**Missional Engagement Discernment Process**

**Based on a model of discernment developed by D. Morris & C. Olsen**

**in *Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church***

**Description:**

Churches and faith-based organizations often struggle in deciding how to take part in *Missio Dei*, the Mission of God in the world. With numerous possibilities to be the presence of Christ and so many cries for help, both locally and globally, the task of determining how a congregation/organization will engage itself missionally can be daunting. The Missional Engagement Discernment Process is a resource to help churches and faith-based organizations in determining next steps for missional engagement/partnership. The resource utilizes a model of discernment developed by D. Morris and C. Olsen, in their book *Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*. The discernment process can be accomplished in as little as two meetings or it can be spread over a longer period of time to suit the church’s or organization’s needs.

**Instructions:**

(1) Appoint someone from your church or network to serve as the guide for the discernment process. In choosing someone to guide the process, consider those who possess a natural gifting in the area of discernment. If you need assistance in finding someone in your area/state who can lead this process, contact your state/regional CBF office or CBF Global to get connected with those who have group discernment experience. The discernment guide will need to purchase a copy of the book, *Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* in order to gain a broad understanding of the process. Other discernment team members may want to purchase the book as well.

(2) Invite those who serve in leadership in your congregation/organization to participate in the missional engagement discernment process. This can include the Missions Committee and Ministerial Staff for a church, or the staff, leadership team and officers for an organization. You might also consider inviting other individuals who are highly invested in missional engagement to participate.

(3) Once the team has been assembled, set a meeting date and time for the first session. Be sure to allow at least an hour and 15 minutes or up to 2 hours for group sessions.

(4) The discernment guide or another member of the team should create a draft group covenant for the discernment team addressing such matters as: the importance of confidentiality, the need to respect all persons viewpoints, the need for each group member to have an equal voice in the process, etc. The group will read over the draft and suggest changes prior to or on the day of their first meeting.

(5) Appoint someone on the team to serve as recorder during the group’s discernment sessions. There may be a time when the team would like to refer back to the minutes from a previous gathering, so a record will prove useful.

(6) As the discernment team goes through the process, keep in mind that it may be necessary to revisit steps completed earlier in the process as new understanding comes to light. Revisiting earlier steps should not be equated to moving backward, but can be seen as evidence of the movement of God’s Spirit among the people of God and the people’s willingness to listen and respond. The act of revisiting should not derail the process or significantly prolong it, instead it serves as a reminder that God is living and active. One example of a need to revisit the *Framing* portion of the process might occur if the group feels that their focus has shifted and requires some modification. Many groups find it necessary to revisit the *Shedding* portion of the process when they become aware that items they agreed to set aside before the process began are cropping up and becoming a barrier to the work of discernment.

**Questions:**

Please contact Rachel Gunter Shapard, Associate Coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Florida, with any questions regarding this resource. Contact Rachel via email at rshapard12@floridacbf.org.

**Framing** – identify the focus for the discernment process. One example is:

*Clarity in determining next steps for (CHURCH/ORGANIZATION’S NAME) missional engagement.*

**Grounding** – develop a guiding principle informed by the values, beliefs, and purpose of those seeking discernment. The guiding principle can be developed by the discernment team based on the specific goals of the church/organization, or a more general principle can be chosen, such as:

*Open hearts and minds to God’s leadership among us.*

**Shedding** – lay aside ego, preconceived notions, false assumptions, and predetermined conclusions so that the matter can be fairly considered. An important question to ask in the shedding process is:

*“What needs to be set aside so that we can be fully aware of the movement of God’s Spirit among us?*

**Rooting** – connecting religious tradition (history, practice, the arts, hymnody, etc.) and biblical stories/themes/ images, with the situation at hand.

*Take a few moments in silence to individually consider examples from Christian tradition and the biblical witness that speak to the matter at hand. After individual contemplation, make space for group members to share what came to the surface for them. Pay attention to whether the examples shared confront, confirm, nudge, or even transform the direction of the process.*

**Listening** – make space to hear the promptings of the Spirit, the past words of family members or friends on the matter, the wisdom of church/organization members who are not present and the voices of those who may be affected by the group’s determinations.

*Take time for silent prayer so that each individual can participate in the spiritual discipline of listening. The discernment guide can assist in keeping group members on task within the silence by calling out the voice(s) to which the group members should be listening one at a time, starting with the promptings of the Spirit. Individual listening will conclude with a communal prayer led by the guide or another group member. Following the communal prayer, group members are given an opportunity to share what they heard through the practice of listening.*

**Exploring** – frees our imaginations to identify all options and paths that lie within the guiding principle.

*Make a list of all possible missional engagement opportunities including past experiences, current engagement and new opportunities.*

**Improving** – consider each option in order to make it the best it can be.

**Weighing** – sort and test each option in response to the leading of God’s spirit. (Examples of weighing can be found in Morris and Olsen’s book, *Discerning God’s Will Together*.)

**Closing** – move toward the selection of an option which is given weight by the Spirit of God and the process in which the discerners are engaged.

**Resting** – complete a final test of the decision by allowing it to rest near the heart. Does it bring consolation (peace and movement toward God) or desolation (distress and movement away from God.) How does it feel after sleeping on it? How does it sit when explaining it to a friend or family member?