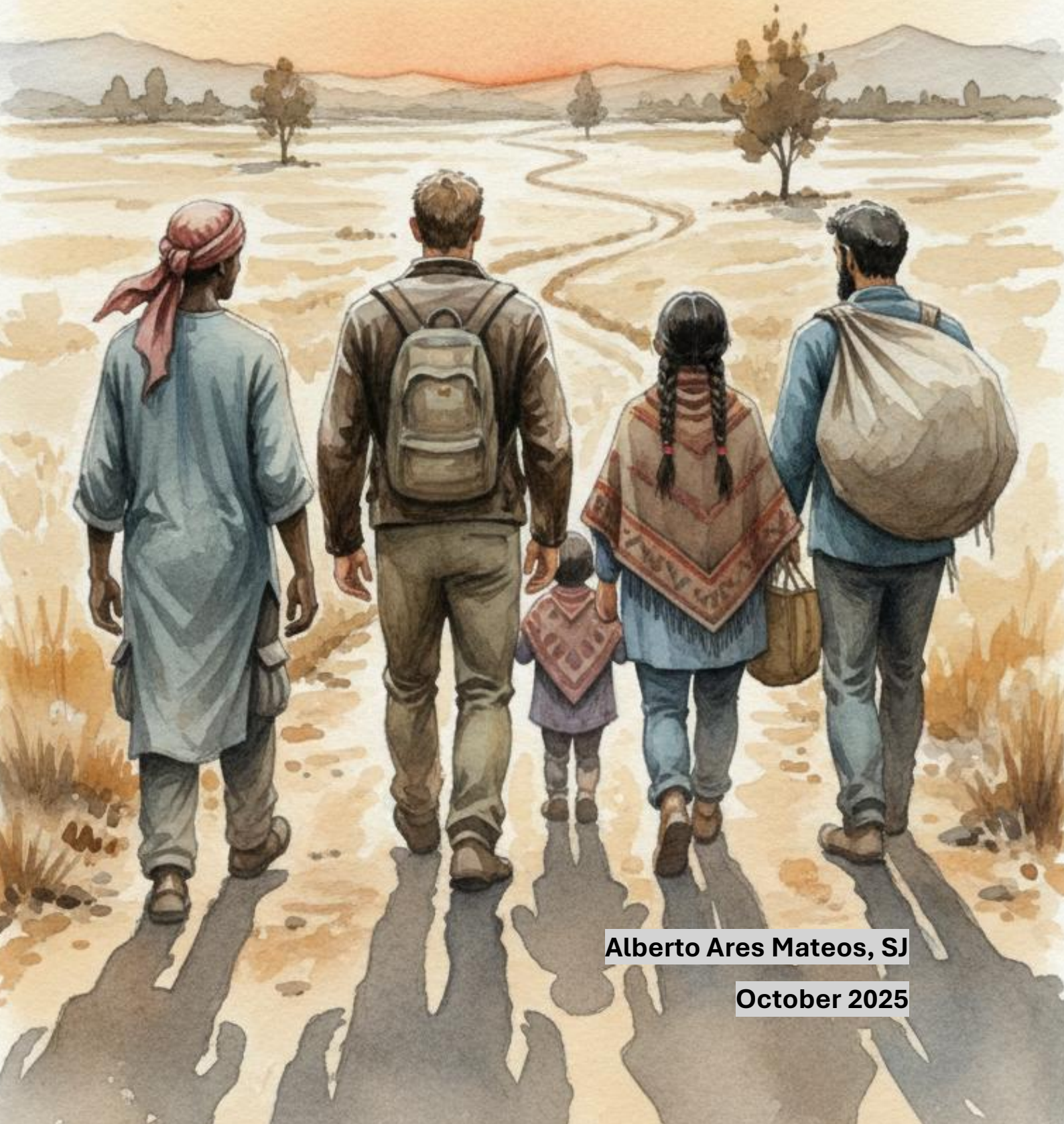


The Spirit-Led Journey of Discernment in Common at JRS



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ABSTRACT

This report explores “Discernment in Common” (DC) as the spiritual and strategic core of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in its mission to accompany, serve, and advocate for forcibly displaced people worldwide. DC is presented not simply as a decision-making methodology, but as a transformative way of life rooted in the Ignatian tradition. It asks all participants—Jesuits, collaborators, and refugees themselves—to seek divine guidance together, cultivating humility, vulnerability, and trust to discern the greater good (*magis*) in a rapidly changing world.

Tracing its origins to the earliest Jesuits and revived by modern leadership, DC has become foundational to JRS’s humanitarian and social inclusion praxis. The practice requires a community approach: deep listening, genuine inclusion of refugee voices, and formation in Ignatian spirituality. The report emphasizes that DC is most effective when anchored in interior freedom, relational trust, and collective prayer.

JRS’s experience with discernment in common is marked by moments of grace—unity, transformation, and spiritual clarity—as well as persistent challenges, including time constraints, gaps in formation, external donor pressures, and operating in conflict zones. Best practices involve structured reflection, daily spiritual conversation, accountability, and ongoing leadership training, all integrated into organizational life.

For the preparation of this report, a survey was conducted on the practice of discernment in common in JRS today. Thirty-Three Jesuits and lay people with leadership responsibilities in JRS in various parts of the world participated in the survey. All eight JRS regions worldwide were represented in the survey sample.

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By sharing survey insights from JRS family around the world, the report advocates for DC as both a spiritual journey and a practical tool for organizational conversion, ensuring JRS remains faithful, inclusive, and effective in serving the world’s most vulnerable.

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Introduction: The Urgent Call to Listen

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) stands at the frontier of human suffering and hope, called to accompany, serve, and advocate for forcibly displaced people. This mission, born from the existential realities of crisis, is inherently a spiritual journey rooted in the Ignatian tradition. The heart of this journey, and the compass guiding its efficacy, is **Discernment in Common (DC)**.

DC is not merely a strategic tool; it is a way of life. Within JRS, it reminds us that our work is about **walking together**—as colleagues, companions, and people of faith—seeking God’s presence in every situation. This practice, which requires humility, vulnerability, and trust, is a constant effort to find the greater good (*magis*) and the will of God in a world marked by swift and profound changes.

The contemporary call to deepen our capacity for communal discernment is insistent, coming directly from the Society of Jesus, which has made **apostolic discernment in common** a priority for its mission today. Fr. Arturo Sosa, Superior General, emphasizes that recurrent recourse to spiritual discernment is the instrument for seeking and finding the will of God in every dimension of our life-mission, leading to revitalization and an increased capacity to serve the Church.

This report aims to reflect the reality of DC at JRS today. It synthesizes the foundational vision of the Society and the unique, lived experiences shared by Jesuits and collaborators worldwide through the recent survey, demonstrating that JRS is not just utilizing discernment, but actively pioneering its application in complex humanitarian, social inclusion and interfaith contexts.

Recently, Pope Leo XIV called on the entire Society of Jesus, and within it the JRS, to go to the frontiers of our world, helping ecclesial communities to discern how to walk together in hope, accompanying those who are forced to migrate, promoting a culture of reconciliation and being powerful channels for promoting systemic change.

I conclude in this introduction with some excerpts, emphasising some personal remarks, from this address from Pope Leo XIV on 24 October 202 to the Major Superiors of The Society of Jesus. This framework will help us understand the importance and urgency of discernment in common in our JRS mission:

*The Church needs you at the frontiers — whether they be geographical, cultural, intellectual or spiritual... A major frontier today is the path of synodality within the Church. I thank you for your contributions to the synodal process, especially in helping ecclesial communities **discern** how to walk together in hope. Another essential frontier lies in reconciliation and justice, especially in a world torn apart by conflict, inequality and abuse. Today, many suffer exclusion, and many wounds remain unhealed across generations and peoples,... we must oppose the “globalization of powerlessness” with a culture of reconciliation — meeting one another in truth, forgiveness and healing; we must become experts in reconciliation, confident that good is stronger than evil.*

*Your second preference calls you to walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world and those whose dignity has been violated. Many today are victims of an economic system driven by profit above the dignity of the person. In my recent Exhortation, [Dilexi Te](#), I emphasized the need to confront “the dictatorship of an economy that kills,” where the wealth of a few grows exponentially while the majority are left behind (cf. 92). This global imbalance **pushes countless people to migrate in search of survival**. They leave home, culture and family, often facing rejection and **hostility**. True discipleship requires both denunciation of injustice and the proposal of new models rooted in solidarity and the common good. In this regard, your universities, social centers, publications and institutions, like the **Jesuit Refugee Service**, can be powerful channels to promote systemic change. Despite the obstacles or failures that we may experience at times in carrying out this service, we must avoid giving in to resentment, or falling into a ‘compassion fatigue’ or fatalism. Instead, we must trust in the transformative power of God’s love, like the mustard seed that becomes a great tree (cf. Mt 13:31-32).*

*To accomplish this, I encourage you to remain close to Jesus... From this rootedness, you will have **the courage to walk anywhere**: to speak truth, to reconcile, to heal, to labor for justice, to set captives free. No frontier will be beyond your reach if you walk with Christ... May the Lord lead you to the frontiers of today and beyond, renewing the Church and building a Kingdom of justice, love and truth.*

Chapter 1: The Foundational Vision of a Discerning Body

The practice of discernment in common is **inherent to the way of proceeding of the Society of Jesus**. This spiritual heritage, central to JRS, as a global mission of the Society of Jesus, establishes that the search for God's will is a collective endeavor rooted in profound prayer and communal reflection.

1.1. The Historical Wellspring

The source of communal discernment flows directly from the time of St. Ignatius and his first companions. The **Deliberation of the First Fathers (1539)** serves as the historical foundation, a living testimony to how a culturally diverse group can deliberate in common, led by the light of the Holy Spirit, guided by their love for Christ and availability for mission. They gathered to share how the Spirit was moving them internally concerning the mission, articulating their fears, hopes, and even personal inclinations toward pride or self-interest.

This deliberative process led them to unite and form a religious order. This profound historical experience demonstrated that a body aspiring to follow God's will, jointly must turn to the practice of communal discernment.

1.2. Renewed Emphasis in the Modern Era

The reintroduction of communal discernment to modern Jesuit practice began with Pedro Arrupe's foundational letter in 1971. This was followed by systematic promotion through successive General Congregations (GCs).

The Last General Congregations established that discernment in common is the **prior condition for apostolic planning** at all organizational levels. The process ensures that decisions are made "in the light of the experience of God" and put into practice with "evangelical effectiveness". This positive tension between discernment and apostolic planning requires a spiritual examen of what has been experienced to ensure continual fidelity to God's will.

Fr. General Arturo Sosa has made apostolic discernment in common a clear priority. He notes that the practice was necessary for implementing the decisions of GC 36, such as discerning the consequences of formulating the mission as a contribution to reconciliation and choosing universal apostolic preferences.

1.3. JRS as a Specialized Application of Discernment

Communal discernment has been **foundational to JRS from its inception** in 1980. Pedro Arrupe's founding vision explicitly emphasized spiritual service and established spiritual conversation and communal discernment as integral, not auxiliary, to JRS methodology.

JRS, as a global mission of the Society of Jesus, represents the **most extensive practical application of Ignatian communal discernment in contemporary humanitarian and social inclusion work**. The methodology, developed over 45 years, is a documented example of how traditional Ignatian spirituality adapts to serve the most marginalized populations.

The current JRS leadership, following Fr. Sosa's universal call, emphasizes "shared apostolic discernment" as essential for identifying the most vulnerable displaced populations and responding effectively. This approach recognizes refugees as the "**locus theologicus**"—the theological places where God's will is discerned.

Chapter 2: The Meaning of Discernment in Common at JRS: A Shared Journey

For the Jesuits and collaborators serving at JRS globally, DC is a richly textured concept, rooted deeply in Ignatian spirituality yet adapted to the exigencies of humanitarian and social inclusion work in cross-cultural, emergency and long-term settings. The survey responses offer a living definition, testifying that DC is indeed **more than a method; it is a way of life**.

2.1. Defining the Spiritual Process

At its core, DC is universally understood within JRS as a spiritual and contemplative quest for divine guidance. It is a **shared effort to seek and recognize God's will**, allowing a community, through the unity of spirit, to make decisions aligned with God's entrusted mission.

Key definitions from the field reveal this spiritual depth:

- **A Contemplative Process:** DC is a contemplative process where participants seek divinely guided direction regarding important decisions. It is characterized as a prayerful/reflective series of conversations directed on subjects with the goal of arriving at a clear direction forward, ideally with consensus and without a vote.
- **Seeking the *Magis*:** It is understood as a process that allows us to seek and find God's will for the **best possible development of his mission on Earth**. This pursuit of the *magis* (the greater good) requires participants, through prayer, reflection, and listening, to strengthen their abilities to better serve the Glory of God.
- **Listening to the Spirit of God:** DC is defined as a **shared journey of listening**—listening to God's Spirit, to one another, and crucially, **to the concrete realities around us**. It means listening to the spirit of God through others. It happens when a group creates a space of trust, prayer, and honest dialogue, where everyone speaks from the heart to contribute to the search for what the Spirit is saying.

2.2. Discernment in the Refugee and Migrant Context

The JRS context introduces specific dimensions to the practice of discernment:

- **Inclusion of the Marginalized:** DC at JRS involves **listening to the voice of refugees who are JRS staff** before arriving at minor and major decisions. This intentional inclusion takes staff beyond their comfort zones and keeps them in the world of refugees.
- **Rooted in Reality:** For our JRS colleagues in South Africa, DC must be **rooted in the lived realities of refugees, asylum seekers, and host communities**. In

emergency settings (Mozambique, El Paso, South Sudan), DC is used during difficult situations when complex issues with multiple elements need to be looked at jointly and require decisive action.

- **Beyond Rationality:** JRS practitioners recognize that spiritual discernment—both personal and communal—**goes beyond merely rational or human considerations**, emphasizing that a spiritual atmosphere is indispensable. DC manifests as a **discursive approach in implementation, consultation, collaboration, and teamwork**, plus prayer on the things to be discerned about.

2.3. Discernment in Common vs. Other Decision-Making

It is crucial to understand what DC is *not*. Sharing in a spiritual conversation is distinct from a **business discussion** aimed at the most reasonable administrative decision, or a **parliamentary exercise** based on majority/minority interests. DC requires quality information and rational argument, but it ultimately relies on **spiritual movements** or that which can reasonably generate **greater love and service for the glory of God**.

For JRS, this distinction is vital: DC must take place within the **structure of the International humanitarian and social inclusion world** while adhering to standards for HR, finance, and programming. Yet, JRS strives to ensure its discernment remains **mission-driven rather than purely administrative**.

Chapter 3: Essential Elements: The Soil of Spiritual Freedom

The effectiveness of discernment in common within the JRS mission depends on specific spiritual, relational, and practical conditions. These elements prepare the soil of the heart for the Spirit to move, allowing the group to seek the *magis*—the greater good and glory of God.

3.1. The Cornerstone: Ignatian Freedom and Purpose

The most crucial spiritual condition is **Interior freedom, or Ignatian indifference**. Without this detachment, correct election is impossible. Those who discern must cultivate freedom, meaning they should be detached from their own interests and free to assume whatever is the greater good in the light of the Gospel.

This interior freedom is manifested by two basic conditions necessary for discernment:

1. **Passion for the Mission:** This is a deep desire for God's will to advance in this broken world. For JRS, this means putting the **JRS mission above personal interests**. This passion fuels the pursuit of the *magis*, expressed today in the criterion of "**greater need**" (pointing to situations of injustice), "**greater fruit**" (effectiveness in creating solidarity and faith communities), and "**greater universality**" (structural change).
2. **Freedom Interior and Exterior:** This indifference requires setting aside internal attachments and external pressures that might sway decisions. Participants must be willing to listen from Ignatian indifference, actively stripping away prejudices, fears, and personal preferences.

It is necessary and possible, even for those who share the mission but not the Christian faith, to acquire this interior freedom that enables them to divest themselves of self-love, self-will, and self-interests, seeking the greater good of all.

3.2. Relational and Spiritual Conditions

Discernment in common requires the existence of a **union of hearts and minds** in the group. This unity is born from a shared sense of purpose.

Essential relational elements cited by JRS practitioners include:

- **Mutual Appreciation:** A sincere recognition and appreciation for the other participants, allowing for attentive listening genuinely interested in what others communicate.

- **Active Listening:** The capacity of **deep listening and mutual respect**, where every voice, regardless of position or background, is valued as a unique contribution to the common search for God's will.
- **Spiritual Communication:** The ability to communicate the **internal movements** experienced as consolations and desolations. This requires the dual skill of recognizing these motions internally and formulating them clearly to others.
- **Openness to Conversion:** The freedom to **change one's mind** after listening and praying over what others have said, which demands humility and a genuine desire to seek God's will.

Furthermore, **Prayer in common** is a non-negotiable requirement. Personal and communal prayer maintains the healthy tension between heaven and earth, keeping the body focused as servants of the *missio Dei*. The Eucharist, as the privileged mode of communal prayer, holds a central role in DC processes.

3.3. JRS Contextual Adaptations

JRS highlights unique components vital for effective discernment in its mission structure:

- **Genuine Inclusion of Refugee Voices (The Most Crucial Condition):** Refugees must be **genuine participants** in the discernment, not merely consulted or seen as objects of discernment. This necessitates accessible forums, translation, and adapting processes to include those unfamiliar with Ignatian terminology, whose lived experience reveals God's presence.
- **Mission Rooted in Lived Realities:** Discernment must be anchored in JRS's mission and rooted in the lived realities of refugees, asylum seekers, and host communities, considering the barriers they face.
- **Intercultural Approach:** JRS has pioneered methods for discernment in religiously diverse contexts, requiring an intercultural approach and accommodating interfaith teams. It requires going beyond religious and ethnic boundaries and identifying voices who support refugees locally and globally.
- **Leadership and Formation:** Effective DC requires leadership **inspired and formed by Ignatian spirituality**. The **formation (spiritual and intellectual) of everyone is crucial**. Leadership plays a vital role in facilitating this space with humility and trust, enabling participation rather than domination.

Chapter 4: Lights and Shadows: Moments of Grace and Human Frailty

The experience of discernment in common at JRS, as revealed by practitioners and leaders across the globe, is a complex tapestry woven with moments of profound spiritual clarity (**Lights**) and moments of human limitation and institutional struggle (**Shadows**).

4.1. The Lights: Witnessing the Spirit at Work

When discernment is practiced with sincerity, it becomes a **transformative experience**. Participants witness genuine unity, mutual respect, and a **deep sense that the Spirit is at work among us**.

- **A Feeling of Value and Unity:** When done well, DC consistently leads to a feeling of **being included and valued**. It strengthens unity and focus, and decisions made often carry shared **peace and collective ownership**. One respondent noted that reliance on God and the JRS mission motivates even difficult decisions.
- **Transformation through Inclusion:** The most profound light reported is the **transformation that occurs when refugee voices genuinely shape decisions**. This process redirected JRS away from assumptions toward programs that truly helped them, revealing how the Spirit speaks through the most vulnerable.
- **Moments of Grace:** When deliberately engaged, DC is described as **fruitful and feeling like a moment of grace**. Experiencing deep and intense sharing confirms that the group is responding according to the signs of the time. Even differing views, when shared with openness, do not have to become seeds of division.

4.2. The Shadows: The Cost of Human Imperfection

Despite the desire to serve, the practice of DC is hindered by significant practical and spiritual obstacles.

- **The Tyranny of Time and Workload:** **Time constraints, heavy workloads, and competing priorities** constantly threaten to reduce DC to mere quick consultations rather than deep reflection. DC is a long process that consumes time and energy, and often, the work cannot be stopped. This difficulty in assigning **sufficient time** is a nearly universal challenge.
- **Spiritual and Formational Deficits:** A major shadow is the **lack of spiritual background (Ignatian spirituality)** for the majority of those involved. Many staff are **not acquainted with our spirituality**, and often in secularized countries, discernment lacks a Christian ground. Furthermore, initial confusion in understanding discernment is common.

- **Organizational and Hierarchical Blocks: Strong opinions or hierarchical structures** unintentionally limit the freedom of expression, causing the process to lean more toward discussion or debate than true spiritual listening. This occurs particularly when individual preferences or personal beliefs are placed above the call of the Holy Spirit.
- **The Failure of Consistency:** Discernment has often **not been practiced in a regular, consistent way**. In some locations, it is seen as a **missed target** because no one is engaged or interested in reflecting on their mission delivery. It is difficult to keep the flame alive when daily work resumes with frenzy.

Chapter 5: Navigating the Challenges: The Steep Path of the *Magis*

JRS operates in complex, high-risk environments, making its challenges severe and multi-layered. These difficulties highlight the immense spiritual strength required to seek the *magis* in the face of scarcity, conflict, and administrative pressure.

5.1. The Scarcity of Resources and the Pressure of Donors

A persistent and fundamental challenge across many JRS contexts is the struggle for resources and funding.

- **Funding Dependency and Gap:** Discernment becomes difficult when the mission often runs **without financial aid**. In some places, there are continuous problems with **funding gaps** and not meeting the needs of our staff, volunteers, and refugees and migrants.
- **External Control over Mission:** In many contexts, JRS is **almost totally dependent on donor requests**, severely limiting the ability to make important decisions independently based on spiritual discernment. Decision-makers often prioritize **donor requirements and financial procedures** over the spiritual fundament of the work.

This external pressure leads to the struggle of preserving JRS's spiritual identity. There is a noted danger of siding with the humanitarian/social inclusion /NGO dimension, **overemphasizing the 'professional' aspect**. The need is strong to alleviate the "**red-tape aspect**" and align interventions clearly to the mission of JRS.

5.2. Formation and Leadership Deficiencies

The effectiveness of DC hinges on the spiritual and intellectual capacity of the participants. Where this capacity is lacking, challenges arise:

- **Lack of Spiritual Culture:** People in leadership positions are not always Catholic, and **it is reportedly sometimes difficult for them to learn about the Jesuits and their spirituality**, relying solely on experience. This makes leadership sessions on Ignatian spirituality crucial across all levels.
- **Reflectiveness and Effectiveness:** One respondent noted a great difference in reflectiveness and effectiveness between different types of leadership in the field, emphasizing that **field leadership is key and significant** to leaving an indelible mark.
- **The Ununderstood Concept:** The thematic 'Discernment in Common' is frequently **not well understood**. Training or creating awareness about

discernment is crucial, especially where it is not a common phenomenon in secular form.

5.3. Challenges of Context and War

JRS often operates in zones of extreme vulnerability, adding layers of complexity to communal discernment:

- **Crisis Discernment:** JRS has developed methods for **rapid discernment processes** for emergency humanitarian responses and social inclusion contexts. Yet, working in **war areas** (e.g., Mozambique), where violence is pervasive and funding is difficult, strains the organization's capacity to deliver satisfactory services.
- **Political Hostility:** Increasingly hostile government views towards migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, coupled with public policies based on lies, create a challenging environment where internal discernment must grapple with external falsehoods and continuous policy changes.
- **Inclusion of Vulnerable Voices:** While the involvement of refugees is a *light* (positive aspect), ensuring their consistent and genuine participation remains a major challenge, requiring adaptation and resources.

Chapter 6: Best Practices: Cultivating the Garden of the Spirit

Amidst the shadows and challenges, JRS practitioners have developed and affirmed concrete approaches that translate the high ideal of DC into actionable, Spirit-led practice. These best practices focus on creating necessary spiritual space, ensuring inclusive methodology, and integrating DC into the daily rhythm of mission.

The practice of Discernment in Common (DC) within JRS is a sustained effort to translate the foundational spiritual heritage of St. Ignatius into effective, compassionate action amidst the chaos of humanitarian crises, and long-term processes into social inclusion. The global experience of Jesuits and collaborators reveals a rich tapestry of best practices—methods and attitudes that nourish the spiritual life of the organization, ensuring decisions are rooted in God’s will and the deep commitment to the mission.

These practices are not rigid steps, but invitations to conversion, designed to make JRS a true *communitas ad discretionem*—a community oriented toward the constant search for the greater good (*magis*).

6.1. Creating the Spiritual Space: Preparing the Heart for the Holy Spirit

Effective discernment hinges on deliberate practices that shift the group's focus from administrative urgency to contemplative seeking. These practices cultivate the interior freedom necessary for recognizing the Spirit's voice.

A. Anchoring the Rhythm in Prayer and Reflection

The most consistent best practice is the conscious insertion of spiritual reflection into the daily life of JRS.

Beginning and Ending in Presence: Every major meeting or decision-making process should begin with a moment of prayer or silent reflection. This helps situate people thankfully, broadly, and honestly before the mission. Conversely, meetings should finalize with a brief moment to examine what was lived. This concluding examen allows teams to put in common those internal movements—the inquietudes, desires, doubts, resistances, and acknowledgments—that speak to the spiritual maturity of the team regarding the issues addressed.

Framing in the Gospel and Mission: It is highly recommended to frame each moment of discernment within a passage or section of the Gospel. This practice ensures discussions are grounded in the incarnational spirituality that defines JRS’s work.

The Power of the Examen: Introducing the use and practice of the Examen (personally or collectively) is vital. The JRS/USA Examen is an explicit resource for this. This tool allows the team to articulate how they responded generously and what impeded their generosity

and efficacy in carrying out the mission. It helps maintain a memory of the process and confirms that the group is on the right path.

Simple Daily Practices: Even simple, regular practices prove foundational, such as the Daily Coffee Conversations - "Kaffee-Kreis" After Lunch practiced by the Berlin team, which has become foundational to their communal discernment.

B. Cultivating the Conducive Environment

Creating a space for discernment requires intentional protective measures against external noise and internal pressures:

Physical and Temporal Space: Discernment spaces must be arranged in quiet places, actively avoiding external noise, such as cell phones or laptops. It must be a moment and a place that offers space sufficient for concentration and peace. Discernment cannot be done in a rush; sufficient time must be assigned for individual and communal reflection and prayer.

Relational Trust: The spiritual atmosphere demands deep listening and mutual respect, where every voice is valued. The process requires trust and respect for the other person. Spiritual conversation creates an atmosphere of trust and welcome.

6.2. Methodology for Shared Insight: Practicing Spiritual Conversation

Spiritual conversation is the essential tool that animates apostolic communal discernment. It moves the group beyond mere discussion toward a deep, prayerful listening to the Spirit speaking through others.

A. The Foundational Methodological Steps

The General Method for DC provides a widely accepted framework:

Preparation (Phase 0): This phase is crucial for managing expectations and securing commitment. It requires clearly indicating how the final decision will be taken from the beginning (e.g., by consensus, by the authority after consultation) to avoid frustration. It also includes selecting the group, choosing the moment, and indicating the person who will conduct the discernment (the moderator).

Acknowledging Reality (Phase 1): Before any reflection, participants must acquire full information, of good quality and accessible to all, about the matter. This ensures the discussion is rational and informed. This phase can involve data gathering through reports or experts, dialogue, contrast of viewpoints, and analysis of reasons a favor and en contra of possible options.

Personal Reflection and Prayer (Phase 2): Individuals dedicate time to personal prayer, reflecting on their inner movements. This process requires answering questions such as: What external or internal conditioning factors remove my freedom? What brings light, peace, encouragement, or hope (consolation)? What causes unease, fear, turmoil, or discouragement (desolation)? What is God calling the group to do?

The Shared Rounds (Phase 3 – Spiritual Conversation): This is the core practice of spiritual listening.

First Round (Sharing): Each participant puts in common their written responses, inner motions, and calls. This is done simply, without debate or interruption. "Round sharing" is a specific best practice where everyone speaks once before anyone speaks twice, ensuring all voices are heard, especially the quieter ones.

Second Round (Resonance): Participants share what most resonated or echoed from what others have said. This reveals the spiritual movements occurring collectively.

Third Round (Synthesis/Moving Forward): A brief synthesis in a single phrase or word or an open space for shared insight or invitations to act as a team.

B. Honoring the Spiritual Motions

The dialogue must focus on spiritual movements (consolations and desolations) rather than purely emotional states.

Sharing Consolation and Desolation: Creating structured spaces for sharing consolation and desolation helps team members express what gives them life or what drains their energy. This approach focuses on choosing the path of consolation that fortifies faith, hope, and love.

The Goal is Purified Intention: Discernment is ultimately concerned with spiritual motions or, where those are unclear, with what can reasonably generate greater love and service for the glory of God.

6.3. Organizational and Strategic Integration: Making DC Operational

For DC to be more than a one-time retreat, it must be integrated into the mission, strategy, and organizational life of JRS, establishing it as a *modus procedendi*.

Choosing the Matter Well: A prerequisite for effective DC is the realization that not every decision requires discernment in common. It should be reserved for important matters where the path forward is not completely clear, thus avoiding the banalization of the term.

Distinction from Other Processes: Discernment must be explicitly distinguished from a mere business discussion aimed at reasonable administrative decisions or a parliamentary exercise based on majority/minority interests, as explained above.

Formation and Leadership: JRS recognizes that formation is crucial. Leaders and participants need training on:

- The methodology of decision-taking.
- Understanding the limits of decisions and responsibilities (i.e., common discernment is consultative, not democracy).
- The fundamentals of Ignatian spirituality, especially consolation and desolation.
- A leadership inspired and formed by Ignatian spirituality is required to lead the team toward this procedure.

Regular Review: The annual spiritual review of the year for each local team helps ensure DC is an ongoing process, prompting reflection on what was done and its effects. This aligns with the systematic practice of the examen during the process.

6.4. JRS's Unique Contributions: Discernment Rooted in Accompaniment

JRS has pioneered best practices that adapt Ignatian tradition to the interfaith and high-vulnerability contexts of refugee service, rooted in the core principle of accompaniment.

Over recent decades, we have come to understand that working for justice requires integrating various elements: friendship with and service to those most marginalized, critical reflection on our reality, and the desire to transform our world. Working for justice presents a profound challenge because it is oriented toward the universal while remaining committed to the local context; it seeks to reshape the structures that govern human relationships, yet it walks side by side with individuals. The question becomes how to bring together all these dimensions that are fundamental to advancing justice, so that we preserve the richness of the whole while recognizing the inherent value of each component.

The work for justice as interpreted by the Society of Jesus (Álvarez, 2015) must encompass five key areas: accompaniment, service, research-reflection, awareness-raising, and the transformation of structures. Accompaniment, one of the foundational pillars of JRS's mission, emerges in the vulnerability of human encounter, when people recognize their common humanity and rejoice in coming to know one another. In this manner, we build relationships of equality with our brothers and sisters and journey together through life. We accompany others and allow ourselves to be accompanied. Walking alongside the poor becomes a spiritual experience and a space where we acknowledge both the human dignity of our fellow men and women and our own. It is where friendship is born.

This accompaniment happens primarily in our everyday living spaces, where relationships are not filtered through professional roles. This is why the communal dimension holds such importance, and particularly our communities of hospitality (Ares, 2021), privileged settings where discernment in common can take place.

A. Genuine Inclusion of Refugee Voices

The single most crucial condition is the Genuine Inclusion of Refugee Voices.

Refugee Participation as Decisive: JRS practitioners report that refugees must be genuine participants in the discernment, not merely consulted or seen as objects of service.

Transformation through Listening: This involvement has proven to be the most profound light witnessed, leading to the transformation that occurs when refugee voices genuinely shape decisions. Their input redirected JRS away from assumptions toward programs that truly helped them.

Participatory Methodology: Decisions are taken in consultation with staff, volunteers and refugees and migrants. JRS utilizes a method of need assessment which involves refugees themselves before starting new initiatives. A further practice is Accountability to the Affected Population (AAP).

B. Intercultural and Inclusive Approaches

JRS operates with a "mixed bunch of committed people" and has developed methods to ensure spiritual depth across diverse teams.

Beyond Boundaries: Best practices include going beyond religious and ethnic boundaries. The JRS context necessitates accommodation of interfaith teams and adaptation of spiritual conversation methodology to cross-cultural settings.

Shared Values: Discernment is made possible in non-religious situations by defining and fostering a shared commitment to values, vision, and ideals. An example of inclusive leadership cited as a good practice was a Muslim leading a Catholic organization in Burundi and Tanzania.

Integrated Support: JRS implements an integrated approach, ensuring support opportunities reach both displaced and native communities simultaneously, allowing shared involvement.

C. Strategic Fidelity

Communal discernment is actively used for strategic planning, ensuring fidelity to the universal mission.

Mission-Driven Decisions: JRS must ensure that its decisions are mission-driven rather than purely administrative.

Global Framework Discernment: Best practices include engaging in discernments on our global and regional strategic framework. One specific example cited was the process of deliberating on regional priorities for the strategic framework in Nairobi or in LAC.

Conscious Implementation: JRS teams strive to ensure that all actions and deliberations keep the Mission and Vision at the heart of the effort.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and the Path Ahead: A Spirituality of Walking Together

Discernment in common at JRS is recognized as a **great way for everyone to get involved**, feel included, and contribute to the evolution of the organization in a fast-changing world. It is a collective process where individuals united by a common purpose engage in reflection and decision-making, remaining open to one another, and actively listening in order to realize their shared mission.

7.1. Embracing the Spiritual Reality

The overwhelming consensus among JRS practitioners is that DC is **more than a method; it is a way of life**. When practiced with sincerity, it becomes a transformative experience, helping the community grow not only as a team but as a community rooted in hope, love, and service to those most in need.

DC requires:

- **Humility** to accept that others may carry insights we do not.
- **Vulnerability** to share honestly what moves within us.
- **Trust** that the Spirit can unite our diversity into one shared mission.

The ultimate goal remains the service of God's Glory. As one respondent emphasized, democratic management tools alone are insufficient if they are not related to the service of God's Glory—the **J of JRS is crucial**.

7.2. Challenges for Institutional Conversion

The survey results point toward necessary paths for institutional and personal conversion within JRS:

1. **Deepening Ignatian Culture:** There is a critical need to share the JRS mission, vision, and values among all staff. Leadership, especially at the field level, must be equipped through Ignatian leadership sessions to promote reflectiveness and effectiveness.
2. **Fighting the *Anti-Magis*:** JRS must deliberately create space and structure for purposeful pausing to reflect and pray over thematic programs. Individuals must commit to letting go of personal agendas, attachments, or fears, to be freed from bias and seek the greater good of the shared mission.
3. **Accountability and Openness to Surprise:** JRS should be held more accountable. Participants must constantly question their prejudices and agendas. The essential disposition is to have the courage to say "I don't know," and to be **open to the God of surprises**.

This report, rooted in the lived experience of JRS practitioners and leaders, serves as a beginning and a **new chance to revitalise JRS** with such a powerful tool as discernment in common. By embracing DC fully—its spiritual demands, its challenging methodology, and its transformative results—JRS can ensure that its accompaniment continues to be a profound encounter with the Spirit, leading to greater fidelity and effectiveness in serving those most in need, for the greater glory of God.

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Appendix: Core Ignatian Properties of Discernment in Common (Fr. Sosa)

Fr. General Arturo Sosa outlined nine principal properties of discernment in common, emphasizing that they follow traditional Ignatian criteria, taking into account the people, the times, and the places. These properties are essential for JRS teams striving for authenticity:

1. **Choosing the matter well:** Focus on important decisions where the will of God is not entirely clear (not every decision requires DC).
2. **Knowing who should take part and why:** Clearly defining participants, their roles, and accepting the conditions.
3. **Interior freedom (Ignatian indifference):** Cultivating detachment from self-interest to assume the greater good in the light of the Gospel.
4. **Union of minds and hearts:** A shared sense of purpose, born from mutual knowledge and trust.
5. **Knowledge about how to discern:** Utilizing the three times of election (clear conviction, spiritual movements/consolation/desolation, or pros/cons reasoning).
6. **Prayer in common:** Finding ways and spaces for personal and communal prayer, with the Eucharist as a privileged mode.
7. **Spiritual conversation:** Sharing the fruit of prayer and personal reflection simply, characterized by active listening and seeking a spiritual echo.
8. **Systematic practice of the examen:** Used during the process to confirm the true nature of spiritual movements and maintain memory of the group's movements.
9. **Establishing how the final decision is to be made:** Clear definition and acceptance of the decision-making authority from the start (e.g., General Congregation votes, Superior makes final decision).