

Christians historically have entered into a process that allows them to listen to one another and to God, even as they engage difficult questions. This process, known as “discernment,” calls upon participants to worship together, to study the Bible, to commune with one another and to share stories of their own experiences around difficult questions.

One of the more recent challenges to the church — including the Disciples of Christ — has centered around this question:

WHAT IS THE *Gospel* MESSAGE TO OUR CHURCH AS WE RELATE TO LESBIAN AND GAY CHRISTIANS?

In response to growing contention among Disciples regarding the place of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in the life of the church, the General Assembly appointed a committee in 1997 to clarify the issues for the church and to develop a process of discernment to explore them. Their report was presented to the

General Assembly held in Kansas City in 2001. *Listening to the Spirit*, a book and video, is the material that emerged to help guide groups in the discernment process.

Each member of a group that embarks on this journey makes a commitment to God and to

one another to engage in a directed program of Bible study, worship and sharing.

In this in-depth Bible study, groups examine how we understand the Bible, how relevant passages have been interpreted, and how God still speaks through these pages.

A reflection ON DISCERNMENT

My discernment experience through *Listening to the Spirit* was like no other experience I’ve had. I was challenged on so many levels to really bring together my preexisting feelings, opinions and convictions with new learning, understanding and knowledge.

We questioned, discussed, read, prayed and reflected in a way that allowed all members to fully participate. We turned over every stone we could find. We read all of the relevant scriptures and really studied the context to understand the very basic purpose of each one.

‘GROWING AND MATURING AS A CHRISTIAN HAS
... EVERYTHING TO DO WITH *intentional* STUDY,
REFLECTION, GUIDANCE AND PRAYER.’

I thought my Bible skills were pretty good to begin with, but still I was astonished at what I learned. There is no question that I am far better prepared now to deal with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues than before I committed myself to the discernment process. I urge all thinking and caring Christians to participate in a *Listening to the Spirit* discernment group.

Growing and maturing as a Christian has nothing to do with years, but everything to do with intentional study, reflection, guidance and prayer. I count my discernment experience among the most important in my Christian development.

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*T*he church's discussions of difficult issues all too often generate more heat than light. When we disagree with one another, not only do Christians face contention within our communities, but our conversations contribute unwittingly to cultural conflict as well. No one wins a church fight.

THE *good news*
IS WE HAVE
AN ALTERNATIVE.

'DO NOT BE CONFORMED
TO THIS WORLD BUT BE
transformed BY THE RENEWING
OF YOUR MINDS, SO THAT YOU
MAY DISCERN WHAT IS THE WILL
OF GOD—WHAT IS GOOD AND
ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT.'

—ROMANS 12:2

*I*n support of the Disciples Process of Discernment, GLAD Alliance established the Discernment Team. For more information about the materials or the process contact:

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