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## A Contemplative Approach to Reaching Group Consensus

*We reach decisions through prayerful discernment,  
aiming toward consensus especially in matters of major importance.*  
[- Guidelines for Contemplative Outreach Service, #7](#)

Consensus is a process of arriving at a decision through dialogue and listening. The process is designed to provide a forum where creative input and discernment is invited by all participants, with the intention of generating diverse options for consideration.

Note: The most important element of the consensus decision-making process is that those participating fully understand the concept, the process and the agreements. The basic foundation of decision-making through consensus is the attitude of the decision-makers. Ideally, the group accepts the responsibility of working in an optimistic, supportive and informed atmosphere.

### **The following process is recommended:**

- Prior to the process, it is helpful to have a written agenda available for participants listing topics and items for discussion. A designated facilitator explains the agenda and overall process to the group.
- Open the process with Centering Prayer or a prayer to the Holy Spirit asking for guidance and direction.
- The facilitator then states the first agenda item for decision and opens the floor for input. At this point, there is no dialogue on the ideas generated.
- All participants are invited to contribute their ideas concerning the issue.
- After everyone has shared input, the facilitator then invites discussion. The purpose of the discussion is to integrate the thinking of the group; to assess all possible options and to combine, modify, or enhance the total group thinking through compromise consensus. Guidelines for discussion include:
  - Participants may state the consensus that he/she can live with only once.
  - Participants may not continually lobby or reinforce the same position.

- Participants are asked to refrain from digressions not relevant to the issue.

The major responsibility of the facilitator at this point is to listen carefully as the discussion begins to move toward general feeling of agreement.

When the facilitator feels that a consensus has been reached through integrating the ideas and solutions of the participants, the facilitator will ask, "Do we have a consensus?" If there are no objections, the consensus has been reached and should be restated again for the whole group, such as "we have a consensus decision that \_\_\_\_\_" As soon as the consensus is agreed upon, no further discussion is necessary.

At this point, a prayer could be offered in gratitude for the process and the community.

When a group has agreed to work under a consensus decision-making process, they are agreeing to add their own ideas and thoughts with those of other participants. It is important that once the group has been brought to consensus, they totally support and promote the consensus.

No one person can block a consensus decision. What is felt by the group to be the best and most workable decision becomes the accepted path forward. This process is difficult to initiate and will not always fulfill the needs and desires of each individual but is extremely beneficial to the greater good of the group when understood and utilized.

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