

In community discernment as defined by the Social Discernment Cycle, action flows from a foundation of prayer and reflection. This principle, often called “contemplative action,” ensures that steps taken are both intentional and spiritually grounded. In her book *The Soul of Discernment*, Elizabeth Liebert emphasizes that action and contemplation are inseparable in faithful decision-making. After engaging in social analysis and theological reflection, the question is not “What should we do?” but **“What is God calling us to do?”** This shift reframes action as a response to divine prompting rather than mere problem-solving.



No Change Is Too Small

When a community has identified challenges that require action, it is common to feel pressure to make sweeping changes. However, Liebert reminds us that no change is too small when dealing with systemic interventions. Social systems, by definition, are interdependent. When an individual affects a structure, the structure then affects broader systems and their constituents.^[1] Even incremental adjustments embody the profound potential for change. A new program might not launch overnight, but small actions—like hosting a listening session or piloting a single event—can lay the groundwork for more significant transformations. These initial steps demonstrate the community’s willingness to act on its discernment while remaining open to ongoing learning.

Deciding on the First Contemplative Action

Choosing the first action can feel daunting. Liebert suggests returning to the discernment process itself:^[2]

- Recall your previous prayer exercises and what felt most alive when analyzing the social context.
- Cling to any felt sense of freedom, where God might be opening horizons. Describe this freedom. Where does it come from? What does it look like? Where do you notice it in your body? What images are associated with it?
- Describe any nudges or concrete actions connected to this desire. List these possible concrete actions, and highlight those that are most possible within your organization’s life, those that would address the needs of the situation, or those that would be most effective.
- Finally, choose one contemplative action to work with or live into now, the one with the most energy or seems to be calling to you.

Felt Sense of Freedom

A hallmark of a faithful decision, according to Liebert, is a “felt sense of freedom”.^[3] This feeling doesn’t mean the absence of challenges but rather a deep, spiritual assurance that the chosen action aligns with God’s will. Communities might experience this as a sense of peace, joy, or clarity, even amid uncertainty. Paying attention to this felt freedom helps safeguard the action, not to be driven by anxiety or haste but by a genuine response to God’s invitation.

The community discernment cycle doesn’t end with action; it continues as the community observes, learns, and

adapts. By grounding decisions in contemplative action, valuing small changes, and trusting the felt sense of freedom, churches can faithfully live out their call to serve the ongoing transformation of the world.

Have questions about applying for ECF funding for your new ministry? Please [contact us!](#) We are happy to talk with you about your project and how we might partner together to create lasting change!

[1] Elizabeth Liebert, *[The Soul of Discernment: A Spiritual Practice for Communities and Institutions](#)* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 125.

[2] Liebert, 125-126.

[3] Liebert, 126-127.



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