

Ascension Health Organizational Ethics Discernment Process

Why a process?

A STRUCTURED DISCERNMENT PROCESS:

- Disciplines our decision-making
- Ensures that we consider all relevant factors
- Elicits multiple perspectives
- Allows us to reflect on our moral intuitions and instincts
- Aligns our affects, intuitions and instincts with our deliberative intellect

Why *this* process?

THIS DISCERNMENT PROCESS:

- Explicitly relates decisions back to our Mission, Vision, Values and Identity
- Reinforces our Preferred Culture
- Promotes consistency with existing organizational structures, processes and positions; e.g., Authority Matrix, Distributive Leadership Model, Position Paper on a Positive Organizational Climate, etc.
- Fosters our ability to articulate and communicate the rationale for our decisions
- Ensures major decisions are grounded in prayer and careful reflection

The Process:

DISCERNMENT ENGAGES our spirituality, intellect, imagination, intuition, and our beliefs. It is decision-making that reaches into the heart of our beliefs about God, creation, others, and ourselves. It therefore requires structured time for reflection and prayer from the beginning and throughout the process. Such prayer and reflection may include but should not be limited to the following considerations:

- What would God have me do in this situation? In these circumstances?
- How does this decision help us to serve others better?
- How does this issue relate to our Mission?
- Am I willing to step outside my preconceived plan?
- Am I willing to give up control?
- What are the subjective/objective facts? Events? Feelings?
- How is God speaking through events, people and authority?

The following steps are intended to guide the discernment process. While the considerations under each step are not exhaustive, they are intended to serve as a checklist to ensure various dimensions of a decision are being considered. In group or committee situations, each step need not be completed by every member but should be

considered explicitly and discussed with all the members before a final decision is implemented. Each step may need to be considered more than once, and earlier steps may need to be revisited in light of responses to later steps. The entire process may be completed in one session of deliberations, or over the course of several. Returning to prayer and reflection between steps and throughout the process, as appropriate, is integral to discernment.

Step One:

IDENTIFY THE CENTRAL QUESTION (S)

- Clearly and succinctly articulate the issue(s).
- Is the issue of sufficient significance and/or complexity that it requires a structured process of discernment?
- What organizational, ethical and strategic considerations does the issue raise?
- How does the issue potentially impact the organization in the short and long term?
- Is this an appropriate time to address this issue?

Step Two:

CONSIDER SUBSIDIARITY

- Who is affected by the decision and how?
- Who is most directly affected?
- Who has proper authority?
- Who has relevant expertise?
- Is their participation in the decision-making process appropriate to the matter under consideration?

Step Three:

IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT FACTS

- Statutes & regulations
- Existing institutional policies
- Professional standards
- Strategic priorities, needs, goals, etc.
- Possible outcomes

Step Four:

IDENTIFY SALIENT VALUES AND MORAL CONCERNS

- Key Principles, e.g., Human Dignity, Common Good, Justice, Fairness, Stewardship, Human Rights, etc.
- Associate rights & responsibilities
- Ascension Health's Mission, Vision, Values & Preferred Culture
- Individual & Professional Values
- Institutional identity, integrity & conscience

Step Five:

CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES

- What do other organizations do in this situation?
- What do other organizations *not* do in this situation, but should?
- What would I, as an individual, do in this situation?
- What would the prudent person do in this situation?
- Are there other possibilities not yet considered?

Step Six:

DECIDE & JUSTIFY

- Is the decision consistent with our Catholic Identity and moral norms?
- Does the decision advance our Mission, Vision & Values?
- Does the decision benefit those we serve?
- Does the decision reflect our Preferred Culture?
- Does the decision promote our strategic priorities?
- Is the decision adequately grounded in prayer and reflection?
- Is there a sense of peace with the decision?
- Prior to implementation, develop a plan for communicating the decision and its rationale.

Step Seven:

FOLLOW-UP & REVIEW

- Have all parties responsible for implementing the decision followed through?
- Did those responsible for implementing the decision consult and review the implementation plan with the primary decision-makers and those who have the relevant expertise?
- Was the decision implemented in a timely manner?
- Were there any unforeseen consequences?
- Does the decision need to be revised in light of new information?
- What can be learned from the decision and its outcome?
- What should be done differently next time?