

How to Plan an Evening of Discernment

When planning an evening of discernment, you would want to build in five key elements: Prayer; information on how to discern gifts; time for reflection; a witness talk; and a commitment activity. For example, you might want to do something like this:

Early bird activity for people who arrive before the starting time:

Arrange participants into groups of four as they arrive. Assist them in introducing themselves to the other people in their group. Then ask them to think of the best gift they ever gave and share that story with the others in their group. This gives people a chance to meet new people and chat a little before the program starts.

Agenda for the evening:

- Welcome
- Opening song or the breathing prayer (see below)
- A 30-40 minute talk on discerning gifts and matching gifts with the needs of the parish.
- Guided meditation (see below)
- Index Card Activity: Play soft music while people down their own gifts.
- Witness talk (10 minutes how someone has used their gifts and how it changed this person)
- Closing song or prayer
- Sign up sheets so people can commit to some parish ministry or organization. You have to make sure that if someone commits their gifts will be used. The worst thing is to have people volunteer and never be contacted or even worse to be rejected or told they are not needed.

Breathing Prayer

Take a deep breath and imagine that you are breathing in God's Love.

Breathe in God's love, and breathe out any tension or anxiety.

Breathe in God's love, and breathe out fear.

Breathe in God's love, and breathe out negativity.

Breathe in God's love, and breathe out anger or resentment.

Breathe in God's love, and breathe out worry.

Breathe in God's love, and breathe out anything in you that is not of God.

Now breathe quietly for a few seconds and imagine that God's love is flowing through you to every part of your body. Amen.

Fountain Meditation

Close your eyes. Take a deep breath and imagine that you are in a meadow. The sun is shining, and in the center of the meadow is a fountain. The water is soft and falls down more like snow than like rain. Step into the fountain. Is the warm and soothing? Or is it cool and refreshing? Now imagine that this is a fountain of God's love pouring down on you. If there's anything in your life that is troubling you, ask God to soothe it with his love...

Now bring the people in your life that you really love into the fountain -- family, friends, even people you love who have died. Ask God to shower each one of these people with his love...

You're alone in the fountain again. Cup your hands and gather water from the fountain. Now drink the water and feel God's love flow through you... You are completely surrounded and filled with God's love.... Maybe you want to thank God for whatever gifts or talents or abilities he has given you... It's almost time to go. If there's anything else you want to tell God or ask God, do it now... As you step out of the fountain remember that you're carrying God's love inside of you. God's love will give you the strength you need to use your gifts to help other people.