

Introductory Remarks by The Rt. Rev. Henry Nutt Parsley, Jr.
at Fall Convocation Meetings

This meeting is a vital part of our discernment process as a diocese, as resolved by our convention and planned by our Standing Committee. It is being led by a fine Discernment Committee appointed by Standing Committee, co-chaired by Mrs. Jo Merrill and the Rev. David Michaud. As Bishop, I serve as pastor and resource for them.

Discernment is the ancient Christian practice of seeking God's leading and will for his people in a particular situation or decision point.

Discernment is different from dialogue or discussion or debate. It is a prayerful process of listening to God. It involves being quiet and centered and asking, in St. Paul's words, "Lord, what would you have me [us] do?"

It is rooted in the belief that God is always trying to lead us- to break into our lives- so that we can hear God's word and direction. In old Charleston where I was once a young priest the story is told about a tornado hitting old St. Michael's Church. Seeing the hole in the roof, a Charleston wag quipped, "God's been trying to break into that church for a long time!"

We love to talk and debate, but for God's leading to break into our lives we need to be quiet and listening. We have to listen not just to our agendas, issues and egos, but to the Spirit and to one another. We have to listen not just with our heads but with our hearts.

Discernment is always corporate. We bring together our individual insights and perceptions of God's call, so that we can sort out a sense of direction together for the church's life and mission.

Discussion and debate are ultimately necessary as well in the decision-making process, but they are most effective when deep discernment has taken place first.

So it is to this ancient Christian practice of spiritual discernment that your committee is inviting all of you. We invite you to listen to God and then listen to one another. We believe that you will find it life-giving.

Let us pray.

Gracious God, by you the faithful are guided in judgment and light rises up in darkness for the godly. As we seek to be stewards of the Gospel and build up your church in love, give us listening hearts and the grace to ask what you would have us do; that the Spirit of wisdom may guide us to wise discernment and that in your light we may see light and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.