ground on which a discerning missionary life is built.

Practical Application

Review these seven foundations and identify those that are strongest and those that need greater attention in your own formation.

Reflect prayerfully:

- Which foundation most supports my discernment?
- Which one do I tend to neglect?
- What concrete step can I take this week to strengthen that foundation?

Remember that discernment is not built in moments of crisis but through the faithful cultivation of these foundations in ordinary daily life.

V. Interior Attitudes that Foster Discernment

Forming a Heart That Listens

Discernment is not merely a skill to be learned but a way of being that is gradually formed through God's grace and personal cooperation. While methods and principles are helpful, they bear fruit only when they are supported by the right interior dispositions. A discerning person develops attitudes that make him more receptive to God's action and more capable of responding with freedom and fidelity.

These attitudes do not develop overnight. They are cultivated through prayer, self-awareness, community life, spiritual accompaniment, and faithful practice. As they mature, they shape not only individual decisions but the entire way a missionary lives and serves.

1. Openness to God

Discernment begins with the willingness to allow God to lead. This requires an open heart that sincerely desires God's will above personal plans or preferences. Such openness enables the formandus to remain teachable and receptive, even when God's invitations are unexpected or challenging.

An open heart prays: *"Lord, show me not what I prefer, but what You desire."*

2. Interior Freedom

Authentic discernment requires freedom from anything that prevents a wholehearted response to God. Attachments to personal ambitions, fears, comforts, approval, possessions, relationships, or fixed ideas can cloud judgment and make it difficult to recognize God's invitations.

Interior freedom does not mean indifference or lack of commitment. Rather, it is the capacity to choose whatever best serves God's Kingdom, even when it demands sacrifice or change.

3. Humility

A discerning person recognizes that he does not possess all the answers. Humility acknowledges both personal strengths and limitations and remains willing to learn from God, from others, and from experience.

Humility also protects discernment from self-deception. It enables the formandus to receive correction, seek advice, admit mistakes, and revise decisions when necessary.

4. Honest Self-Awareness

Discernment requires the courage to look truthfully at oneself. Thoughts, emotions, desires, fears, prejudices, and unconscious motivations all influence decisions. Honest self-awareness helps distinguish between authentic spiritual movements and personal reactions.

The more honestly a person knows himself, the more freely he can respond to God's grace.

5. Patience

God's guidance often unfolds gradually. Important decisions rarely become clear through haste or impulsive reactions. Patience allows sufficient time for prayer, reflection, consultation, and the quiet working of the Holy Spirit.

A discerning person resists the temptation to force immediate answers when greater clarity requires waiting.

6. Courage

Discernment often leads beyond familiar or comfortable paths. Recognizing God's will is only part of the journey; faithfully acting upon it may demand sacrifice, perseverance, or difficult choices.

Courage enables the formandus to remain faithful even when God's invitation involves uncertainty, misunderstanding, or personal cost.

7. Trust in God's Providence

No one can discern with absolute certainty in every situation. Christian discernment therefore rests on confidence that God faithfully guides those who sincerely seek Him.

Trust frees the formandus from excessive anxiety about making the "perfect" decision. Instead, he learns to make responsible choices with prayer, prudence, and confidence that God continues to guide even through human limitations.

8. Attentiveness

Many of God's invitations are quiet and easily overlooked. A discerning person learns to pay attention to the ordinary events of daily life, the movements of the heart, encounters with others, successes, failures, and unexpected circumstances.

Attentiveness transforms everyday experiences into opportunities for listening to God.

9. Generosity

Discernment reaches its fulfillment in generous response. Knowing God's will without acting upon it leads to spiritual stagnation. A generous heart is willing to place its gifts, time, talents, and life at the service of Christ and His mission.

Generosity enables discernment to become concrete in daily choices rather than remaining merely an interior reflection.

Formation Insight: The quality of discernment depends as much on the disposition of the heart as on the clarity of the mind. Methods can help us understand God's invitations, but only a humble, free, prayerful, and generous heart can respond to them faithfully. As these attitudes mature, discernment gradually becomes less about solving problems and more about living in a continuous relationship of listening and responding to God.

Practical Application

At the end of this week, review these nine attitudes and ask yourself:

- Which attitude is most evident in my life?
- Which attitude needs greater growth?
- What situations reveal my lack of interior freedom or trust?
- What one concrete practice can I adopt to cultivate a more discerning heart?

Choose one attitude to focus on during the coming week. At the end of each day, briefly review how you lived it and ask the Holy Spirit to continue forming your heart in the likeness of Christ.

VI. Learning to Read the Movements of the Heart

Becoming Attentive to God's Action Within Us

One of the most important lessons in the spiritual life is learning to pay attention to what is happening within us. Every day we experience thoughts, emotions, desires, fears, attractions, disappointments, peace, restlessness, enthusiasm, and discouragement. These interior experiences influence the way we perceive people, interpret situations, and make decisions.

Christian discernment invites us neither to ignore these experiences nor to be controlled by them. Instead, it teaches us to observe them carefully, to reflect on them prayerfully, and to ask what they reveal about God's action in our lives.

Our interior world is like a conversation where many voices seek our attention. Some lead us toward greater faith, hope, charity, and freedom; others lead us toward fear, selfishness, discouragement, or isolation. Learning to distinguish these movements is one of the essential skills of spiritual growth.

1. Interior Movements Are Part of Normal Christian Life

Interior movements are a normal part of every person's experience. They include changing thoughts, feelings, desires, and impulses that arise as we respond to people, events, prayer, work, and relationships.

For example, after spending time in prayer, a formandus may experience peace, gratitude, and renewed generosity. After a misunderstanding with a community member, he may feel hurt, anger, or a desire to withdraw. During apostolic ministry, he may experience joy and enthusiasm, or frustration and self-doubt.

These experiences are neither good nor bad simply because they occur. They are invitations to greater awareness and prayerful reflection.

2. Every Movement Does Not Come from the Same Source

Not every thought, desire, or emotion reflects God's will. Some arise naturally from our personality, temperament, physical condition, or life experiences. Others may be influenced by personal fears, unresolved emotional needs, unhealthy attachments, or external pressures. At times, certain movements become occasions through which God invites us to grow, while others may gradually lead us away from Him.

The task of discernment is therefore not to suppress these movements but to understand them and respond wisely.

3. Looking Beyond Immediate Feelings

Strong emotions often demand immediate action. Joy may tempt us to make hasty promises, while disappointment may tempt us to abandon worthwhile commitments. Fear may prevent us from accepting God's invitation, while enthusiasm may lead us to undertake responsibilities without sufficient reflection.

A discerning person learns to pause before reacting. Instead of asking, "*How do I feel?*" he also asks:

- *Why am I feeling this way?*
- *What is this experience inviting me to notice?*
- *Where is this movement leading me?*

- *Will acting on it help me grow in love of God and service of others?*

This pause creates space for prayer, reflection, and freedom.

4. Recognizing Lasting Fruits

One helpful way of reading the movements of the heart is to observe their lasting effects rather than their immediate intensity.

Certain experiences gradually lead to deeper peace, hope, generosity, humility, patience, and love. Others may initially appear attractive but eventually produce anxiety, confusion, resentment, discouragement, isolation, or self-centredness.

Rather than judging experiences too quickly, the discerning person patiently observes the direction in which they lead over time. The fruits they produce often reveal more than the intensity with which they first appear.

5. Bringing Interior Movements into Prayer and Accompaniment

Interior movements become clearer when they are brought before the Lord in prayer. Instead of reacting impulsively or suppressing difficult emotions, the formandus learns to speak honestly with God about them. Prayer gradually brings light, perspective, and freedom.

Sharing these experiences with a spiritual guide or formator also helps. Often another person can notice patterns or offer insights that we ourselves cannot easily see. Honest accompaniment protects discernment from becoming merely subjective or driven by temporary emotions.

A Bridge to Ignatian Discernment

Among the many traditions within the Church, **St. Ignatius of Loyola** offers a particularly practical way of understanding these interior movements. He observed that certain movements consistently draw us closer to God, while others gradually distance us from Him. He described these experiences as **spiritual consolation** and **spiritual desolation**, and developed practical rules for recognizing and responding to them wisely.

The next module will explore these **Ignatian Rules for Discernment** in detail. They provide a valuable framework for understanding the movements of the heart and learning how to cooperate more faithfully with the action of the Holy Spirit.

Formation Insight: Discernment begins with awareness. Those who never notice what is happening within them cannot discern wisely. By patiently observing the movements of the heart, bringing them to prayer, and reflecting on their lasting fruits, the formandus gradually learns to recognize the quiet guidance of God amid the many voices of daily life.

Practical Application

For the next seven days, take five minutes each evening to review your day. Ask yourself:

- What interior movement was strongest today?
- What situation gave rise to it?
- How did I respond?
- Where did this movement seem to lead me?
- What fruit did it leave in my heart?

Do not try to analyse everything immediately. Simply learn to observe, pray, and listen. Discernment begins not with having all the answers but with becoming attentive to the movements through which God gradually forms the heart.

VII. Growing in a Lifestyle of Discernment

Living Attentively in God's Presence

Discernment is often associated with important decisions such as choosing a vocation, accepting a new ministry, or making a major life change. While these moments certainly require discernment, Christian discernment is much broader. It is not simply a method for making occasional decisions but a way of living in continual openness to God's presence and guidance.

A discerning person gradually learns to see every aspect of life as an opportunity to encounter God. Daily events, relationships, responsibilities, successes, disappointments, and even ordinary routines become places where God is at work. Instead of asking only, "*What should I do?*" the discerning disciple continually asks, "*How is God inviting me to respond today?*"

For this reason, discernment becomes a daily habit rather than an occasional exercise.

1. Discernment in Prayer

Prayer is the privileged place where the heart learns to listen. Through regular prayer, the formandus becomes more aware of God's presence and more sensitive to the movements of the Holy Spirit.

A discerning prayer is not simply speaking to God but also listening attentively. Silence, meditation on Scripture, Eucharistic adoration, the Daily Examen, and personal reflection gradually form an interior attitude of receptivity.

Prayer also helps us to distinguish between our own desires and God's invitations.

2. Discernment in Community Life

Community provides countless opportunities for discernment. Living with people of different personalities, cultures, and experiences continually challenges us to grow in patience, humility, forgiveness, and mutual understanding.

A discerning formandus asks:

- Why did I react so strongly?
- What is God teaching me through this relationship?
- How can I contribute to greater communion?

Instead of seeing community difficulties merely as obstacles, discernment recognizes them as opportunities for growth.

3. Discernment in Study and Formation

Academic formation is not simply acquiring knowledge but allowing the truth to shape one's life and ministry.

A discerning student studies not merely to pass examinations or gain qualifications but to understand the Gospel more deeply and to serve God's people more effectively.

He also learns to discern how he uses his time, balances responsibilities, and responds to success or failure in his studies.

4. Discernment in Ministry

Missionary activity continually presents new situations requiring wisdom and sensitivity. Needs are often many, while time and resources are limited.

A discerning missionary does not simply ask: “*What can I do?*” He also asks: “*What is God asking of me here and now?*”

This attitude prevents activism and encourages faithful service rooted in prayer.

5. Discernment in Relationships

Every relationship influences our growth. Friendships, family relationships, interactions within the community, and encounters in ministry all affect our emotional and spiritual lives.

Discernment helps us recognize whether relationships foster greater freedom, charity, maturity, and fidelity to our vocation, or whether they gradually become possessive, dependent, or distracting from God’s call.

Healthy relationships strengthen vocation because they are rooted in mutual respect, appropriate boundaries, and shared growth in Christ.

6. Discernment in the Use of Time and Resources

How we use our time often reveals our deepest priorities.

A discerning person periodically asks:

- How am I spending my time?
- What receives most of my attention and energy?
- Are my daily choices consistent with my vocation?

The same applies to the use of technology, social media, finances, and personal possessions. Discernment helps ensure that these remain instruments of mission rather than sources of distraction or attachment.

7. Discernment in Ordinary Events

God often speaks through ordinary experiences rather than extraordinary signs. A conversation, an unexpected difficulty, a word from Scripture, an experience in ministry, a correction from a formator, or a moment of unexpected joy may all become occasions through which the Holy Spirit gently guides us.

The discerning person learns to ask throughout the day:

- What is God teaching me through this experience?
- How is this event inviting me to grow?
- What response would best reflect the Gospel?

Gradually, life itself becomes a place of continual dialogue with God.

Formation Insight: Discernment is not something we practise only when facing important decisions. It is a habitual way of living in attentive communion with God. The more faithfully we seek God’s presence in the ordinary events of daily life, the more naturally we recognize His guidance when significant decisions arise. Extraordinary discernment is built upon ordinary daily faithfulness.

Practical Application

Choose one ordinary activity this week, such as prayer, community life, study, meals, recreation, or ministry, and approach it with greater attentiveness.

At the end of each day, ask yourself:

- Where did I notice God’s presence today?
- Which ordinary event spoke most deeply to me?

- Did I respond with attentiveness or simply act out of routine?
- What invitation from God did I almost overlook?

Over time, these simple questions help transform everyday life into a continual school of discernment, where the formandus learns to recognize God not only in extraordinary moments but in the quiet rhythm of daily missionary living.

VIII. Common Obstacles to Discernment

Recognizing What Clouds Our Listening

God constantly invites us to walk in truth and freedom. Yet listening to His voice is not always easy. Our hearts are influenced by many internal and external forces that can distort our perception, weaken our freedom, or lead us away from God's invitations. Discernment therefore requires not only openness to the Holy Spirit but also an honest recognition of the obstacles that can hinder our spiritual vision.

These obstacles are not reasons for discouragement. Rather, when recognized with humility and brought into prayer, they become opportunities for growth. Awareness of these obstacles helps the formandus become more attentive, more prayerful, and more dependent on God's grace.

1. Self-Centredness

One of the greatest obstacles to discernment is allowing personal preferences, ambitions, or comfort to become the primary criterion for decision-making. When our first concern is "*What do I want?*" rather than "*What is God asking?*", our capacity to discern becomes limited.

True discernment requires moving from self-interest to a sincere desire to seek God's will and the good of others.

2. Disordered Attachments

Healthy relationships, responsibilities, and possessions are gifts from God. However, when we become excessively attached to people, roles, recognition, security, or particular ways of doing things, these attachments can limit our interior freedom.

Disordered attachment does not necessarily mean loving something bad; it means loving even good things in a way that prevents us from responding freely to God's call.

3. Fear and Anxiety

Fear often narrows our vision. Fear of failure, rejection, criticism, uncertainty, or sacrifice may prevent us from embracing God's invitations. Anxiety can also tempt us to seek immediate certainty rather than patiently waiting for greater clarity.

Discernment grows through trust that God faithfully accompanies those who sincerely seek His will.

4. Impulsiveness

Strong emotions sometimes tempt us to make quick decisions without sufficient prayer or reflection. Excitement may lead to unrealistic commitments, while disappointment or anger may lead us to abandon worthwhile responsibilities.

A discerning person learns to pause, pray, and seek wisdom before acting.

5. Unresolved Emotional Wounds

Past experiences, disappointments, losses, unresolved conflicts, or emotional hurts can unconsciously influence present decisions. These experiences may lead us to interpret situations through fear, suspicion, insecurity, or excessive need for approval.

Healing and self-awareness are therefore important elements of discernment. God's grace does not ignore our humanity but gradually transforms it.

6. Pride and Self-Reliance

Discernment requires humility. When we assume that our judgments are always correct or refuse to seek advice, we become vulnerable to self-deception.

A humble person recognizes that God often speaks through Scripture, the Church, spiritual guides, community members, and the ordinary events of life.

7. Excessive Activity

Missionary life can easily become busy. When activity is not balanced by prayer, silence, and reflection, we gradually lose the ability to notice God's gentle guidance.

Constant activity may produce efficiency, but without interior attentiveness it weakens discernment. Silence is not an escape from mission but a necessary condition for hearing God's voice.

8. Noise and Distraction

Modern life is filled with constant information, digital media, and endless stimulation. Without moments of silence, the heart becomes crowded with competing voices, making it difficult to recognize the quiet promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Developing healthy habits regarding technology, media, and personal silence protects the interior space where discernment can flourish.

9. Isolation

Discernment is weakened when we attempt to make important decisions entirely on our own. Isolation limits perspective and increases the risk of interpreting experiences only through our personal biases.

Honest conversation with a spiritual guide, formator, or trusted community member often brings clarity, balance, and confirmation.

10. Discouragement

Discouragement can distort our perception of ourselves, others, and even God. In moments of disappointment or spiritual dryness, we may be tempted to question our vocation, abandon good practices, or make decisions that we would not make in times of greater peace.

Such moments call not for impulsive decisions but for patience, perseverance, and renewed trust in God's faithful presence. Learning how to respond wisely to these experiences is one of the central insights of the Ignatian tradition and will be explored in the next module.

Formation Insight: The greatest obstacle to discernment is not making mistakes but becoming unaware of the influences that shape our choices. Those who humbly recognize their fears, attachments, wounds, and limitations become more open to God's transforming grace. Discernment grows not through perfection but through honesty, humility, and continual conversion.

Practical Application

Take some quiet time this week to review these common obstacles.

Reflect prayerfully:

- Which obstacle most frequently influences my decisions?
- When does it usually appear?
- How does it affect my relationship with God, others, and my vocation?
- What concrete step can I take to grow in greater interior freedom?

You may also discuss your reflections with your spiritual guide or formator. Bringing these obstacles into prayer and accompaniment is itself an important step in learning to discern more faithfully.

IX. Discernment in Formation Practice

Learning Discernment Through Everyday Experiences

Discernment is learned not only by studying its principles but by practising it in the ordinary situations of daily life. Every experience in formation becomes an opportunity to listen more attentively to God, understand the movements of the heart, and respond with greater wisdom and freedom.

The following situations are drawn from common experiences in initial formation. They are not meant to provide ready-made answers but to help formandi develop the habit of prayerful reflection. In each case, the essential question is not simply, *“What should I do?”* but *“What is God inviting me to recognize and how is He calling me to respond?”*

Case 1. A Friendship That Raises Questions

A novice develops a close friendship with another member of the community. The friendship brings mutual encouragement, openness, and joy. Gradually, however, he notices that he becomes disappointed when the other spends time with someone else. He begins to seek opportunities to be together, feels distracted during prayer, and loses interest in other community relationships.

He asks himself: *“Is this friendship helping me grow in my vocation, or am I becoming emotionally dependent?”*

Rather than making a quick judgment, he brings the situation to prayer and speaks honestly with his spiritual guide. Through reflection, he begins to distinguish between the genuine gift of friendship and the subtle attachment that is limiting his interior freedom. He learns that authentic friendship always leads to greater freedom, broader charity, and deeper commitment to one’s vocation.

Questions for Reflection

- What attracts me to this friendship?
- Does it help me love God and others more freely?
- Am I becoming dependent on another person for my emotional security?
- What is God inviting me to learn through this relationship?

Case 2. Responding to Correction

During a community meeting, a formator gently points out that a formandus has been arriving late for common prayer. Although the correction is given respectfully, he feels embarrassed and misunderstood. For several days he avoids the formator, becomes discouraged, and begins questioning whether he is suited for religious life.

Instead of acting immediately on these feelings, he takes time to pray, reflect, and examine what is happening within him. Gradually, he realizes that the strongest reaction is not caused by the correction itself but by his fear of failure and his desire to be seen as competent. Accepting this truth allows him to receive the correction with greater humility and to continue growing.

Questions for Reflection

- What emotions arose within me?
- Why did this correction affect me so deeply?
- What can I learn about myself through this experience?
- How is God inviting me to grow in humility and freedom?

Case 3. Balancing Zeal and Wisdom

A student in theology eagerly volunteers for every pastoral activity offered by the formation house. He enjoys ministry and receives much appreciation from the people he serves. Gradually, however, his personal prayer becomes irregular, his studies suffer, and he begins to feel physically and emotionally exhausted.

Initially, he believes he is simply being generous. Through prayer and accompaniment, however, he recognizes that genuine missionary zeal must remain rooted in communion with Christ. He learns that discernment sometimes invites us not to do more, but to do what God is truly asking at this moment.

Questions for Reflection

- What motivates my desire to serve?
- Am I seeking God's will or simply trying to meet every expectation?
- Is my activity strengthening or weakening my relationship with Christ?
- What would faithful balance look like in this situation?

Case 4. Feeling Discouraged in Prayer

For several weeks, a novice has found personal prayer dry and difficult. He no longer experiences the peace and enthusiasm that marked his first months in formation. Prayer seems empty, and he wonders whether God is disappointed with him. He begins to reduce his time of prayer and focuses instead on work and study.

Rather than concluding that God is absent, he shares his experience with his spiritual guide. Through patient reflection, he learns that periods of dryness can become opportunities to deepen faith and perseverance rather than reasons to abandon prayer.

Questions for Reflection

- How do I usually respond when prayer becomes difficult?
- What assumptions am I making about God's presence?
- Am I allowing temporary feelings to determine my commitment to prayer?
- What invitation might God be offering through this experience?

Case 5. Comparing Myself with Others

A formandus notices that another member of the community is frequently praised for his preaching, academic performance, and leadership abilities. Instead of rejoicing, he gradually becomes discouraged and begins to question his own gifts and vocation.

As he reflects, he realizes that comparison has slowly replaced gratitude. Instead of recognizing his own gifts, he has become preoccupied with the achievements of others.

Questions for Reflection

- Why do the success of others affect me so deeply?
- What gifts has God entrusted to me?
- Does comparison help or hinder my vocation?
- How can I grow in gratitude and freedom?

Learning from Experience

These examples illustrate an important truth: discernment is learned through life itself. Friendships, corrections, successes, failures, responsibilities, and daily routines all become opportunities for spiritual growth when they are approached with prayer, honest reflection, and openness to God's guidance.

Over time, the formandus begins to notice recurring patterns in his responses. He becomes more aware of what leads him toward greater faith, hope, charity, humility, and freedom, and what gradually distances him from these values. This growing awareness forms the basis of mature discernment.

Formation Insight: Formation is a school of discernment because ordinary experiences become the place where God gradually shapes the heart. The goal is not to avoid difficulties but to learn how to read them in the light of faith. Every situation—pleasant or painful—can become an opportunity to grow in self-knowledge, interior freedom, and faithful response to God's call.

Practical Application

Choose one significant experience from the past week and reflect on it using these four questions:

1. **What happened?**
2. **What was happening within me?** (thoughts, emotions, desires, fears)
3. **What was God inviting me to recognize?**
4. **How can I respond more faithfully now?**

Discuss this reflection during your next meeting with your spiritual guide or formator. Regular reflection on lived experience is one of the most effective ways of developing a discerning heart.

X. Discernment Across the Formation Journey

Growing in Discernment Throughout Life

Discernment is not mastered in a single course or at one stage of formation. It is a lifelong process of learning to recognize God's presence, interpret the movements of the heart, and respond faithfully to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As a person's vocation matures, so do the questions, responsibilities, and situations that require discernment.

Formation should therefore cultivate discernment progressively, helping formandi grow from simple awareness of God's presence to mature spiritual and apostolic wisdom.

1. Pre-Novitiate: Learning to Listen

The pre-novitiate is a time of awakening to God's call and developing the basic attitudes necessary for discernment. The emphasis is less on making major decisions and more on learning to listen attentively to God.

Particular areas of growth include:

- developing a regular life of prayer

- becoming aware of one's thoughts, emotions, and desires
- growing in self-knowledge
- learning openness to guidance and accompaniment
- reflecting on personal motivations for religious life
- cultivating honesty and simplicity before God

The primary objective at this stage is to help the candidate recognize that God continues to speak through ordinary life.

Formation Focus: *“What is God teaching me about myself and my vocation?”*

2. Novitiate: Learning to Recognize God's Action

The novitiate provides a privileged environment for learning spiritual discernment. Through deeper prayer, silence, spiritual reading, the Spiritual Exercises, community life, and regular accompaniment, novices begin to recognize how God works within their hearts.

Special attention is given to:

- understanding interior movements
- growing in interior freedom
- discerning personal attachments
- learning fidelity in times of consolation and difficulty
- developing confidence in God's guidance
- integrating prayer with daily life

This is also the stage where the Ignatian Rules for Discernment become especially valuable as practical guides for interpreting spiritual experience.

Formation Focus: *“What movements within me lead me closer to Christ and His mission?”*

3. Post-Novitiate: Integrating Discernment with Mission

As academic studies and apostolic responsibilities increase, discernment becomes more closely connected with daily decision-making. The challenge is to integrate prayer, study, community life, and ministry into a unified missionary vocation.

Areas requiring discernment include:

- balancing prayer, study, and ministry
- developing healthy relationships
- using authority and freedom responsibly
- responding to success and failure
- integrating intellectual, human, spiritual, and pastoral formation
- discerning one's missionary gifts and areas for growth

The formandus gradually learns that discernment is not separate from mission but an essential part of missionary living.

Formation Focus: *“How is God inviting me to serve more faithfully through my daily responsibilities?”*

4. Immediate Preparation for Perpetual Profession or Ordination: Confirming the Call

As one approaches definitive commitment, discernment becomes more focused on vocational confirmation. The question is no longer simply whether one desires religious life but whether one is freely, maturely, and joyfully ready to offer one's life completely in the service of God and His people.

Important areas include:

- confirming vocational motivation
- embracing evangelical counsels with freedom
- accepting missionary availability
- integrating personal history and vocational identity
- developing emotional and spiritual stability
- strengthening commitment to lifelong formation

This stage calls for honest dialogue with God, oneself, and the formation team.

Formation Focus: *“Am I freely and joyfully prepared to offer my life in lifelong missionary service?”*

5. Ongoing Formation: Remaining a Lifelong Disciple

Discernment does not end with profession or ordination. Every stage of missionary life presents new opportunities and new challenges. Changing ministries, leadership responsibilities, intercultural communities, personal crises, ageing, illness, and new apostolic needs all require continual discernment.

Ongoing formation helps missionaries to:

- remain attentive to the Holy Spirit
- review their life and mission regularly
- renew their vocational commitment
- discern changing pastoral needs
- integrate new experiences with wisdom
- continue growing in holiness and missionary fruitfulness

A missionary who stops discerning gradually risks living from habit rather than from the inspiration of the Spirit.

Formation Focus: *“Where is God calling me now, and how can I continue to respond with generosity and hope?”*

Formation Insight: Discernment matures throughout life. At every stage of formation, the questions become deeper, the responsibilities greater, and the invitation to trust God more complete. The goal is not merely to make good decisions at important moments but to become a missionary whose entire life is shaped by attentive listening, interior freedom, and faithful response to the Holy Spirit.

Practical Application

Reflect on your present stage of formation.

Ask yourself:

- What are the principal discernment challenges at this stage?
- In what areas have I grown in listening to God?
- What attitudes still need to mature?

- What concrete practice can help me become more attentive to the Holy Spirit during this stage of my formation journey?

Take one practical step this week to strengthen your daily practice of discernment, remembering that every stage of formation is an invitation to deepen your relationship with Christ and your readiness for mission.

XI. Missionary Integration

Becoming a Missionary Who Lives by Discernment

The ultimate purpose of discernment is not simply to make good decisions but to become the kind of person who habitually seeks, recognizes, and responds to God's will. Discernment is therefore much more than an occasional exercise or a spiritual technique. It is a way of living that gradually shapes the mind, heart, and mission of a disciple of Christ.

For a missionary, discernment is indispensable. Missionary life unfolds in changing circumstances, unfamiliar cultures, complex relationships, and unexpected challenges. No set of rules can anticipate every situation. What enables a missionary to respond faithfully is not merely knowledge or experience, but a discerning heart that remains attentive to the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus demonstrates this way of living. He continually seeks the Father's will through prayer, listens attentively to the needs of those He encounters, knows when to act and when to withdraw, when to speak and when to remain silent, when to challenge and when to console. His entire life is marked by openness to the Father's guidance. Christian discernment is, ultimately, learning to share in this same attitude of filial trust and obedience.

For missionaries, discernment is expressed in many ways:

- listening before acting;
- praying before deciding;
- seeking the common good rather than personal preference;
- responding with freedom rather than impulse;
- remaining faithful during uncertainty;
- continually asking where God is already at work and how to collaborate with His mission.

This way of living also protects missionaries from two common dangers. The first is **activism**, where ministry becomes driven by constant activity without sufficient prayer or reflection. The second is **rigidity**, where one clings to familiar methods or personal opinions without openness to the new movements of the Spirit. Discernment offers a path that is both rooted and responsive, firmly grounded in the Gospel while remaining attentive to the needs of the present moment.

Within the Claretian tradition, discernment has a particular missionary significance. Saint Anthony Mary Claret sought God's will with remarkable attentiveness throughout his life. Whether accepting new missions, responding to unexpected challenges, or adapting his ministry to changing circumstances, he continually sought to cooperate with God's plan rather than his own preferences. His availability for mission flowed from a heart that desired above all to know and fulfil God's will.

This same missionary spirit is expected of every Claretian. Discernment enables missionaries to remain faithful to their vocation while responding creatively to the needs of the Church and the world. It fosters openness to new missionary frontiers, intercultural communities, collaborative ministry, and the changing demands of evangelization without losing sight of the Gospel.

Ultimately, discernment is not about becoming experts in spiritual analysis. It is about becoming men and women who belong completely to God. A discerning missionary gradually develops an inner disposition that asks in every circumstance: "**Lord, what are You asking of me here and now?**"

When this question becomes the guiding attitude of one's life, discernment is no longer simply something one practises, it becomes the way one lives.

Formation Insight: A mature missionary is recognized not primarily by the number of responsibilities he carries or the success of his ministry, but by his capacity to seek God's will with humility, freedom, and perseverance. Discernment transforms every stage of formation and every moment of missionary life into an opportunity to collaborate more fully with the Holy Spirit in Christ's mission.

Practical Application

As you conclude this module, take time for personal prayer and reflect on the following questions:

- Do I sincerely seek God's will, or do I often seek confirmation of my own preferences?
- In what areas of my life do I find it easiest to recognize God's guidance?
- Where do I experience the greatest difficulty in discerning His will?
- What daily practices will help me grow into a more discerning missionary?

End your reflection with this simple prayer: *Lord Jesus, teach me to listen with an open heart, to recognize Your voice amid the many voices that surround me, and to follow You with freedom, courage, and generosity. May Your Holy Spirit guide my thoughts, desires, decisions, and actions, so that in all things I may seek the Father's will and serve His people with joy. Amen.*

Looking Ahead

This introductory module has presented discernment as a **way of life** rooted in prayer, self-knowledge, interior freedom, and openness to the Holy Spirit. The modules that follow will develop this foundation in a practical manner by exploring:

- the **Ignatian Rules for Discernment**, which help us understand the movements of the heart;
- **Pope Francis' catechesis on discernment**, which present discernment as an essential practice for Christian living;
- **personal and community discernment**, for making decisions individually and together;
- **reading the signs of daily life**, discovering God's presence in ordinary experiences;
- **vocational discernment**, deepening fidelity to God's call; and
- **leadership and discernment**, enabling missionary leaders to guide communities and ministries according to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Together, these modules aim to form missionaries who are not only competent in ministry but also capable of discerning God's will with wisdom, freedom, and evangelical courage throughout their lives.

XII. Reflective Questions

Reflection is an essential part of discernment. Without taking time to prayerfully review our experiences, we can easily overlook God's presence and continue to act from habit, emotion, or personal preference. These questions are intended to foster honest self-examination and meaningful dialogue with a spiritual guide or formation group. They may be used for personal prayer, journaling, community sharing, or accompaniment.

A. Reflecting on My Relationship with God

1. How do I usually seek God's guidance before making important decisions?
2. What place does personal prayer have in my discernment?
3. Am I growing in trust that God is actively guiding my life?

4. When have I experienced God's guidance most clearly?
5. What prevents me from listening attentively to God's voice?

B. Reflecting on My Interior Life

1. Am I attentive to the thoughts, desires, emotions, and movements of my heart?
2. Which interior movements most often draw me closer to God?
3. Which attitudes or emotions frequently disturb my peace or freedom?
4. How well do I know my strengths, weaknesses, fears, and personal attachments?
5. What recurring patterns do I notice in my reactions to people and situations?

C. Reflecting on My Decisions

1. What usually guides my decisions: faith, personal preference, fear, or external pressure?
2. Do I take sufficient time to pray and reflect before making important decisions?
3. How do I respond when my plans change unexpectedly?
4. Am I willing to reconsider my decisions when greater light or wisdom emerges?
5. Can I recognize the fruits of my decisions in my relationship with God and others?

D. Reflecting on My Community Life

1. How do I respond to correction or disagreement?
2. Do my relationships promote greater freedom, charity, and commitment to my vocation?
3. Am I open to listening to others before defending my own views?
4. Do I seek reconciliation when conflicts arise?
5. How does community life help me grow in discernment?

E. Reflecting on My Missionary Vocation

1. What originally attracted me to my vocation, and how has that attraction matured?
2. In what situations do I feel most alive in my missionary calling?
3. What fears or attachments still limit my availability for God's mission?
4. How do I discern the balance between prayer, community, study, and ministry?
5. Am I becoming more available for whatever mission God and the Congregation may entrust to me?

F. Reflecting on My Growth in Discernment

1. Which aspect of discernment has become clearer to me through this module?
2. Which attitudes still need to grow within me?
3. Which obstacles most frequently hinder my discernment?
4. Who helps me discern wisely, and am I open to being accompanied?
5. What concrete step will I take to become a more discerning missionary disciple?

Formation Exercise

At the end of each week, set aside twenty to thirty minutes for a personal review using the following questions:

- What events this week most affected me?
- What interior movements did I experience?
- Where did I recognize God's presence and invitation?
- What prevented me from responding freely?
- What am I grateful for?
- What do I need to bring before the Lord?
- What is one concrete step I will take next week to grow in discernment?

Record your reflections in a journal and, when appropriate, discuss them with your spiritual guide or formator. Over time, this regular practice develops the habit of spiritual attentiveness and enables discernment to become an integral part of daily missionary living.

Formation Insight: Discernment grows through regular reflection. Those who prayerfully review their experiences become more attentive to God's action, more aware of themselves, and more responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Reflection transforms experience into wisdom and gradually forms a heart that seeks God's will in all things.

Appendix: Additional Formation Scenarios for Group Reflection.

Case 6. Homesickness and Vocational Doubts

During the first months of formation, a novice begins to miss his family intensely. A family member falls ill, and he feels guilty for being away from home. He wonders whether remaining in formation is selfish and begins to think about returning home permanently.

Instead of making an immediate decision, he brings his concerns to prayer and discusses them with his formator. He gradually learns to distinguish genuine concern for his family from the emotional pressure created by homesickness and loneliness.

Questions for Reflection

- What emotions are influencing my thoughts?
- What responsibilities do I have toward my family and my vocation?
- Am I making this decision from peace or from emotional distress?
- What would help me discern more freely?

Case 7. An Unexpected Apostolic Success

After preaching during a parish mission, a formandus receives many compliments. He feels encouraged and begins to imagine himself as a successful missionary. Over the following weeks, however, he notices that he seeks opportunities where he will be noticed and appreciated.

Through prayer and reflection, he realizes that the desire to serve God has gradually become mixed with the desire for recognition.

Questions for Reflection

- What gives me the greatest satisfaction in ministry?
- Am I seeking God's glory or my own recognition?
- How do I respond when my efforts go unnoticed?
- How can I remain rooted in humility?

Case 8. Facing an Important Assignment

A superior asks a formandus to undertake a responsibility that he neither expected nor desired. Although capable of doing it, he feels disappointed because it is different from what he had hoped for.

His first reaction is resistance. After prayer and dialogue, however, he begins to ask not whether the assignment matches his preference but whether it may be God's invitation for his growth and service.

Questions for Reflection

- Why am I resisting this assignment?
- Are my expectations preventing me from seeing new possibilities?

- What values should guide my decision?
- How might God be inviting me to grow through this responsibility?

Case 9. Balancing Digital Life

A formandus uses his mobile phone mainly to stay connected with family and friends. Gradually, however, he notices that he spends increasing amounts of time on social media. He becomes distracted during study, less attentive in community conversations, and finds it difficult to remain recollected in prayer.

Instead of simply setting stricter rules, he reflects on the deeper need that constant connectivity is trying to satisfy. This helps him develop healthier habits and recover greater interior freedom.

Questions for Reflection

- What am I really seeking when I spend so much time online?
- How does my digital life affect my prayer, relationships, and studies?
- Does technology support or distract from my vocation?
- What changes would help me use technology more wisely?

Further Reading

Sacred Scripture

The Bible remains the primary source for learning discernment, as it reveals how God guides His people and invites them to respond in faith.

Recommended passages

- 1 Samuel 3:1–10 – Samuel learns to recognize God’s voice.
- 1 Kings 19:9–13 – Elijah encounters God in the gentle whisper.
- Psalm 25 – Seeking God’s guidance.
- Psalm 139:23–24 – Prayer for self-examination.
- Matthew 4:1–11 – Jesus discerns and resists temptation.
- Matthew 26:36–46 – Jesus discerns the Father’s will in Gethsemane.
- Luke 24:13–35 – The disciples recognize the Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus.
- Romans 12:1–2 – Discerning the will of God.
- Galatians 5:16–26 – Living according to the Spirit.
- Philippians 1:9–11 – Growing in wisdom and discernment.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22 – Testing everything and holding fast to what is good.
- Hebrews 5:14 – Maturity through discernment.
- 1 John 4:1–6 – Testing the spirits.

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