



## **THE ART OF TEACHING SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT**

### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR AT-HOME PREPARATION**

Welcome to the at-home Preparation for The Art of Teaching Spiritual Discernment. We look forward to getting to know you over the course of the preparation from February 5 to March 11, and to meeting you at the DuBose Conference Center on March 14.

While there are up to 24 participants in the course, you have been divided into small groups of 5 or 6, each with its own retreat leader/mentor and its own meeting space. All of the groups will be following the exact same schedule.

On Sunday morning of each week, you will receive an email for your small group with the instructions for that week. To give you as much flexibility as possible, we are giving you the entire syllabus now so that you may begin reading ahead if you would like to cushion yourself against a time crunch later on.

<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Feb 5-11</b>	<b>Practicing the Presence of God</b>
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Feb 12-18</b>	<b>Listening Hearts</b>
<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Feb 19-25</b>	<b>Discernment Listening – Letting Go</b>
<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Feb 26-Mar 4</b>	<b>The Fullness of Time</b>
<b>Week 5</b>	<b>Mar 5-11</b>	<b>Discernment Questions</b>

Each week you will be asked to respond to that week's email with questions, concerns, and reflections. Each week's preparation will take about 2 ½ hours, but will depend on how fast or how carefully you read, how much you get caught up in the meditation exercises, how you choose to share in the group emails.

During the retreat itself, each small group will assemble for a series of actual discernment sessions, with each person serving once as the focus person, once as a convener, twice as a discerner, and at least once as an observer. The at-home preparation is the first step in forming what will become an intimate community.



## WEEK 1 – PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

February 5-11, 2017

### PART ONE

Welcome to Week 1 of the five weeks of at-home preparation for The Art of Teaching Spiritual Discernment.

Early in the week turn to *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence (a 16<sup>th</sup> century Carmelite monk). Eventually you may want to read all of the Conversations and Letters, but for this program of preparation, you need read only:

**The Fourth Conversation  
The First Letter  
and  
Letters Four through Seven**

Be sure you have the [Wildwood edition](#) suggested on the Beecken Center site. Other editions number the letters in different sequence, in which case you will need to read the entire book.

For the rest of the week, try to practice the presence of God as Brother Lawrence did, keeping God at the center of your thoughts, making all of your work a prayer to God, and turning yourself over to God’s care and love for you.

### PART TWO

Turn to [A Primer on Spiritual Discernment](#), which you can access by clicking the hyper-link or by going to the Listening Hearts website, [www.listeninghearts.org](http://www.listeninghearts.org) home page, clicking “Menu,” then clicking “Resources,” then “Open Hearts,” then “A Primer on Spiritual Discernment.” Since you will need to refer to this document several times during the time of preparation, you may want to download and print the entire Primer, using the link toward the bottom of the webpage.

**Thoughtfully read:**

**Topic 1: “What is Discernment?”**

**Topic 3: “Centering Silence”**

**Topic 4: “Applying the Mind”**

On this week’s group email, offer any insights that come to you as you read the three topics in the Primer. At the week’s end, reflect on your experience of practicing God’s presence. Read the replies of the others in your group, initiating dialogue if you wish.



## **WEEK 2 – LISTENING HEARTS**

**February 12-18, 2017**

### **PART ONE**

Early in the week, introduce yourselves to the other participants in this small group. Say something about your spiritual journey over the years as it has brought you to this program. If you would like, include a photograph of yourself and/or post some image that will tell us more about you.

### **PART TWO**

Read the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition of *Listening Hearts*: the Foreword, the Introduction, Chapters 1-9, and the Epilog. Underline or highlight portions that particularly speak to you. Put a question mark by any portion that raises questions for you.

### **PART THREE**

Then write a paragraph or two on the group email, reflecting on how the book resonates with you.



## WEEK 3 – DISCERNMENT LISTENING and LETTING GO

February 19-25, 2017

### PART ONE

Go to the Listening Hearts website [www.listeninghearts.org](http://www.listeninghearts.org). Click “Menu,” then click “Resources,” and then click the “[Discernment Listening Guidelines](#).” Thoughtfully read the guidelines. Download and print the pdf file for ready reference. Then, on the group email for the week, identify anything you particularly appreciate, anything you do not fully comprehend, anything you do not see the value of, anything you have reservations about, anything you disagree with, and any new insights that have come to you from reading them. If so moved, respond to each other's reflections, always keeping the Discernment Listening Guidelines firmly in mind.

### PART TWO

Read the following topics in [A Primer on Spiritual Discernment](#). Be sure to read them in the order listed:

**Topic 6: “Engaging the Imagination”**

**Topic 5: “Detachment: Letting Go”**

### PART THREE

You will need an 8½ by 11 inch sheet of heavy stock white paper and your WikkiStix. Give yourself at least an hour of uninterrupted time for the exercise.

Refer back to Discernment Guideline #10. Identify a desire, opinion, or conviction that is of utmost importance to you. Maybe a desire to hold on to a personal relationship in the same way that it has been for a long while, which is poisoning the relationship. Perhaps strong opinions are sabotaging your compassion. Possibly a yearning to be liked is inhibiting your ability to speak the truth. Think about all this. Think about your life in relationship to whatever you are clinging to. Try to feel any dissonance that it creates within you.

Now take your WikkiStix. Express your thoughts and feelings by selecting colors and shaping the stix. Use the white paper as a canvas if you are working in two dimensions or as a base if you are working in three dimensions. Express your feelings by shaping and reshaping the WikkiStix as you meditate. Pause to gaze at what you are shaping. Let God speak to you through what you shape. Alternate between working with the stix and looking at what you are creating. Fall into utter silence if the Spirit so moves you.

When you have finished, go to the group email for Week 3 and share reflections about your time of meditation in whatever way the Spirit moves you.





## WEEK 4 – THE FULLNESS OF TIME

February 26-March 4, 2017

### PART ONE

In [A Primer on Spiritual Discernment](#), re-read Topic 1, “What Is Spiritual Discernment?”

### PART TWO

Read Appendices One and Two of *Listening Hearts*, underlining or hi-lighting parts that are important to you. Make note of any guideline that you do not fully comprehend, anything you do not see the value of, anything with which you disagree, and anything about which you have reservations. Register these notes on our group email for Week 4.

### PART THREE

Gather your supplies for the meditation exercise: at least two sheets of drawing paper, a pen, and an assortment of coloring pens that includes black, brown, and a range of both pastels and bright colors. Then do the meditation exercise below. Give yourself at least an hour of uninterrupted time for the exercise.

#### THE FULLNESS OF TIME: A MEDITATION EXERCISE

Linear time is a human construct, vital to bringing order to our life as human beings together here on this earth. However, God occupies the entire universe. Earthly time simply does not compute once we hit outer space. And when it comes to eternal love and truth, human time--which is one-dimensional—limits our ability to receive it because God who is Love and Truth is multi-dimensional. In spiritual discernment we are concerned with our life in God and God’s life in us. To honor this we must open ourselves to the contemplative sphere that takes us into the eternal even though we continue to live with linear time.

**...with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:8)**

Below is an excerpt from W. H. Auden’s FOR THE TIME BEING, A Christmas Oratorio in which Auden contemplates the mysterious unfolding of God’s purpose over the sweep of history. By extension it can help us comprehend how God works through the ups and downs, the peaks and valleys that mark the course of our own personal lives.

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Slowly and contemplatively read and reread the passage many times over, letting it seep into your flesh and bones. Assimilate it on a small-scale personal level as well as on the macro level of all of history. Feel it internally in relation to the circumstances of your own life at this moment in time.

***Let us acknowledge our defeats, but without despair.***

***For all societies and epochs are transient details,***

***Transmitting an everlasting opportunity***

***That the Kingdom of Heaven may come, not in our present***

***And not in our future, but in the Fullness of Time.***

***Let us pray.***

Eventually, take some drawing paper and an assortment of coloring pens. Begin to express your feelings with the pens by the colors you choose, the shapes you make, how hard or softly you draw your lines. Do not concern yourself with how it looks. The purpose is not to create a beautiful picture, but to communicate with God from your center. Alternate between drawing and gazing at what you have drawn. As the Spirit moves you, take another sheet of paper and put some of your thoughts and feelings into words without concern about sentence structure, spelling, or punctuation. Read it over and then sit in silence for a while.

Finally, offer the fruits of your meditation on our group email in whatever way you feel moved.





## WEEK 5 – QUESTIONS FOR DISCERNMENT

March 5-11, 2017

### PART ONE

Begin the week by reading the topics indicated below in [A Primer on Spiritual Discernment](#).

**Topic 10. “Humility”**

**Topic 11. “Taking Action”**

**Topic 12. “And Fruits Appear in the Fullness of Time”**

**Lastly read:**

**Topic 2. “Formulating a Question for Discernment”**

### PART TWO

In Appendix 1 of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition of *Listening Hearts*, read the section entitled “Prior to the First Discernment Session” that begins on page 72. Carefully study item 6 that describes the brief sketch the focus person prepares.

Then referring to the Primer Topic 2, draft a discernment question for yourself to use when you serve as the focus person at the retreat. The question needs to be about a real issue that is a present struggle in your own life.

Then, based on that question, prepare a background sketch to use when you are the focus person at one of the discernment sessions at the four-day retreat. Print out eight copies to bring with you to the retreat. It is essential that you not forget to bring them. If you need help, you may contact your group’s mentor for guidance.

### PART THREE

Between now and the start of the retreat, hold the entire group in prayer, including yourself and your mentor. Try to get relaxed and rested because it will be an intensive four days.

See you soon and safe travel for all!

