

## Discernment and Decision-Making \*

Structured processes for communal discernment have been developed and used by several traditions (including the Jesuits, Friends, Presbyterian Church). Communal discernment provides ways for a group to jointly study its mission and founding principles and engage in dialogue on an issue, allow multiple alternatives to be weighed with the mind and heart in a collaborative manner, and collectively sense what common direction emerges. Many suggest that such a process would be more beneficial than parliamentary procedure for a body to use when dealing with significant matters that affect the whole body, especially those around which there is current or potential conflict.

The Reverend Victoria Grace Curtiss offers the comparisons below to indicate when each approach is most useful::

### **Parliamentary procedure is helpful when**

- \* dealing with routine organizational business
- \* an issue has near or full consensus
- \* clear alternatives have been identified and further discussion is not likely to surface more options
- \* delaying a decision is not an option
- \* participants are comfortable with parliamentary procedure
- \* the group is willing to accept exists majority rule when a common solution cannot be found

### **Communal discernment is helpful when**

- \* dealing with significant matters that affect the whole body
- \* a sizable minority or range of views is present
- \* more voices or ideas need to be included
- \* time can be taken to explore more options and build consensus
- \* a diversity of cultural backgrounds is present
- \* persistent and substantial division

Reverend Curtiss notes also that Robert's Rules of Order provide ways a communal discernment process can be used through means of less-structured deliberation by:

- transforming the deliberative body into a "committee of the whole"
- acting as a "quasi-committee of the whole"
- allowing "informal consideration" and "crystallization of opinion"

\* This material is adapted from Curtiss, The Rev. Victoria Grace, Discernment and Decision-Making, pdf file, Copyright 2005.