

# TURN THE PAGE: DISCOVERING, DISCERNING AND CONNECTING THE PIECES OF OUR CHURCH STORY



*A Discernment Process for Congregations*



# ***Welcome to*** **Turn the Page: Discovering, Discerning and Connecting the Pieces of our Church Story.**

God calls all congregations, communities of faith, and disciples to continually discern their mission and ministry.

God calls all to engage in the community and discover those places where God's light shines in the darkness.

God calls all to join God in those places of ministry.

*Turn the Page* is a discernment process intentionally designed to assist congregations and their leaders to discover those places where God is calling them in mission and ministry in this time and place.

The process leads the congregation through spiritual discernment, prayer, Dwelling in the Word, storytelling, deep listening, and lots of conversations around the questions of where God calls the congregation into the next chapter of their journey.



# Introduction

## Why a Discernment Process?

The discernment process is like the steps to solving a puzzle. Solving a puzzle requires inquiry and discovery, seeing patterns and forms and making sense of all the bits of information. As a congregation works their way through the discernment process, they pay attention, listen, inquire, and discover where God is at work. This means telling stories, listening deeply, seeing patterns, and making sense of all the different pieces of information, stories, prayers and conversations.

This discernment process will assist the congregational leadership to discover or rediscover the pieces of history, information, stories, and call of the congregation. It will also help them to see the patterns, shapes, and order of that information so that together the congregation can discover where God is calling them in this time and place.

During this discernment time, the congregation will discover and assemble the pieces and stories of their life in Christ together, to create a picture of who they are, whose they are, where God is calling the community of faith, and turn the page to the new chapter of their journey.

***The Discernment process leads to where God is calling the congregation into mission ministry in this time and place.***

# Frequently Asked Questions – FAQ

## ***What is the process and how long does it take?***

The process consists of leadership retreats/gatherings with congregational events in between. The process is designed to be completed within 4 to 6 months. Depending on the time of the year and/or the church calendar, it may take longer.

## ***What about the Pandemic season?***

Even though it becomes difficult to meet face-to-face for the leadership retreats and the congregational gatherings, this process can still be accomplished through some creative planning and online conferencing applications such as ZOOM, Google hangouts, and Microsoft Teams. Suggestions on how to accomplish the task during the pandemic are included throughout this edition of the process.

## ***Who leads the process?***

A Discernment Team works with the Pastor or Transitional/Interim Pastor, who will be the facilitator, to lead the congregation. This team of 4 to 6 people, appointed by the session, should be people who are interested in pulling information together and people who are good listeners, organizers, and willing to take on a short-term task. They do not have to be members of the session but having at least one person from session on the Discernment Team can assist in communication.

If a Pastor or Transitional/Interim Pastor is not available for the facilitator role, the presbytery has trained facilitators available to lead the process. Contact the Presbytery office for more information.

## ***What are the responsibilities of the Discernment Team?***

The Discernment Team is responsible to plan, assist, and participate in each retreat. They are also responsible to follow up on the “in between work”, to communicate the process and events, and to put together a final report with the session.

## **Tell us about the Retreats?**

The retreat process works with 3 to 4 planning and reflection retreats or gatherings of the Discernment team and other leaders. Each retreat is designed to be time to reflect, learn, Dwell in the Word, and to plan for the work in between retreats.

The retreats are the “staging area” for the work of the congregation. The process is designed so that by the end of the process a majority of the congregation will have had an opportunity to participate.

## **Who participates in the Retreats?**

The Discernment team, the facilitator, and others when indicated participate in the retreats. They do the work of planning and leading the events in between the retreats.

## **For congregations seeking new pastoral leadership:**

It is well documented that the time between pastors can be critical and fruitful for the life of the congregation. The in-between time can be used as a space to evaluate, reflect, focus and discern the faithful journey of the congregation.

When a congregation is discerning their next pastor, they will add retreat # 4. This retreat will assist a congregation in preparation of the Ministry Information Form (MIF).



## DWELLING IN THE WORD

### ***What is Dwelling in the Word?***

Dwelling in the Word is a process of deep listening to the Word of God and what God is saying to us as individuals and as a community of faith.

### ***Why do Dwelling in the Word?***

Dwelling in the Word is about listening to each other, listening to our own hearts, and listening together to where God is calling us as a community of faith. God does call communities of faith to ministry and the first step in discerning that call is ***to listen***.

Throughout this discernment process everyone will be Dwelling in one passage of scripture. Though it may seem strange to stick with one passage, the challenge is to hang in there throughout the process and to listen deeper each

time the scripture is read. The richness is not in hearing the scripture over and over but the listening to it and to each other over and over.

## **Use of the Discernment Process**

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**The cost of the process document is free to congregations within the Northwest New Jersey Presbytery. All other congregations are asked for a donation of \$25. At this time this is on the honor system.**

Please send check payable to the Presbytery of Newton, 390 Route 10 West, Randolph, NJ 07869. Please include the name of your congregation, address, city and state and an email address. You may also pay online at [www.newtonpresbytery.org](http://www.newtonpresbytery.org)