



# Listening and collaborative decision-making

## Governance through a discernment lens

### **Metaphor to hold in mind:**

*What if a board meeting wasn't a courtroom or a theatre—but a circle?*

In the movement that is the Uniting Church, there's an attempt to elevate decision-making beyond "out-arguing" or "out-voting." Instead decision making is primarily about discernment—a slower, sometimes messier process where truth emerges through attention, humility, and care. Not just in what is said, but in who is heard, when, and in what spirit.

If we governed more like discerners and less like deciders, what would we notice first? And what might we hear that we've missed?

## The 10 facets reframed through a listening lens

<b>Facet</b>	What might we hear differently?
<b>Role clarity</b>	Are we genuinely drawing on staff wisdom—or drifting into micromanagement masked as consultation?
<b>Strategic vision</b>	Who had a hand in shaping this vision? Who didn't? What might those absent voices have named?
<b>Board composition</b>	Are we favouring confident talkers, or creating space for those who shift conversations through depth, not volume?
<b>Financial stewardship</b>	What do our budgets inadvertently assume about what (and who) we value?
<b>Risk management</b>	Are we aware of moral and relational risk—or mostly tracking liability?
<b>Succession</b>	Who are we noticing as future leaders? And who, by habit or bias, are we not seeing at all?
<b>Transparency</b>	Is our communication a closed loop—or are we creating space for honest response?
<b>Stakeholder engagement</b>	Are we asking questions out of real curiosity—or just confirming what we already believe?
<b>Community partnership</b>	Have we stopped to ask our partners what's changed for them—or are we relying on assumptions from years past?
<b>Board effectiveness</b>	How well do we listen—especially when we disagree, or when something personal is at stake?

### Prompted inquiry: for your board conversation

1. Think of a decision we've made recently. Would deeper listening have shifted it? How?
2. How do we shape our meeting structures—to move efficiently through tasks, or to make room for genuine attention?
3. Which parts of our school community do we hear from most easily? Which ones take effort, or creativity, to tune into?
4. What familiar habits, personalities, or power dynamics might be dampening dissent—or accidentally flattening difference?

## **Practice: The silent spiral**

### *A 15-minute spiritual governance activity*

1. Choose a current issue or strategic question.
2. Each person privately writes down their initial thoughts (2 mins)—what feels important, unresolved, surprising, or emotionally charged about the issue at hand.
3. Rather than going around the circle in sequence—which can turn listening into waiting for your turn—invite participants to share their written thoughts only when they feel ready. Create pauses between speakers. Encourage genuine listening, not rehearsing.
4. Pause for 90 seconds of silence.
5. Open 7–10 minutes of conversation. Notice what builds, what deepens, what changes.
6. End with this: What surfaced here that wouldn't have shown up in a regular discussion?

## **A final question to take into your next meeting**

### *What does it mean to be a listening board—not just an informed one?*

