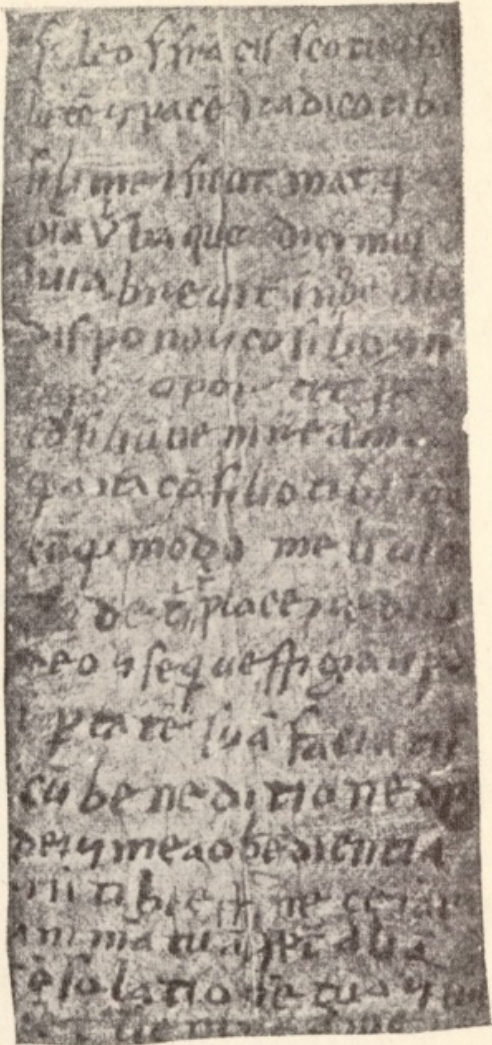


# Discernment in the Franciscan Spirit:

A Practical Guide Based on the writings and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare of Assisi







LETTER OF ST. FRANCIS TO BROTHER  
LEO, PRESERVED AT SPOLETO. (See  
page 130.)

Brother Leo, health and peace from Brother Francis! I am speaking, my son, in this way—as a mother would—because I am putting everything we said on the road in this brief message and advice. If afterwards, you need to come to me for counsel, I advise you thus: In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God and to follow His footprint and poverty, do with the blessing of the Lord God and my obedience. And if you need and want to come to me for the sake of your soul or for some consolation, Leo, come. (1224-1226 - - Edition of Kajetan Esser)



This letter is the essence of what it means to discern from a Franciscan perspective:

*“In whatever way it seems best to you to please the Lord God and to follow His footprint and His poverty, do this with the blessing of God and my obedience.”*





# Reflect:

- WHAT ARE YOU HEARING FROM FRANCIS AND LEO?
- HOW MIGHT THIS APPLY TO YOUR LIFE?
- WHO WOULD SAY THESE THINGS TO YOU AND TO WHOM WOULD YOU SAY THESE THINGS?



All life is a journey, a way of beauty.  
Franciscan Discernment begins from  
a perspective of abundance, knowing  
grace and beauty are everywhere.  
Love grounds Franciscan Discernment  
from the very start:

- God's abundant love for the individual.
- The individual's overflowing love for God and the world.
- The individual's sense of his/her own life-journey into love.







Bl. John Duns Scotus—  
Franciscan Discernment  
involves two affections:

- Affection for self (love of self)
- Affection for justice (love of others)



“In the Franciscan vision, moral living is seen as a response to divine graciousness and love....True human freedom becomes the foundation and the summit of moral living, enabling the fully functioning moral agent to respond in right actions and ordered loving in imitation of Jesus Christ, to that love that God has poured out into our heart.”

*(The Franciscan Moral Vision: Responding to God's Love)*





Right moral living requires  
balancing the two affections  
resulting in a dynamic of mutual  
love and expanding inclusivity:



- A SELF-REFLECTIVE GLANCE TOWARD ONE'S OWN LIFE.
- CRITICAL AWARENESS OF INJUSTICE
- COURAGE TO ACT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE ON BEHALF OF JUSTICE





# Reflect:

- DO YOU TRULY AND DEEPLY LOVE GOD?
- DO YOU BELIEVE GOD TRULY AND DEEPLY LOVES YOU?
- IS YOUR LOVE DIRECTED BOTH INWARD AND OUTWARD? WHAT EVIDENCE DO YOU HAVE OF BOTH OF THESE?



# Key Aspects of Franciscan Discernment:

- SEES THE WHOLE SITUATION AS A LOCUS FOR BEAUTY—  
NOT ISOLATING ONE ASPECT
- LETS ONESELF BE DRAWN BY THE HEART—  
NOT TURNING LIFE INTO A PUZZLE OR DILEMMA
- BASED ON PRAXIS (PRACTICE)—  
NOT ABSTRACT SOLUTIONS
- FOLLOWS THE SPIRIT'S LEAD—  
NOT FIGURING THINGS OUT





# Move from attentiveness to birthing beauty:

- AS I AM ATTENTIVE TO MY LOVE OF MYSELF, WHAT IS PRESENT TO ME?
- AS I AM ATTENTIVE TO THOSE PARTS OF ME 'THAT HOLD ME CAPTIVE', WHAT WAYS IS BEAUTY ALREADY PRESENT TO ME?
- AS I AM ATTENTIVE TO MY DISTRACTIONS, MY BIASES, MY ASSUMPTIONS, HOW MIGHT I BRING FORTH MORE BEAUTY IN A SITUATION?
- AS I AM ATTENTIVE TO MY OWN EXPECTATIONS OF MYSELF AND GOD, WHAT INCARNATIONAL ASPECTS DISTURB, SURPRISE AND UNSETTLE ME?





# Reflect:

- AFTER REFLECTING ON THE MOVEMENT FROM ATTENTIVENESS TO BIRTHING BEAUTY, HOW ARE YOU CALLED TO DO THE SAME IN YOUR WON DISCERNMENT PROCESS?



# Franciscan Discernment is a path to wholeness and is all about balance and harmony...it is **RADICALLY HOPEFUL!**

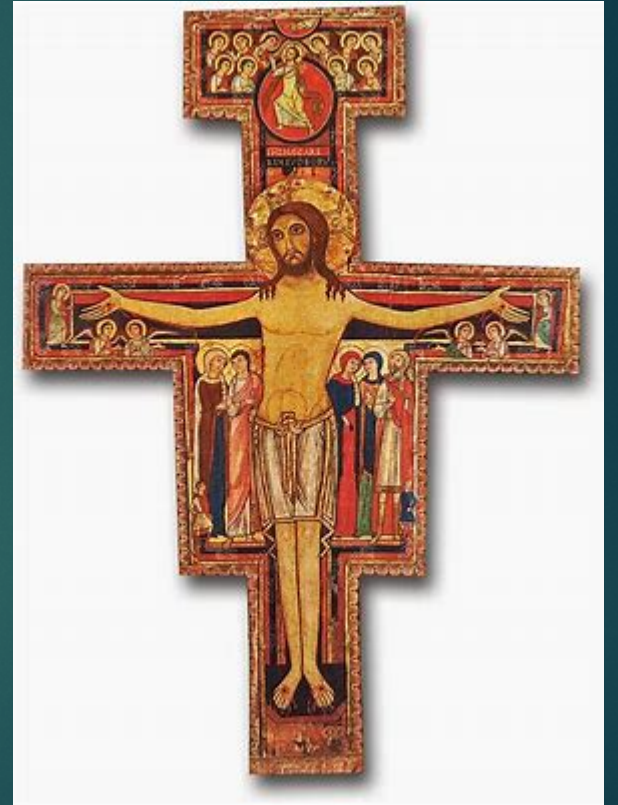
- AWARE OF ONE'S OWN DESIRES AND ATTRACTIONS
- MINDFUL OF THE ASPECTS OF THE SITUATION
  - WHO ONE IS
  - WHAT ONE IS CONSIDERING
- ATTENTIVE TO THE SPIRIT
  - Awaits with patience and confidence for the movement within
  - Acts with grace and peace toward a future filled with beauty and hope.





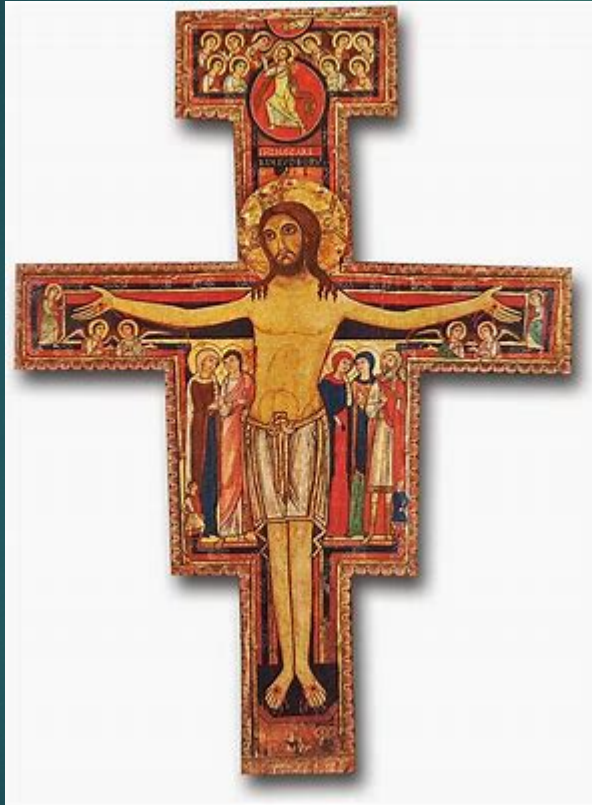
# Prayer for Guidance—St. Francis

“MOST HIGH AND GLORIOUS GOD,  
ENLIGHTEN THE DARKNESS OF MY  
HEART, GIVE ME RIGHT FAITH, CERTAIN  
HOPE AND PERFECT CHARITY, SENSE AND  
KNOWLEDGE, LORD, SO THAT I MIGHT  
ALWAYS DISCERN YOUR HOLY AND TRUE  
WILL.”





# Second Letter of Agnes of Prague—St. Clare



GAZE UPON CHRIST  
(INNER AND OUTER SENSES)  
CONSIDER CHRIST  
(INTELLECT)  
CONTEMPLATE CHRIST  
(CORE OF YOUR BEING)  
IMITATE CHRIST  
(ACT)



# Reflect:

- In praying with Francis' Prayer for Guidance, what faith, hope, charity, sense, and knowledge are you asking for?
- Clare used the San Damiano cross to inspire her discernment process. How might you use her advice to gaze, consider, contemplate, and imitate this in your own discernment process?
- In Clare's second letter to Agnes, Clare directs Agnes to always do what her discernment tells her and to never abandon what is at the core of her life. In your own discernment what are you led to never abandon; what is nonnegotiable for you? What is at the heart of your discernment, the heart of the core of your life?





## Franciscan Discernment Process:

- REFLECT ON A CONCRETE, PRACTICAL DECISION
- HAVE A SENSE OF ABUNDANCE
- KNOW THAT GRACE AND BEAUTY ARE EVERYWHERE
- TAKE AMPLE TIME TO CONSIDER EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS
- RECOGNIZE THAT THIS IS NOT A LINEAR, STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS—REVISIT ANY ASPECT AT ANY TIME



# 1. Be expansive and inclusive!

- a. How might I expand the moral situation involved in my discernment?
- b. Who would I include in a larger circle of relationships that affect my discernment?
- c. How do I go about including more than two options in my discernment?
- d. How does this course of action strengthen existing relationships and open space for new relationships and new life?





## 2. Emotions are morally relevant!

- a. How often do my self-related emotional concerns drive my decisions?
- b. How alert am I to myself? To my feelings? To my inner movements?
- c. Do I put my emotions “on hold” when I make a decision?
- d. Do I minimize my inner sense of harmony or disharmony?





### 3. Be Creative!

- a. Do I play things conservatively?
- b. Do I think about taking a moral risk that might have a huge impact on the world?
- c. How might I use my imagination to consider options that may seem farfetched?
- d. Do I consider not just the good, but the life-giving course of action?





## 4. Be Faithful!

- a. How do I stay connected to God and others in the situation?
- b. How do I stay connected to the most practical aspect of the situation?
- c. How am I aware of the Spirit's inspiration?
- d. How attentive and ready am I?





## 5. Know when to act!

- a. How might the action I am taking provide its own affirmation?
- b. How am I being led by the spirit, guided by the voice within?
- c. Am I willing to recognize that no amount of reflection is sufficient to move me to act?
- d. Will I move myself in response to the specifics of the situation?





# Reflect:

- CAREFULLY CONSIDER EACH OF THE FIVE STEPS IN THE PROCESS OF FRANCISCAN DISCERNMENT. TAKE ADEQUATE TIME TO PRAY WITH THE QUESTIONS AND TO ANSWER THEM AS YOUR HEART LEADS YOU. THEN CHOOSE TO ACT, KNOWING GOD WILL WORK THROUGH EVERY CHOICE THAT YOU MAKE.





THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

## Aston, PA 19014 2020

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Created by Sr. Mary Jo Chaves, OSF and Sr. Christine Still, OSF