**Spiritual Discernment in the Kittamaqundi Community**

**What is Community Discernment?**

On a number of occasions, when the Kittamaqundi Community has faced a major decision, the leaders of our church have consulted with the community as a whole before deciding how to proceed. This has been motivated by more than a desire to act according to the majority opinion. Rather, the consultation has always been framed as a “spiritual discernment,” that is, a process by which the entire community is engaged in figuring out how God might be calling us to act.

Meeting for the purpose of spiritual discernment requires the community to be willing to listen, to each other and to ourselves, so that we might hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit within our thoughts, our words, our emotions and our physical sensations. As such, it is often helpful to distinguish a discernment gathering from an informational meeting or a decision-making meeting.

An informational meeting may be necessary prior to a discernment meeting. At this meeting, leaders can present detailed information about the issue at hand and answer questions from the community. It is also possible to inform the community and answer questions through email or other on-line forums. At times, it may be necessary to directly precede a discernment meeting with an informational meeting in which case it is best to clearly distinguish the two parts of the meeting by separating them with a break.

A discernment gathering is not a time during which decisions are made. It is, in fact, crucial that some time separate the discernment gathering from the meeting at which the final decision will be made. During the time between these events, the Holy Spirit continues to speak to us as we sort through all that we have felt and heard. This process may seem slow to some, but patience is a necessary part of spiritual discernment.

It is important to clearly state what will happen after the discernment gathering. Who is ultimately responsible for making the final decision about the question at hand? When will they make that decision, and how will they inform the community of their decision? When these questions are addressed at the outset of a discernment gathering, the community is able to listen and speak more openly, knowing that we are not there to persuade others to our point of view or even to make up our own minds.

It is essential that those making the decision be present at the discernment meeting because this process cannot be captured in a written summary or a recording. Those who are making the decision are also discerning the movement of the Spirit—what our Quaker brothers and sisters call the “Sense of the Meeting”—not counting votes for or against a proposal.

**What is the process for Community Discernment?**

The President and the Vice President of Council or any group of 3 or more Members of the Kittamaqundi Community may call a Community Meeting according to the process outlined in the By-Laws of the Community.

The following process should be used as a guideline:

1. All of those in attendance will gather in a large circle, members and non-members alike. It is helpful to record attendance.
2. Those who have called the meeting clearly state the reason for the gathering. The meeting may be facilitated by an officer of the church or by someone designated by the officers.
3. Before any discussion of the question at hand begins, the community will enter into a time of prayer. This time may begin with a spoken prayer, led by the Enabling Minister or other member of the community, but it will necessarily include an extended time of silence. It is recommended that this time be at least 5 minutes.
4. After the period of silence, one of those who have called the meeting, or someone else at their invitation, will go over the ground rules for the time that follows:

-Each person will be invited to speak. Speakers are encouraged to keep their comments focused, out of consideration for all those gathered. For large groups, it may be helpful to give a time limit to each speaker.

-Each person is encouraged to share their sense of how the Holy Spirit is leading the community, acknowledging that this is sometimes not the

same as how we would lead the community, were we to be in charge.

-Each person is encouraged to speak personally, using “I statements.” Please refrain from “cross-talk,” that is, speaking directly about a comment someone else has made.

-When you are not speaking, remember that you are still very much a part of the discernment process. Listen for how the Holy Spirit is speaking to the community through the words of each person in the circle.

-When everyone has spoken once, the group will have a short period of silence, after which an opportunity may be given for a second turn to

speak for those who have new insights. Providing this opportunity is an important way of acknowledging that people may change their sense of

God’s call as the discernment progresses.

-After everyone is done speaking, we will have one more period of silent prayer before leaving.

1. It is very helpful to record discernment gatherings and to make those recordings available to the community.
2. If there are people who are not able to attend the discernment but would like to give input, they may send a written statement to be read by another member of the community, or they may participate via FaceTime, Skype or other appropriate electronic means. *Because the discernment process is as much about listening to* *others as it is about sharing your own thoughts, every effort should be made to attend in person.*
3. More than one gathering may be necessary to get a true sense of how God is calling the community. This means that those who are responsible for making a decision must discern whether the discernment process is complete. It may be helpful to send an email to the community with a “last call” for input so that the community knows that the discernment period has ended.

**When should we use the Community Discernment process?**

In previous discussions with members of the Community, it has been suggested that the

Community Discernment process be used when KC is considering:

* Major physical or structural changes to the building or grounds
* Selling or mortgaging our property
* Hiring or firing of our Enabling Minister
* Changes to the structure of the Community
* Changes to the Faith Statement
* Large expenditures of money not budgeted
* Other considerations not listed here