

## **Discernment: Reflecting together on what God is up to in our lives and neighborhood using scripture, tradition, and reason**

A continuous Spirit-filled discernment process has been the foundational practice for our ministries and common life. Anchoring our decisions in faithful discernment has allowed us to be innovative and grounded, practical and creative. As the Holy Spirit leads us, pointing out what is important, we take time and space to pause, listen, consider, and arrive at spiritual consensus before making decisions: what does the scripture say on this issue? How are our hearts responding? When we listen to others, what rises to the top? Where is the energy? We engage in group discernment for major business decisions, ministry beginnings or endings, strategic steps and faith formation. God speaks to and through a variety of people and we take care to pause and to listen broadly and deeply. After a decision, discernment never truly ends as we continually watch and listen for the Spirit's leading.



The evolution of our involvement with Project Home exemplifies this process. For more than 20 years, [Project Home](#) organized churches to provide overnight shelter for families experiencing homelessness. During August, our parish hall and youth rooms were filled with families sleeping in make-shift bedrooms separated by cardboard dividers. We provided snacks, breakfast, and companionship, taking children to the park, reading to them, or working on craft projects while exhausted parents tried to rest and regroup. With no privacy or shower facilities, the shelter we could offer was not ideal, but it served an urgent need to house families facing emergencies.

*Mollie flies the Holy Spirit dove kite on Pentecost Sunday.*

Because of the poor accommodations and waning volunteer support, our clergy and staff felt we might be called to stop providing this ministry in our space, hoping instead to find a more hospitable location for our guests, and increase pressure on the county to provide better housing for families. When members of the church gathered with staff and clergy to discuss this option, it became clear that many in our community felt strongly that we were called to continue hosting families onsite. In the discussions, many ideas came up to better serve these guests. New ideas were implemented and more

members of the congregation began volunteering in this effort. Sharing stories of the relationships built with the guests was integral to the discernment process. Through patient listening and prayerful discernment, what could have become a destructive conflict led to positive change.



*Children and youth are an important part of every congregational discernment process; here, kids engage in discernment around our 2019 hospitality renovation.*

In a second discernment process that followed, key volunteers who were passionately invested in our Project Home ministry worked to find a better solution for the families. Ministry leaders urged Ramsey County to find better temporary accommodations for these families. Instead of moving from church basement to church basement each month, families are now housed at a comfortable central location with access to private rooms, bathrooms and showers, washing facilities and meals. Volunteers remain in touch with the guests and share any needs they may have with the congregation. God led the change. The discernment process helped us adjust our participation in this ministry to better fit the needs of families along the way.