



Catholic Christian
OUTREACH

Prayerful Discernment

Discovering God's Call in Your Life



A word from the author...



If you're reading this, you're likely seriously considering to apply to CCO as a full-time missionary. If you are, then you certainly will want to take this to prayer. And you definitely will want to know where God is leading you and know what to do about it. We want to help you take this important question to prayer.

We will frame it as an ASK :

That is, the necessary A - attitudes, S - skills, and K - knowledge for Prayerful Discernment. The principles we will be using are universal. But for the purposes of this type of discernment, it will be tailored to the question, "Is the Lord calling me to be a CCO missionary?"

So let's get into it. (Full disclosure - the order in which we need to approach it is KAS not ASK. It's going to be okay. Work with me here.)

- Angèle Regnier, CCO Foundress

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Knowledge

Knowledge of CCO

Here we want to have a strong understanding of what we are discerning. This means gathering data and information about the question at hand.

1 Read up! Do some research. Talk to people. Find out the ins and outs. What are the various job descriptions, programs, onboarding times of the year? How does support-raising really work? How do placements get made? What is hard and rewarding for the missionaries who work with CCO? What are the benefits offered working for CCO? How do they do missionary work exactly?

In addition, you should also take stock of and assess your own personal situation.

When will you actually graduate? Are your credits in order? Should you take a year's break and serve CCO? Are there unavoidable demands in your life that prevent you from being open to relocation?

Self-Knowledge & CCO

Self-Knowledge is another important consideration here as you look at applying for CCO Staff:

- From what I am learning about CCO's mission, how does that resonate with my heart? Are we a fit?
- From what I am learning about CCO's core values and in being with CCO people, do I feel their way of behaving resonates with me? Are we a fit?

Broader Self-Knowledge

Let's go a bit deeper and examine your relationship with the Lord.

- Do you remember your “first love” with God? What is your conversion moment?
- In what circumstances are you the healthiest and growing in your relationship with God?
- In what circumstances were you the furthest away from God?
- When did you feel the most alive and fruitful in your apostolic efforts?
- What is the best environment for you spiritually? What is a harmful environment for you spiritually?
- What could the answers to these questions be indicating to you about how God works in your life to become the best version of yourself?
- What could be indicating to you the Enemy's attempts to sabotage the direction of your life?

2



Attitudes

3 Real discernment that is truly seeking to hear and follow God's will has prerequisite attitudes which must be present as you begin the discernment **and must be diligently maintained** throughout the process. This is huge! Once you drift away from the proper attitude, your discernment will be flawed.

Magis

You read that right. "Magis". Magis is Latin - meaning "the more". This means that you should approach your discernment with the attitude of seeking that which will serve God the most. You desire to give your life for God's greater glory, no matter what. This is perhaps a more radical approach to discernment than you are accustomed to. But if we are to really seek God's will in the important decisions in life, then it makes sense to ask Him what He needs us to do for His Kingdom to come.

“

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission.

—John Henry Cardinal Newman

So keep this in the forefront of your mind in your discernment: "What is the best investment of my life for God's greater glory? What does He need me to do?"

Now this is not trying to be heavy handed - that therefore being a CCO missionary or a priest or a nun gives God the greatest glory. That's not true! We can all and everywhere, with a magis perspective, give God the greatest glory. God's plan is myriad and varied.

The key is a disposition of searching for his leading, and in all things to seek his greatest glory. Cardinal Newman goes on to explain this idea:

“God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments.

Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.”

In the words of Cardinal Newman, we see the second attitude necessary - that of **holy indifference**.

Holy Indifference

This is not the same as saying “Saintly Apathy”, by the way. Holy indifference is seeking to be indifferent to all but God’s preferential will. Cardinal Newman describes holy indifference fundamentally as a great trust and confidence that God is good no matter what circumstances you may find yourself in.

This is important to remember because even when we have perfectly discerned what God wants us to do, even those who join CCO staff will experience hardships, confusion and desolation. You can count on it. It's part of the Christian journey. It is the act of pushing into the difficulty with faith and hope that makes us stronger! We need to remember this when we make a decision and the going gets tough. This is not a time to quit or despair. It's a time to trust and grow. Holy indifference ultimately trusts in the Lord's love and goodness, no matter what.

In terms of initially making a decision, holy indifference calls us to pray as Fr. Bob Bedard, the founder of the Companions of the Cross, taught us. That is, to "Give God permission". We give God permission with the direction of our life. We trust that His plan for our life is good and actually the best plan. In this simple prayer of Fr. Bob's, we express to God that we want what He wants. Holy indifference is an attitude seeking freedom and holding a decision lightly in order to be influenced by the Holy Spirit's prompting.

Another way to explain holy indifference is detachment. That is, becoming detached from anything that would take the rightful place of God and His will as central to our lives. In this case, it is a detachment from those things that have a spiritually unbalanced attraction or control over you. We also need to seek detachment from fears which lock us up and prevent us from trusting and serving God fully. You also need to fight against fears that would scare you away from being fully abandoned to God's will. Take note of these biases or fears and pray through them. Ask the Lord for understanding in order to get to the root of what they are about. Strive to surrender the fears or attractions to the Lord and express your desire to give Him permission in this process. These fears and biases will come up periodically and continually in your discernment. Keep seeking to have holy indifference.

Keep watch over your heart.

Intensify Prayer

We should always be people of prayer, no matter the circumstances. To pray only when we want something is kind of not cool, right? A healthy prayer life is the best ground for knowing the Lord's voice and his prompting. However, when you are in a time of needing to practically discern something, then you would do well to pray more intensely. Your attitude should be that of seriously seeking God's will and demonstrating this through more fervent prayer. Be extra diligent in your personal prayer and attentive to the Lord's actions and promptings in your life. Do more intercessory prayer as well -- novenas, chaplets, rosaries, daily masses, holy hours, etc. Ask patron saints and friends to intercede for you at this time. Fr. Timothy Gallagher, OMV emphasizes that, in his experience of spiritual direction, time in silence in the front of the Blessed Sacrament is a proven "sweet spot" for hearing the Lord. If you seriously want to know God's will - then seriously, pray seriously!

Skill

7 Knowledge and Attitudes allow you to implement some pretty sweet skills right now. You know the deal about joining CCO staff, you've done your reading, you've talked to people. You have a handle on the facts. You've thought about yourself and whether working with CCO would be a good fit and you're feeling comfortable about that too. You're coming to the decision with an awareness of the necessary attitudes, and you're bought in. You're willing to seek to maintain holy indifference throughout the actual discernment. Now it's time to get at the practical skills.

Clarity

1. Question

First thing you need to do is formulate a clear question for discernment.

For example:

- Am I called to join CCO staff as a campus missionary intern this May?
- Am I called to use my gifts to serve as a CCO missionary in the finance department?
- Am I called to give a year to CCO in the Vine program?



2. Timing

What are the deadlines at play? What are the preferred deadlines for CCO? (You don't have to wait for the last minute to apply, you know. In fact, it makes things easier for everyone if you apply as soon as you know, in order for us to begin processing things efficiently. Perhaps you have other options on the table like higher learning, or other mission work. Take note of when their deadlines are, prioritize which option should you discern first and to make sure you have time to be open to all options. (Note: it is best to discern one option at a time. Rule out one option then go on to the next.).

Once you know when would be good time to send in your application, work backwards to calculate a time frame to focus on the discernment. Here's a suggested time frame:

- Pray about it for 2 focused weeks.
- Book in with your Spiritual Director to discuss.
- Allow for another week for confirmation or further prayer.
- Touch base again with your Spiritual Director, if necessary.
- Step out in faith.

You've done a lot of preparing to make this discernment. Spiritually and personally, you should be in a place of calmness, or peace - not in a deep, ongoing place of desolation - to make such a decision. But if you are in a "normal" place spiritually, discerning to join CCO staff doesn't have to take months. If you are prepared and are being intentional in your discernment, you might find two or three weeks gives enough clarity. This may sound radical, but think about it. Most people tend to discern "lightly" or haphazardly over a long period of time. Praying more or less generally about a new opportunity. Throughout that extended time, they often succumb to whatever seems to feel most inviting or comfortable to them.

You are being invited to be way more intentional than that! You are going to be focused on seeking the Lord and being open to hearing him. You will be intensifying your prayer and efforts with readiness and abandonment to God's will. It's beautiful! The Lord is so pleased with this approach and He will meet you there.

9 Three Modes of Discernment

St. Ignatius teaches us that there are three modes or times for discernment:

1. "First Mode" - Flaming Arrow from Heaven!

"First Mode" discernment is when God is so obviously and unmistakably communicating to you what He wants you to do that you can't deny what He has said. (Don't we all wish! But it could happen.)

2. "Second Mode" - Discernment of Spirits (Consolations & Desolations)

"Second Mode" discernment is when through the discernment of Spirits you are aware and understand how the Holy Spirit is prompting you. You are also even aware of what the Enemy is prompting you to do. As you weigh the evidence from these days of prayer, you are confident, you have peace, courage and clarity about what God is leading you to do.

Read Ignatian Rules for Discernment of Spirits. - In brief, it says the Enemy discourages, deceives, and causes us to doubt God's goodness with false reasons. God leads us through inflaming our heart with love for God, making us want to aspire from good to better in his service.

In consolation reflect on the decision:

When you are feeling God inspiring you and giving you consolation in prayer; or at the end of the day when you do an Examen* and reflect on when you felt close to God in the moments of the day, ask yourself: How does this inform the decision to join CCO staff?

Reflect on movements of desolation

When you are feeling desolation, how does that affect the way you think about joining CCO staff? This is of interest because St. Ignatius tells that the Enemy acts in the opposite way of the Good Spirit. So if you feel discouraged spiritually and thinking about joining CCO seems like a really bad idea, ask yourself, "What voice is speaking to me right now? God or the Enemy?" Whose voice is prompting you to act?"

Do not be afraid to look at the thoughts of desolation squarely and seek the truth and attack the lies being presented to you. God will lead you from a place of consolation not a place of desolation. So, if God doesn't want you to join CCO staff you will have peace, courage and clarity about making that decision.

3. "Third Mode" - Weigh Pros & Cons

"Third Mode" discernment is embarked upon traditionally if you have not found satisfying clarity in the "Second Mode". Some people choose to do both simultaneously. Third mode discernment is more of a rational approach of weighing the pros and cons of responding positively or negatively to the question at hand. Sounds clear enough. Aha!

But there's a catch. For St. Ignatius it is weighing the pros and cons of the decision in light of God's greater glory. That's a twist and a fantastic exercise for discernment. So you go through the question like this: "If I do join CCO staff, how is this decision for God's greater glory? Or is it a detriment to God's greater glory?" Make two columns and hammer out those reasons, ALWAYS from the perspective of God's greater glory. You can look at it from another angle and see if this gives new clarity: "If I do NOT join CCO staff, how is this for God's greater glory? How is it not for God's greater glory?" (Yes, you may find many of the answers will be the same. But the process will help you to look at it from all sides.)

Afterwards, you look at the answers and take them to prayer and consider the weight each reason holds. For example, one reason alone in one column may carry more weight than half a dozen weaker reasons combined in the other column.

Examen on Prerequisites for Discernment of God's Will

Daily check your heart in all of these. Are you fervently seeking the Lord in prayer?

Are you striving to have holy indifference from attractions and fears?

Are you seeking God's greater glory?

Here is a more in-depth tool you can use daily to maintain holy indifference thanks to the Companions of the Cross.

Ask you self these questions everyday in your discernment.

- Am I satisfactorily informed about and do I understand the situation for choice and the real alternatives open to me?
- Do I sincerely desire to know God's will, no matter what it may be? Am I giving God permission in my life and with my life?
- Am I honestly and firmly determined to do whatever turns out to be God's will, no matter how hard it may appear? (It may, of course, be what I would very much enjoy doing.)
- Do I have any desire or aversion, hope or fear or resentment, which could block out the truth from appearing to me even though I truly want to find God's will and do it? If so, what am I doing to free my- self?
- Have I prayed intensely that God will not only create and maintain the right dispositions in me, but also that he will enlighten my mind to see what he wants me to see, guide my reason, move my heart toward what he wants me to choose?
- Does there seem to be any unjustified prejudgment, any questionable assumption, which could lock me in to or out of any real alternative for choice in this situation? If so, what am I doing to free my- self?
- Do I have entire trust in God that he will lead me to his will if I do my best to find it? Is my faith ultimately in him alone, not in my human abilities and efforts except insofar as he works through them?
- Have I been contemplating Jesus and meditating on his teachings so that I can see and respond to the situation for choice with its real alternatives in accord with his mind and heart?
- Am I considering, above all, what God is inviting me to do for his glory?

Next Steps

1. Seek counsel from those who are spiritually mature and know you. This includes but does not limit you from talking to your Spiritual Director.

2. Make a tentative decision. Regardless of which mode or modes you used, when you feel you have enough knowledge to make a decision do so tentatively.

3. Seek confirmation. Now that you are pretty sure of what the decision is, take that to prayer and ask the Lord to confirm it with more of his peace, courage and clarity. If there is not courage but rather fear, take this to prayer as well. Where did the fear suddenly come from? Ask the Lord about it. Beg him for clarity. Talk to mature spiritual counsel about it.

4. Finalize the decision. There should be a sense of satisfaction and completion in the process. You have prayed about it as well as anyone really could and you feel confident that God has given you a green light to move forward. Is there satisfying and sufficient evidence that you are moving in the right direction Whether joining CCO staff is for His greater glory.

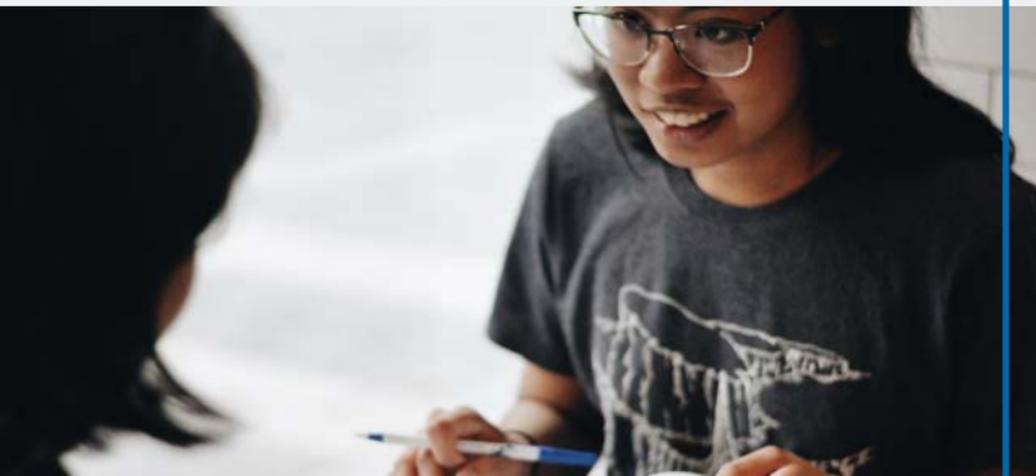


5. Additional help questions for clarity:

a. What advice would you give someone else in your shoes? If you heard this exact discernment journey from someone else, and they asked you what you think God is saying, what would you say?

b. Any regrets if you don't do it? St. Ignatius challenges us to ask ourselves, when we go to heaven and face the Living God, can you look him in the eye knowing you made a decision pleasing to Him? Imagine, what might He say about your decision?

6. Remember - there are two parties discerning this call to join CCO: you and CCO. Your discernment is a discernment to apply. CCO's discernment is that of determining if you are a fit with our mission, calling and culture. This gives freedom as well to let the Lord confirm whether joining CCO staff is for His greater glory.



Prayer

An important skill here is that of praying. Praying is having an honest conversation with the Living God. It implies a two-way conversation. We can speak to God and He will “speak” to us through Scripture, memories, emotions, experiences, thoughts and others. Here are some key ways to pray while discerning.

1. Personal Daily Prayer

It is preferable that you do this in the morning. You should allow for at least 20 minutes and up to an hour for prayer. Include reading of Scripture, lectio divina and journaling. The question of your discernment to join staff is the lens for your prayer times during these days/weeks of intentional discernment. Begin your time of prayer with an examen of your heart in light of holy indifference and magis. Are biases or fears cropping up in my discernment? Do I desire to fully give God permission in my life? Do I desire to live for God’s greater glory? What could be holding me back?

In your lectio divina (meditation on the Scriptures), ask yourself: What in the Scriptures stood out? What brought you consolation? What bothered you? How are the Scriptures teaching you about the Lord? About yourself? About your relationship with the Lord? About the idea of joining staff?

2. Intercessory Prayer

Do something more to intercede for the decision at hand as already mentioned (Novena, Holy Hours in front of the Blessed Sacrament, fasting, etc.)

3. Sacraments

Seek grace in this important time. Get to daily Mass if possible. Ensure you go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation to be in a state of grace during this time of discernment.

4. Daily Examen

At the end of the day, before bed, for 15 minutes invite the Lord to show you where He was present to you in the day. Where was He close? Where were you discouraged or led away from him? What stood out from your day? What is it all about? Does any of this inform your thoughts about joining CCO staff?

DAILY EXAMEN

The Examen is a method of reviewing your day in the presence of God. It usually takes place at the end of the day for 15 minutes.

1. Pray for light

Begin by asking God for the grace to pray, to see and to understand.

2. Give thanks

Look at your day in a spirit of gratitude.

3. Review the day

Guided by the Holy Spirit, look back on your day.

Pay attention to your experiences.

When did you feel close to the Lord?

What stands out?

What might the Lord be teaching you or showing you?

4. Look at what's wrong

Face up to failures and shortcomings.

Ask forgiveness for your faults.

Ask God to show you ways to improve.

5. Resolution

What have I learned that I can practically apply to how I think and act tomorrow?

What truths do I need to cling to?

What lies do I need to reject?

5. The Suscipe Prayer

Recite this prayer daily in seeking holy indifference and the “magis” in this discernment.

Suscipe

composed by St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours;
do with it what you will.
Give me only your love
and your grace,
that is enough for me.
Amen

First Week Rules for Discernment of Spirits

First Rule. The first Rule: In the persons who go from mortal sin to mortal sin, the enemy is commonly used to propose to them apparent pleasures, making them imagine sensual delights and pleasures in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins. In these persons the good spirit uses the opposite method, pricking them and biting their consciences through the process of reason.

Second Rule. The second: In the persons who are going on intensely cleansing their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord, it is the method contrary to that in the first Rule, for then it is the way of the evil spirit to bite, sadden and put obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, that one may not go on; and it is proper to the good to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing, and putting away all obstacles, that one may go on in well doing.

Third Rule. The third: Of Spiritual Consolation. I call it consolation when some interior movement in the soul is caused, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord; and when it can in consequence love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but in the Creator of them all.

Likewise, when it sheds tears that move to love of its Lord, whether out of sorrow for one's sins, or for the Passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other things directly connected with His service and praise.

Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord.

Fourth Rule. The fourth: Of Spiritual Desolation. I call desolation all the contrary of the third rule, such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to things low and earthly, the unquiet of different agitations and temptations, moving to want of confidence, without hope, without love, when one finds oneself all lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from his Creator and Lord. Because, as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts which come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts which come from desolation.

Fifth Rule. The fifth: In time of desolation never to make a change; but to be firm and constant in the resolutions and determination in which one was the day preceding such desolation, or in the determination in which he was in the preceding consolation. Because, as in consolation it is rather the good spirit who guides and counsels us, so in desolation it is the bad, with whose counsels we cannot take a course to decide rightly.

Sixth Rule. The sixth: Although in desolation we ought not to change our first resolutions, it is very helpful intensely to change ourselves against the same desolation, as by insisting more on prayer, meditation, on much examination, and by giving ourselves more scope in some suitable way of doing penance.

Seventh Rule. The seventh: Let him who is in desolation consider how the Lord has left him in trial in his natural powers, in order to resist the different agitations and temptations of the enemy; since he can with the Divine help, which always remains to him, though he does not clearly perceive it: because the Lord has taken from him his great fervor, great love and intense grace, leaving him, however, grace enough for eternal salvation.

Eighth Rule. The eighth: Let him who is in desolation labor to be in patience, which is contrary to the vexations which come to him: and let him think that he will soon be consoled, employing against the desolation the devices, as is said in the sixth Rule.

Ninth Rule. The ninth: There are three principal reasons why we find ourselves desolate.

9.1 The first is, because of our being tepid, lazy or negligent in our spiritual exercises; and so through our faults, spiritual consolation withdraws from us.

9.2 The second, to try us and see how much we are and how much we let ourselves out in His service and praise without such great pay of consolation and great graces.

9.3 The third, to give us true acquaintance and knowledge, that we may interiorly feel that it is not ours to get or keep great devotion, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is the gift and grace of God our Lord, and that we may not build a nest in a thing not ours, raising our intellect into some pride or vainglory, attributing to us devotion or the other things of the spiritual consolation.

Tenth Rule. The tenth: Let him who is in consolation think how he will be in the desolation which will come after, taking new strength for then.

Eleventh Rule. The eleventh: Let him who is consoled see to humbling himself and lowering himself as much as he can, thinking how little he is able for in the time of desolation without such grace or consolation.

On the contrary, let him who is in desolation think that he can do much with the grace sufficient to resist all his enemies, taking strength in his Creator and Lord. [REMEMBER]

Twelfth Rule. The twelfth: The enemy acts like a woman [BRAT], in being weak against vigor and strong of will. Because, as it is the way of the woman when she is quarrelling with some man to lose heart, taking flight when the man shows her much courage: and on the contrary, if the man,

losing heart, begins to fly, the wrath, revenge, and ferocity of the woman is very great, and so without bounds; in the same manner, it is the way of the enemy to weaken and lose heart, his temptations taking flight, when the person who is exercising himself in spiritual things opposes a bold front against the temptations of the enemy, doing diametrically the opposite. And on the contrary, if the person who is exercising himself commences to have fear and lose heart in suffering the temptations, there is no beast so wild on the face of the earth as the enemy of human nature in following out his damnable intention with so great malice.

Thirteenth Rule. The thirteenth: Likewise, he acts as a licentious lover in wanting to be secret and not revealed. For, as the licentious man who, speaking for an evil purpose, solicits a daughter of a good father or a wife of a good husband, wants his words and persuasions to be secret, and the contrary displeases him much, when the daughter reveals to her father or the wife to her husband his licentious words and depraved intention, because he easily gathers that he will not be able to succeed with the undertaking begun: in the same way, when the enemy of human nature brings his wiles and persuasions to the just soul, he wants and desires that they be received and kept in secret; but when one reveals them to his good Confessor or to another spiritual person that knows his deceits and evil ends, it is very grievous to him, because he gathers, from his manifest deceits being discovered, that he will not be able to succeed with his wickedness begun.

Fourteenth Rule. The fourteenth: Likewise, he behaves as a chief bent on conquering and robbing what he desires: for, as a captain and chief of the army, pitching his camp, and looking at the forces or defences of a stronghold, attacks it on the weakest side, in like manner the enemy of human nature, roaming about, looks in turn at all our virtues, theological, cardinal and moral; and where he finds us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and aims at taking us.

Resources:

- The Discernment of Spirits, and Discerning the Will of God by Fr. Timothy Gallagher
- Discerninghearts.com (website and app) – podcasts by Fr. Timothy Gallagher
- Daily Examen app
- Pray as you go app
- careers.cco.ca

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