

# Discernment in Times of Injustice

By **Marina McCoy**



## 8 Ways Discernment Helps in Making Good Choices in Response to Injustice

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Ignatian approaches to discernment are sometimes posed in terms of life choices, such as which vocation we might choose or if a particular job is more than a career and becomes a calling. Or we can consider discernment to be an individual choice or perhaps the choices of a married couple or religious community working together to come to a decision that affects their family or community.

In times of injustice in the world, we also are called to discernment as part of a larger community. Discernment is not simply about where I as an individual am called to fulfill my own sense of purpose. Sometimes the world and its circumstances demand that I get out of myself and into the wider world, beyond my family or small community. But if I notice that there are conditions of injustice in the world, my first response to that injustice may not be a sense of clear call, but rather an initial experience of confusion. Why is this evil happening? What am I to do when there is no clear and easy answer to solve it? How do I choose which among the many kinds of injustice that I see in the world to address? How can I respond when I am only one person with limited energy and knowledge?

St. Ignatius Loyola offers us a variety of helpful tips for discernment, and his approach has something to offer to us as we each decide how to respond to the events of the day. Each of us has different gifts and talents, and we are situated in different places from which to respond. For example, I have admired doctors and nurses, as well as other hospital staff, courageously working to heal others from the coronavirus, and also nuns in cloistered communities who have

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## 1. We are called to speak up about injustice and to challenge with love.

Jesus often spoke in ways that challenged others, and when he did so, he did so with love for the other. For example, when Jesus told the young man who wished to become perfect to give up his material goods, he looked at him with love. **How do I make sure that when I challenge others, I do so with love for all?**

## 2. Challenge begins with me and my own patterns of behavior.

I know that in matters of wider systematic problems, I must begin with myself and challenge myself to be critical of my own beliefs and patterns of action. The Ignatian Examen is a form of prayer in which we can allow God into helping us better to understand our own patterns and where we might act differently out of love for others.

## 3. Christ is our model and friend as we discern.

Jesus lived a life that was fully and authentically human. Through reading Scripture and engaging in prayerful conversation with Jesus, we can decide not to act alone, but rather in cooperation with what the Lord asks of us. We have a friend who accompanies us.

## 4. We need others to discern well.

I may have my ideas of what a good response might look like or have a sense in prayer about what to do, but my response will be better if I consult with others who have knowledge and expertise. Speaking with mentors or trusted friends can help me to see problems and solutions more clearly. But there may be more voices I need to listen to so that I may learn. Ignatian discernment requires that I not only consult trusted and familiar voices, but also be willing to be challenged by unfamiliar voices that may importantly reframe an issue for me that I thought I already understood.

## 5. Ground discernment in love, not fear.

Anger and sadness are legitimate and even healthy responses when we hear of injustice. However, **our decisions will be stronger when we act out of consolation and love,** rather than from anger or fear. If I can hold in love the people who are suffering and work out of care for others, rather than out of a need simply to release my own anger, I will make better choices.

## 6. Allow the process of discernment some time.

Ignatius acknowledged that sometimes we have clarity about our call. But more often we have to go through a lengthier process of discernment. One way to approach discernment when the

main options and **weigh the pros and cons**. What kinds of concrete steps might I take? Which ones use my gifts and talents well and bring me to be a person of greater love?

## 7. Identify what companions are present in my community.

In the spirit of Ignatius, who was part of a larger Society of companions, we consider how we as a whole can work together, using each of our gifts and talents in order to work cooperatively for the common good. I am invited not only to consider my own talents, but also to identify others who are good in different areas and invite them into the process.

## 8. Discernment does not have to be perfect to be good.

In our responses to injustice, as in other areas of life, we do not have to be perfect to be helpful. God draws straight with crooked lines, and God understands that we are all still growing and learning. If I can let go of the need to “figure it all out” and instead trust that God will creatively make use of whatever I offer, then I am freer in service to my fellow human beings.

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