

# TWO DIFFERENT BUT IMPORTANT FORMS OF LOOKING AHEAD: PLANNING AND DISCERNMENT

## CENTRAL REALITY:

God's calling will be found at the intersection of the congregation's greatest capacity, and the mission field's most urgent need.

The central question of any kind of **spiritual discernment** is, "What is God doing, and how can we participate in what God is doing?"

The central question in **congregational discernment** is, "What difference is God calling us to make in our mission field in the coming season of the church's life?"

## SOME POSSIBLE DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS...

Who are we as a congregation, now?  
What is the biblical story we are inhabiting?  
What are our values, and how do we actually behave?  
What is not an option for our congregation?  
What are we good at, and not good at?  
Who do we have the readiness and willingness to serve?  
Who must we admit we do not have the readiness or willingness to serve?  
If this congregation has a sin to confess, what is it?  
Do we work from a culture of scarcity or a culture of abundance?

The central question of **planning** is, "How do we get from here to there?"

The central question in **congregational planning** is, "Given what God is calling us to do, what steps will we need to take in order to be faithful to that call?"

## SOME POSSIBLE PLANNING QUESTIONS...

Do we have the structure in place to accomplish our calling?  
Are leaders already in place, or do we need to nurture new leadership?  
How will we communicate what we have discerned, and how will we build buy-in?  
How will we match the spiritual gifts of our leaders with the tasks at hand?  
What spiritual disciplines will we need to adopt to move toward God's calling?  
Are the right voices at the table? Who have we excluded that ought to be here?

Planning without discernment pretends we need no help from God and that God is not necessarily active in our community already. Discernment without planning pretends that just because we discovered things, that means we actually accomplished them.