

An Ignatian Method of Group Decision Making *

Key principles:

- **Free to Express Differences.** Each person is expected to disclose how he or she thinks (judges) the situation to be. Each participant is also to disclose how he or she feels about each side of the issue. Is it good or bad? Is very much a question of feeling. And this is where discernment, the sorting out of feelings, comes in. Honesty requires that effort to determine *why* each participant feels one way or another about a proposed option
- **Separating Pros and Cons.** The appropriate place for conflict and positive persuasion is in the initial phase of the process where the issue for discernment, the question to be decided, is formulated. Once the process is underway the discussion of positive and negative arguments should be separated. This saves time instead of wasting it. When debate (proper to formulation stage) displaces dialogue (proper to the discernment process), ears and minds close, points are tallied, and win-lose thinking prevails, making the process vulnerable to the loudest voice, the greatest threat, or the highest emotion.

A Process for Group Decision Making

- **Look at your principles and mission statement.** Acknowledge the power and presence of the group as larger than the power and presence of any one participant (including the boss!) and expect more from the group than could come from the individual.
- **Have a little quiet time before and during decision-making meetings.** This may help dissolve interpersonal tensions, reduce anxiety levels, and open members of the decision-making group to the possibility of exchange of feelings and subjective views. Mutual trust is a sine qua non for good group decisions.
- **Allow for full participation in the preparation of the agenda,** with provision for strong advocacy of a position early in the meeting process. Make careful provision for the accumulation and assimilation of all necessary information.
- **Provide opportunities for all elements of unease to surface,** followed by a quiet time when each participant can reflect on the possible sources of his or her own unease.
- **Segment the meeting into time “con” and time “pro” with respect to every major issue.** In each of these segments, all participants must speak, if only to agree with a point already made.
- **Whoever chairs the process then tries to “read a consensus”** and tests it against the group. If there is no clear consensus, the chair can probe for areas of consensus. Here some open debate may be useful, or, as a last resort, a vote.
- **Confirmatory procedures will evolve as the group gains experience with the process.**

* Adapted from Byron, Wm. J. SJ, *Jesuit Saturdays . . .* Loyola Press, 2008.