Shared Wisdom

At a glance:

Shared the wisdom of the community

Shared wisdom recognizes the worth of every individual’s contribution and the unique knowledge, experience and wisdom that each person brings to the discernment and decision making by virtue of their living being and their life experiences; it means listening to the wisdom of the members of their community and their own Advisory Body members in order to know how best to lead and serve the whole community. It:

- recognizes, values and considers the contribution of all
- is complimentary, not competitive
- draws on an understanding of facts without limiting itself to factual answers.
- invites God into the process of decision-making and opens up infinite possibilities for creativity.

Keep in mind:

- Sometimes sharing of wisdom may need to be repeated before discernment.
- There are no quick and easy answers—it takes time to really listen and learn from one another.
**SHARING THE WISDOM OF THE GROUP**

“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” Matthew 18:20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREPARE</th>
<th>Reflection and Prayer: (Refer to Catholic Matters for prayers &amp; reflections)</th>
<th>Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| IDENTIFY | Consider:  
  - What is the issue?  
  - Who is involved?  
  - Who is affected? |           |
| GATHER  | Consider:  
  - What information do we need  
  - Who needs to be consulted?  
  - How are we going to get it?  
  - Who is going to gather it? |           |
| REFLECT | Consider:  
  - How much time is needed?  
  - When is this going to occur - at prior, the meeting or after?  
  - What ‘space’ will people require? |           |
| SHARE   | Consider:  
  - How much time maybe required?  
  - How do we ensure everyone is listened to and listens? |           |
| DISCERN | Consider:  
  - What are possible decisions?  
  - Have you reached true consensus? |           |
| FOLLOW-UP | What needs to happen next? Who is responsible?  
  - What needs to be communicated? (internally & externally?)  
  - Was information gathered from enough and the right sources?  
  - What would you do differently next time? |           |
EXPLORE: A Shared Wisdom Approach

A SHARED WISDOM APPROACH – THE PHILOSOPHY

Sister Mary Benet McKinney* developed a model of decision making based on the concept of shared wisdom. This model finds its basis in the Second Vatican Council which in essence told us that "we are Church, the people of God". Our membership of the Church, through our Baptism, bestows on us a responsibility to answer the Call to ministry, to commit ourselves to the reality of Christ living within and among us. Now, forty something years since Vatican II, people are at a paint where they need to decide what their future in the Church holds for them. Vatican II is a call to a new Pentecost and there is value in examining the gifts of the Holy Spirit in answering that call. The gifts of the Spirit-Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Knowledge, Courage, Reverence, Wonder and Awe are the very gifts which we are called to bring to the shared decision making model of school governance.

Shared decision making recognises the intrinsic worth of each individual's contribution. Every person brings to the discernment and decision making process their own unique wisdom by virtue of their living being and their life experiences. Shared wisdom is complementary, not competitive; it recognises and values the contribution of all. We have a responsibility then to be open to new ways, to be willing to let go and leave the familiar, and whilst this is often difficult to do and involves an acceptance of risk taking and a spirit of adventure, it is essential if we are to answer the call to share in the new Pentecost. In answering the call we must be mindful that, "in any gathering to the degree that you can get all those pieces of wisdom out and allow them to interact with one another, to that degree you came closer and closer to the wisdom the Spirit has to give this group at this time."

Sr. Mary Benet McKinney
“Shared Wisdom” 1991 Tabor Publications
KEY CONCEPTS

Follows the call of Vatican II: Church belongs to the baptized. All the baptised are needed to build the Kingdom of God – the Church.

Our God is present to us in many ways. Our God is present to us in one another.

When we gather together in God’s name, the Spirit is present in and amongst us. The voice of the Spirit in the gathering needs to be listened for very carefully.

All of us are sacred – God within each - we are called to acknowledge God’s wisdom in each other and to use our gifts in service of others.

All The Faith Community is called to take responsibility at local levels for its own growth, development and expression of itself. Local church is the people. We are all called to nurture and care for the community - to use our gifts to be and build church.

“My Spirit will be with you always” When we gather together to break bread, to pray, and to be and build church, Jesus is with us ….

REFLECT:

Choose one concept

- How does this challenge me personally?

- What does this mean to my work as an advisory body member?

- What does this mean to our work as a group?

- How is this concept expressed in our community?
RESPOND:

"In any gathering, to the degree that you can get all those pieces of wisdom out and allow them to interact with one another, to that degree you come closer and closer to the wisdom the Spirit has to give the group at this time."

(Sr Mary Benet McKinney 1991)

The power of school advisory bodies using ‘sharing wisdom’ as a model of discernment, rests in the ability to lead the communities in the continual process of “developing shared meaning” (Fullan 2001). Engaging in processes of communication and collaboration builds new and better relationships and as the organization responds to new information and new relationships, its identity, becomes clearer at the same time as it changes. (Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers 1996 (2) 8).

As an advisory body:

- Do we hear and respect one another's wisdom?
- Do we work for a climate that is open and respectful?
- Are we open to information and data collected by others?
- Are we open to new ways of thinking?
- Do we set aside time at each meeting for reflective prayer?
- Do we empower the other members of the group?
- Do we enable processes to engage everybody's wisdom?
- Do we invite the gifts of others into the work of the advisory body?
REFLECTION:

Explore:

*One Spirit - Many Gifts*

A Reading from 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11

There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit: there are all sorts of service to be done, but always the same Lord: working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose.

One may have the gift of preaching with wisdom, given by the Spirit: another may have the gift of preaching instruction, given by the same Spirit: one the power of miracles; another prophecy, another the gift of recognising spirits; another the gift of tongues and another the ability to interpret them. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, who distributes different gifts to each person.

Reflect:

*Silently*

- What gifts have I been given?
- How can I use these gifts in my work and in my community?
- How can I encourage others to share their gifts?

Respond:

*Each member in turn nominates one gift.*

"To the school community of ........................., I bring the gift of .................... It is a gift I offer freely and humbly"
ALL:
We thank you Lord for the gifts of we all bring.
We offer these Lord in the service of others and humbly recognise that they are gifts from you.
We pray that we may use these gifts to build our community to reach its potential as a faith and education community.
Guide us Lord in all our work. Our gifts are your gifts - our work is your work - our hands are your hands.

Leader: Will you listen to the wisdom of the members of the school community in order to know how best to lead and serve them?
All: We will listen
Leader: Will you strengthen and nourish the school as part of the wider faith community within the beliefs and values, teachings and traditions of our Church?
All: We will strengthen and nourish our school community as part of our Church.
Leader: Will you serve the school, caring for and developing together the whole community?
All: We will serve faithfully
Leader: Will you hold in trust all that is precious about our school community - building on its strengths, discover its potential and lead it in fulfilling its vision?
All: We will write the vision down and never tire until it is done.

All:
Loving Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World and you share His light with us. We ask you to give us the grace and energy to use our gifts to further your work in our community. While we trust in ourselves and your gifts to us, we rely on you as our first beginning and our last end. We make this prayer to you through Christ, our Lord. Amen
EXAMPLE: Shared Wisdom in practice

How to use this resource

This resource offers a way to address issues that trouble a group, a way to move in a new direction and to meet the needs of all who are affected by the group’s decisions. Meetings for this discernment and decision-making process should be led by a skilled facilitator; she need not be an officer of the group. A second person could develop a prayer experience for each gathering. A third person will be needed to record the discussion and provide copies to all participants before subsequent meetings. Newsprint and markers will be helpful.

This process is not a source of quick answers. It takes time to learn from one another, discern a direction, and then implement what will work. If at some point your plans don’t seem to be working, feel free to go back to sharing wisdom. And always, to prayer.

The process

1. **Prepare.** Contemplate and pray, alone and together. Focus your and the group’s contemplation on God—God’s will and actions. Think of prayer as communication with God, opening the lines between us and God.

2. **Identify** the idea, problem, situation, or challenge that needs to be discussed.

3. **Gather** information. Ask who will be affected by this decision. Those who will be affected have the right to share their wisdom with the group before any decision is made. Distribute the information to the group.

4. **Reflect.** Each member of the group reflects on the information in relation to the challenge or problem; this reflection must include individual prayer. It is important to schedule enough time between distributing the information and the actual meeting when wisdom is to be shared. Reflection time can be days or weeks.

5. **Share** wisdom. In this meeting, each person shares, that is, both speaks and listens. Remember the three points above: No one has all the wisdom; everyone has a different piece of the wisdom; everyone has some of the wisdom.

6. **Discern.** Discernment is the awareness that the Holy Spirit is acting within us as we gather and take on the task. Pray that the Holy Spirit is at work in the community. Discernment includes consideration of possible actions and choices.

7. **Repeat** steps as needed. Sometimes sharing of wisdom must be repeated before discernment. The goal is to come to a decision with which every participant is able to live gracefully. The key to this goal is the willingness of each person to accept the results. This takes a great deal of humility, a willingness to struggle with oneself and others, and, most important, a willingness to grow.

Applying the process: An example

Here is an example of how this process can be used to address the perennial problem of women’s groups:

**How do we involve younger women?**

**Prepare.**

Invite those who are not currently part of the group to take part in the process. In this case, they would be younger women.

When you ask women who have not previously participated, invite each one personally to join the gathering. A general invitation may not be effective. Pray in preparation for each meeting and open each meeting with prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit into the group.

**Sharing Wisdom: A Process for Group Decision Making** (Mary Benet McKinney, osa; Tabor Publishing, Valencia, Calif., 1987) is no longer in print. It may be available through sellers of used books (including www.amazon.com), or you might check for a copy in your church or synod library or that of a neighboring Roman Catholic parish. It would be helpful to be able to read the book, but the process outlined in this resource is enough to get you started in a new leadership style.
Identify the challenge.
In the first meeting, the group might ponder questions like these.

Why do we want to include younger women?
• To give younger women the support that older participants had on their own faith journeys?
• To do what older participants want to have done?
• To carry on something that older participants started?
• To come up with and carry out new ideas?
• To learn and celebrate the gifts of each person?

What do we mean by “younger women”?
• Do we mean younger women who work full-time?
• Younger women who have recently retired?
• Younger women with small children?
• Younger women in college?
• All of the above?
• Some of the above?

Why do you or would you participate in this group?
It’s important that those who are not currently participating describe what they hope the organization would provide or become. It’s also important that those who are currently participating describe the benefits of participation. What are the needs of each that, if met, would make it easier to participate?

What are the obstacles to participation?
Obstacles will be named by both those who are and those who are not currently participating in the group. Listen closely. Obstacles might include such things as meeting times, for example. If younger women work during the day, meetings might be scheduled for evenings or weekends. Or maybe someone would be willing to help younger women start a group of their own that fits under the Women of the ELCA umbrella. That volunteer would make certain that this group is represented in organization-wide decision-making.

Gather information.
This could start at the first meeting with brainstorming. Remember to ask all who will be affected by this decision to take part. The recorder could later mail or e-mail her notes to all, including participants who were not able to attend.

Reflect.
Pray over the information gathered and the decisions to be made. Take some time for reflection before the second meeting.

Share wisdom.
At the second meeting, sharing wisdom takes place.
Each person shares and each person listens. If after multiple rounds of sharing and listening, only one person is still holding a specific position, it may be time for her to let go of it and seek to listen more attentively to the wisdom of the group.

Discern.
Discernment demands openness to God, freedom to let go, and willingness to go in whatever direction God calls. Once you’ve discerned a direction, plan to carry it out involving all who have a stake in the decision.

In our example, the wisdom of the group might lead to taking on a specific project on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, under the leadership of a group that includes current participants and younger women who have not been involved before.

Now try this in your group. There are no quick and easy answers—it takes time to learn from one another and then implement what will work. If it seems that your group’s chosen action doesn’t quite work the way you thought it would, that gives you new information that you can use in the next round of sharing wisdom.

From "Shared Wisdom: An effective style of leadership,"
Joan Pope, copyright by Women of the ELCA (womenoftheelca.org).
Used with permission.