

# EXPLORATIONS



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**Inside this Issue**

*Full-body Prayer*  
Suzanne Farnham, Founder

*The Benefits of Parish  
Discernment Committees*  
Doris Christopher

*Spiritual Discernment in the  
Ordination Process*  
Frances Sullinger

*posture*  
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**Full-body Prayer**

**Suzanne Farnham, Founder  
Baltimore, MD**

God, the Maker of everything that is, was, or ever will be, is fully present throughout the entire universe—emanating love, truth, and wisdom.

Most intimately, God is present in every cell of our bodies. I have discovered that when I become still and plant my mind in my body, it alters my demeanor. Meaningful insights come on their own. Whenever I randomly set my mind in my flesh and bones in the course of the day and night, it deepens my relationship with God and improves my relationships with people.



*Photo by kegfire/Envato Elements Stock Images*

allowing divine love, truth, and wisdom to more easily seep into my inner self. In turn, physically feeling God’s energy surge through my entire body seems to activate the divine power.

For me, the richest times are when I have gone to bed and turned off the light, and in the morning as I am waking up. But snatching moments in the course of the day to be still and alert to God, present throughout my entire self, is essential to this ever-deepening relationship with God, through whom I find myself in communion with all creation.

While the focus of my prayer is on quieting my mind and opening my body to the divine presence—and physically feeling gratitude and empathy—an active mind is an essential corollary. Thinking, reading, watching educational TV programs, research, discussion, and debate provide a vital foundation for this wordless prayer.

*(Continued)*

This may make it seem that I am in some kind of a perfect relationship with God and all of creation. Rest assured that the reality is far from that.

*“Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
Till I am wholly thine,  
Till all this earthly part of me  
Glows with thy fire divine.”*  
– Edwin Hatch (1835-1869)

AMEN.

*Suzanne Farnham, an Executive Program Associate, is the founder of Listening Hearts Ministries, coauthor of the Listening Hearts series of books, the original architect of the Listening Hearts programs, and serves on the Board of Trustees. She has been leading programs from coast to coast for more than thirty years.*

### **The Benefits of Parish Discernment Committees**

**Doris Christopher  
San Diego, CA**

It is said that everyone is called to ministry but only some are called to *the* ministry. How can someone truly know if God wants them to serve as an ordained deacon or priest? This is not a decision that any of us can make alone because as Christians we are not alone. We are but one part of the body of Christ and, as such, we need to consult with and receive guidance from others in this body. This is why parish discernment committees are so vitally important in any clergy formation and ordination process.

In 2020, I had the honor of being trained as a Parish Discernment Committee (PDC) leader by Frances Sullinger of Listening Hearts Ministries. The training focused on spiritual listening, discernment of call, and spiritual consensus. With these skills, I am able to train, convene, and mentor a PDC whenever someone in the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego believes they sense a call to ordained ministry.

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*PDC members walk alongside the inquirer as the person shares their spiritual autobiography, discusses the nature of their spiritual gifts, examines the practical aspects of the ordination process, and delves deeper into their specific call.*

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A PDC begins with the training of three members of the home parish of the individual seeking discernment of call. During this prayer-filled time, committee members become familiar with the guidelines for spiritual listening; types of questions that can elicit informational, reflective, and evocative responses; the signs of the Spirit to listen and watch for; and the importance of spiritual consensus, which brings the group together in heart and mind as the process draws to an end.

PDC members walk alongside the inquirer as the person shares their spiritual autobiography, discusses the nature of their spiritual gifts, examines the practical aspects of the ordination process, and delves deeper into their specific call. It is a spiritually rich process in which the presence of the Holy Spirit is often vividly experienced. Many members leave the final meeting feeling that the time spent together deepened not only their bonds to one another but also their faith.

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For a PDC to be successful, the inquirer must be open to the Spirit and allow the gentle questioning of the committee to guide them to a greater understanding of their call. They may discover they are called to a ministry that does not require ordination, or they may find confirmation that they can best serve in an ordained capacity. In either case, they will know that they have grown in their call through this discernment and that they have the support of the body of Christ as they move forward.

*Doris Christopher is a Parish Discernment Convener in the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego. She is a member of St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church, where she serves on the Vestry and the Pastoral Care Committee.*

## **Spiritual Discernment in the Ordination Process**

**Frances Sullinger  
Centreville, VA**

Shortly after the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 2003, the church's Canons on Ministry were revised to call for bishops and Commissions on Ministry to "provide encouragement, training and resources to help every congregation offer community discernment of call to ministry." In response, Listening Hearts developed a training program for those called on to train and mentor Parish Discernment Committees. These committees meet with persons sensing a call to ordained ministry. Through a series of discernment sessions with a Seeker, they try to clarify the nature of the ministry to which that person feels called and to assist the Seeker and the Diocese to sort out if the path to that ministry requires ordination or a path leading to lay or other leadership ministry. That is, not just to say Yes or No to ordination and close doors, which happens many times when this method of discerning assistance is not used.

Listening Hearts partnered with the Diocese of Virginia, my home diocese, to train spiritually mature people with leadership ability to serve as Diocesan Spiritual Discernment Facilitators, who would go on to train and mentor Parish Discernment Committees.

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Since that time, Listening Hearts has adapted the training program to meet the needs of the Dioceses of New York, Central New York, Eastern Maryland, and San Diego. We have held multiple trainings for New York and San Diego, and I recently completed a second ZOOM training for San Diego, as the COVID crisis has kept me from traveling out to California.

I have much enjoyed my association with the wonderful folks who do this work. I keep up with many of them and stand ready to assist them in any way as they go about their devoted ministry to Parish Discernment Committees. I so appreciate Doris's sharing her experiences with you!

*Frances Sullinger is one of two Executive Program Associates for Listening Hearts and is also a Trustee. A retired Foreign Service Officer, she lives in Virginia near her daughter and grandchildren.*

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Listening Hearts Ministries  
provides a range of programs,  
publications, and services that teach  
people the practice of spiritual  
discernment through prayerful listening  
in supportive communities.

*By putting ourselves in God's hands, we allow the Spirit of love and truth to bring a new dimension to our consciousness. — Keeping in Tune with God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Clergy, p. 27*

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**posture**

when i sit  
for the purpose of receptivity  
for the purpose of listening  
to the words  
to the heart  
of the universe

or when i sit  
for the purpose of friendship  
for the purpose of listening  
to the words  
to the heart  
of someone i love

it matters *how* i sit  
it matters  
whether i mold my body  
into an open posture  
a posture of curiosity  
of welcome

a shape like a metal bowl  
which only sings  
when it has received the vibration  
of another  
a bowl whose music remains  
unformed  
until the song of another  
has become alloyed with its own

or like a human being  
whose very brain cells are  
transformed  
by the energy of relationship  
a being whose mirror neurons  
pulse  
with the voltage of *not-me*  
becoming deeply *me*  
becoming part of my body

i try to sit like that  
but it isn't always easy

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