

# Period of Discernment



An information kit for those wishing to  
explore their future ministry



Updated February 2013 by:  
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## Overview

At the heart of this process is the understanding that discipleship and ministry is a calling on all people who have been baptised. This ministry may be expressed:

- within the local congregation
- in your workplace or the community
- or within one of the specified ministries of the Uniting Church.

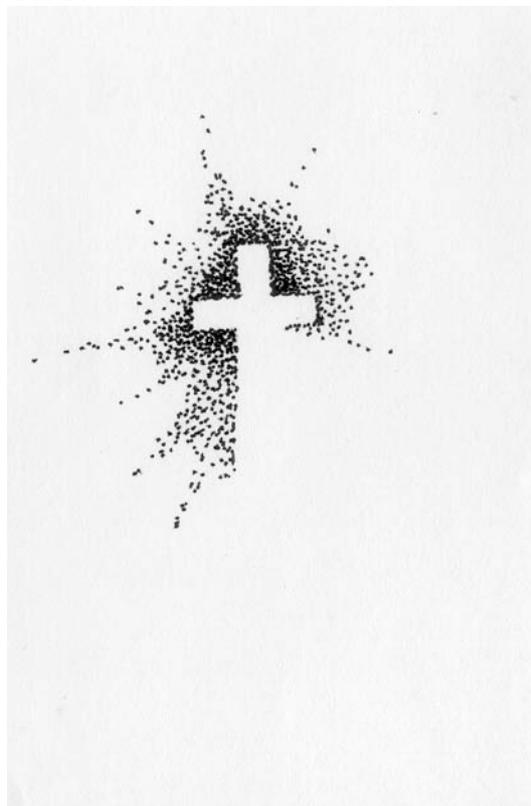
We believe that no ministry is more important or more holy than any other.

The Period of Discernment is a process approved by the National Assembly in 1997 to enable the church and individuals together, to discern God's call on their life for future ministry and where our individual ministry lies.

Whilst all people considering offering as a candidate for one of the specified ministries of the church have to participate in the Period of Discernment, it is not just for such people. There are no pre-determined outcomes - the Period of Discernment provides an opportunity for all members of the church to clarify God's call on their lives to serve in any number of different areas.

At a number of points during the Period of Discernment process, you will meet with representatives of the church, and together you will seek to discover God's directions for your life.

Those people who are considering offering themselves as a candidate for one of the specified ministries should read *Candidating for Specified Ministry* on Page 28 prior to registering for the Period of Discernment.



# STEPS though the Period of Discernment

## Step 1

Speak with your Minister or Church Council. Your congregation, along with the Presbytery should support you as you work through the P.O.D.

Uniting Mission and Education (UME) and your Presbytery representatives are available to provide you with assistance through the Period of Discernment, particularly if you need help with the process or have questions about the educational components.



## Step 2

Send your Registration for the POD to your Presbytery office using the Registration form in this kit. You will need to attach a brief statement (100 - 200 words) outlining your reasons for applying to participate in the Period of Discernment. This statement is not an entry test. Rather it will help you clarify your reasons for participating in the POD and what you hope to gain from the experience. This statement should be given to your minister or church council for endorsement (not approval). Your Presbytery office will pass your registration on to the POD contact person in your Presbytery.

Uniting Mission and Education (UME) and your Presbytery representatives are available for help and advice at any point in your Period of Discernment should it be required. At the point of this initial 'registration' the Presbytery will appoint a mentor, either the person of your choice or another appropriate person.



## Step 3

Once appointed, work with your mentor, and your Presbytery representatives to develop your Discernment Plan (you might find it helpful to also develop a timeline in conjunction with the Learning Plan - see pages 23 - 27) and submit it to your Presbytery representatives in order to complete your registration. Provided the Discernment (Learning) Agreement is submitted within 6 weeks of your initial registration date (that is the date your Presbytery appoints your mentor), your original registration date will be valid. Again, your Learning Agreement will be forwarded to your Presbytery contact person.

(Some people may combine Steps 2 & 3. They may have worked with their proposed mentor, or Presbytery on the Learning Agreement and submitted it to the Presbytery with the Registration Form)



## Step 4

Work through your Period of Discernment (Learning) Agreement and meet with your mentor regularly (at least 2 hours once a month).



### Step 5

Develop your Portfolio with your mentor for presentation to the Presbytery.



### Step 6

Meet with Presbytery representatives to discuss your portfolio, your ministry experience and your learnings. Your portfolio should contain a collection of things that have come from your time doing the POD. For instance it may contain your journal, notes, photos, reflections and so on. It should also include a statement outlining what you have discerned as a result of the Period of Discernment.



### Step 7

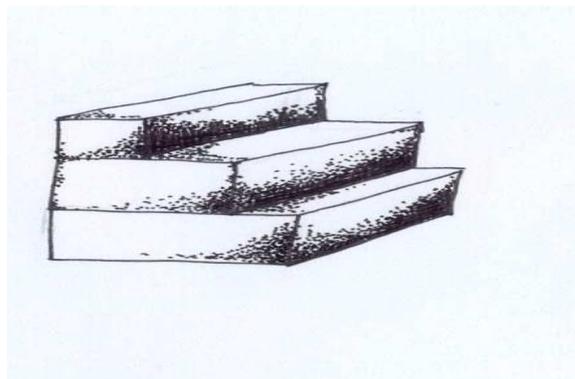
Presbytery will issue a statement of completion for your Period of Discernment.



### Step 8

Carry out ongoing ministry and discipleship within or beyond your local congregation. If you and the church have discerned a call to one of the specified ministries you will need to explore this option by offering yourself as a candidate for ministry through your Presbytery, and proceed through the usual application and selection processes for specified ministries.

**(Completion of the Period of Discernment does not qualify anyone for direct acceptance as a candidate for a specified ministry - you must still apply and be accepted as a candidate through the normal processes.)**



### Stewart's Story

*I had done a number of different types of ministry in the past and didn't feel any particular sense of where my "call" or "niche" was for the future. I entered the POD process just to have a look at what the options might be. The POD process was great as it enabled me to talk to a wide variety of people in different types of ministry. The study and practical components opened up ministry opportunities that I had not considered before and affirmed gifts that I didn't recognise strongly before. I completed my POD with no clear sense of direction for the future, however it provided a strong affirmation that I was in the right place for the time being. Because of the POD process, should I feel a sense of call or desire to change my place of ministry, I think I have a broader, more insightful and positive understanding of what other forms of ministry might entail.*

### Goals of the Period of Discernment:

- To develop your relationship with God within the church community and your understanding of yourself as a Christian disciple;
- To give you an opportunity to understand the ministry of the church, the variety of ministries within that whole ministry both lay and specified ministries (such as Youth Worker, Deacon and Minister of the Word, Lay Pastor and Lay Preacher) and the function, purpose and responsibilities of these ministries;
- To enable both the church and you to discern better your gifts and graces for ministry, and the type of ministry in which these gifts and graces may be expressed;
- To recognise, affirm and build upon skills, knowledge and experience that you bring to the Period of Discernment.

In preparation for undergoing the Period of Discernment, why not reflect on your hopes for the Period of Discernment? (This could form the basis of your first journal entry.)



## Key Educational Elements of the Period of Discernment

There are a number of key elements in the Period of Discernment learning process as outlined in the Assembly Guidelines (page 20). Firstly you will need to prepare a discernment agreement with a mentor which will include some study, hands on ministry experience and some reflection both with your mentor and personally, for which you will keep a journal. The way you fulfil these requirements should be discussed with your mentor, and be appropriate to your gifts, the areas of ministry you wish to explore, and to the level of study you wish to be involved in. You will also be required to prepare a portfolio which documents your learning about your ministry during the Period of Discernment. The learning components of the Period of Discernment are outlined below (there are a number of options for the study components of the Period of Discernment in the NSW-ACT Synod):

**1) Meet with a mentor.** In addition to the three formal learning components below, you are required to meet regularly with a mentor (at least once every 4-6 weeks) who will help you reflect theologically and integrate your learning and ministry experiences. In some cases, meeting face to face with your mentor may be difficult. You may choose to speak with your mentor on the phone, or use email as your method of communication. As you approach the end of your Period of Discernment, your mentor will also help in the development of your portfolio. (For specific responsibilities of mentors see page 14.)

**2) Field education/ministry experience.** You are required to do some local hands-on ministry experience. This will provide an opportunity to exercise ministry under supervision in a local context, with appropriate reflection. This may include ministry in a community welfare agency, ministry within a neighbouring congregation, visiting a local hospital or aged care facility, or undertaking a Practicum unit offered by an appropriate educational facility or agency.

**3) Some elective study in ministry and/or mission.** This study may be undertaken through a number of educational facilities. Some additional options for study in this area include:

A unit of study with a practical component in a “ministry and mission” or “pastoral theology” field;

Skills training - SRE course, Eldership training, Seasons of the Spirit;

Social welfare training;

Counselling, pastoral care;

Retreats (For a list of educational facilities, retreats, seminars see page 33)

### Ask yourself:

How do these connect with ministry and mission?

How might God use this training, skills and ministry situation?

**Note:** it is possible to have recognition of prior learning (RPL) for study undertaken within 5 years of applying to do the POD. However while participants may be released from some study and ministry requirements of the POD, it is still expected that they spend a minimum of 6 months working with a mentor.

**4) Biblical and/or theological study.** This may be done through one or more of the following educational bodies:

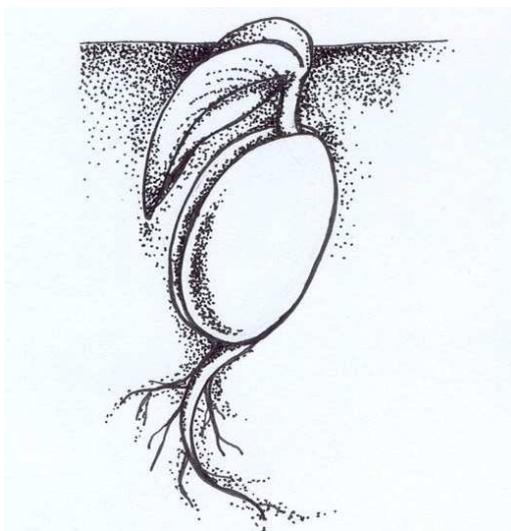
United Theological College;  
Wesley Institute;  
Coolamon College;  
Nungalinga College in Darwin OR Yalga Binbi College in Townsville (for indigenous Australians);  
Universities eg. Charles Sturt, Macquarie Institute of Christian Studies;  
Bible study programs eg. Kerygma, Disciple, KYB.

Please note that **UME** - as the NSW-ACT Synod designated resource agency - will provide guidance for your studies, including the educational facility, or agency most appropriate for you.

The aim of these three components of learning is to enhance your skills for ministry in addition to helping you explore your giftedness in relation to your call for future ministry.

**5) Journal.** You will also be expected to keep a journal as you work through the Period of Discernment. Journaling is a useful spiritual discipline in which you regularly note your learnings, experiences and reflections on your Christian journey. The form this takes is up to you. Your journal may take the form of poems, prayers, accounts of significant experiences or incidents, helpful quotes, drawings - anything that makes an impact on you during your Period of Discernment. Your journal may be part of the material you use to form the basis of your discussions with your mentor, and may be helpful when drawing up your portfolio as you come to the end of your Period of Discernment. However your journal is your private record - you do not have to share this with anyone. (For help on Journaling see page 16.)

**Spiritual Formation.** It is expected that the whole process of the Period of Discernment is one of spiritual formation. This includes not only all components of your Discernment Agreement, but it is expected that you will also reflect seriously on your own worship and prayer life and how that is integrated in everything else you do. Your involvement in the worshipping life of your own congregation is a key element.



## **Jenny's Story**

*At the end of November 2000, I sat in church one Sunday evening and felt a restlessness that I wanted to do more for God. I had no idea what I was being called to, so I contacted a friend who was also a minister at my previous church. He suggested a programme to me called the Period of Discernment (POD). This programme included theological study, personal journaling, having a mentor to assist with the whole process and finding a mission/ministry focus within the local church to work with. To me, one of the benefits of this programme was that I remained in my current job and was able to challenge myself within my everyday life. I did not have to remove myself from my "life", just make certain adjustments to meet the goals and aims of the programme. Unfortunately, during my year of discerning, there were many personal hardships that affected my spiritual journey and my ability to discover God's calling on my life. My POD became a test and another form of stress, instead of an opportunity to search deeper and increase my confidence in an all knowing and all powerful God. I can see now that this was a wilderness experience, something that every Christian faces. It was also something vital to my POD. I knew that God was everywhere, but I learnt that I need to let God take control, pray constantly and allow others to support us through difficult times.*

*At the conclusion of my POD I did not feel a call to a specific ministry, but I learnt that undertaking this programme is not just for those called to be ministers. It's a great time for anyone to look at their spiritual journey, to reflect on where God is in their lives and how to renew and refresh their relationship with Him. I also learnt that it's OK to struggle with our faith and spirituality as this provides us with the opportunity to learn, grow and mature in our Christian journey.*



## Frequently Asked Questions

**What is the Period of Discernment (POD)?** It is an intentional time of study, reflection, and experience guided by a mentor, to discern the call of God on your life.

**What the POD is not.** The Period of Discernment is not simply a forerunner to candidating for a specified ministry within the Uniting Church in Australia. It is a formalised way for members of the Uniting Church to work through the challenge of discerning God's call on their lives.

**Who is it for?** Any member, member in association or adherent (in good standing) of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Provided you meet these criteria, anyone can register for the Period of Discernment. You do not need approval from your congregation or presbytery, however your congregation and presbytery have an important part in supporting you during your Period of Discernment.

If you are considering a future in a specified ministry, working through the Period of Discernment is a requirement prior to offering yourself for candidature.

**How do you register?** Through your Presbytery office after speaking with your congregational minister (or church council in the absence of a minister in settlement). Your Presbytery office will pass your registration on immediately to your presbytery's contact person who will appoint your mentor.

In order to complete your registration, you must submit your Discernment (Learning) Agreement to your Presbytery within 6 weeks of the appointment of your mentor.

**What happens if I can't get my Discernment (Learning) Agreement submitted in time?** The Presbytery may have to adjust your registration date accordingly.

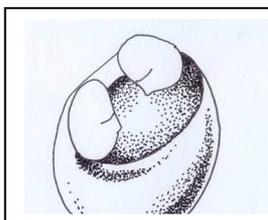
**When does the Registration become 'official'?** Your registration for the Period of Discernment is 'official' once the Presbytery has appointed a Mentor and you have completed and submitted your Discernment (Learning) Agreement.

**How is the Mentor arranged?** As the person registering for the Period of Discernment you may wish to nominate a person you think might be appropriate to guide you in personal and theological reflection and who would be in a position to accept that role. However the mentor is appointed by your presbytery. If you do not know of an appropriate person, the presbytery will suggest a mentor to you.

**What is the role of the Mentor?** The Mentor is one way the Church helps you identify God's call. The Mentor walks alongside you as you work through the Period of Discernment:

- Meeting with you regularly for a minimum of 2 hours per month;
- Helps in the development of your discernment agreement;
- Monitors your implementation of the learning plan;
- Helps you reflect theologically, and integrate your ministry experience & learning;
- Guides you in development of your portfolio;
- Keeps the Presbytery informed on your progress;
- Notifies the Presbytery POD coordinator when you are ready to complete your Period of Discernment.

Your Mentor should not be a person who may be involved in any future selection process. This is particularly important if you discern a call to specified ministry. (More detail on the role of Mentor is available on page 14.)



**Can your Mentor be changed?** While it is desirable to have the same mentor throughout your Period of Discernment, the Presbytery can appoint another mentor should there be any problems in the relationship.

**How do I develop a Discernment Agreement?** The Discernment (Learning) Agreement will include your vision, goals, resources and timeline for completing your Period of Discernment. Your learning plan should be challenging, but at an appropriate level for you. You may, for instance, want to study at a certificate, diploma or degree level. You should work with your mentor to develop your Learning Agreement. If help is required in forming your discernment agreement please contact UME or your Presbytery.

**How long does the Period of Discernment take?** On average the Period of Discernment takes between 12 and 18 months, however you may work through it over a longer period of time. In certain circumstances, the Presbytery may determine that a shorter time is appropriate.

**What's the difference between the journal and the portfolio?** Your journal will be used to record things of a personal nature during your Period of Discernment. It is your private record of experiences, feelings and learnings.

The portfolio will primarily contain your reflections, both personal and theological, on your learning and ministry experience. The portfolio will be presented to Presbytery at the completion of your Period of Discernment.

**Are prior learning and experience taken into account?** Yes, provided it is recent (within the last 5 years). However your reflections on this experience and/or learning must be relevant to your present circumstances and you will still be required to work with a mentor for at least 6 months.

**How will my Period of Discernment be assessed?** The presbytery's responsibility is to provide oversight of the discernment process. Presbytery will therefore appoint a committee to listen to what you have discerned during your POD. There

is no pass or fail, rather the presbytery committee will have a conversation with you about what you have discerned and may add some wisdom that may be helpful in your future ministry.

**When is the Period of Discernment finished?** After assessment of your portfolio and discussion with you and your mentor, a statement of Participation will be issued indicating the areas of study and ministry experience completed.

It will also be considered finished if the presbytery writes a letter to indicate that little progress has been made and your Period of Discernment should finish.

**What if I wish to apply to candidate for a specified ministry?** If you have discerned a call to one of the specified ministries, Youth Worker, Deacon, minister of the Word, Lay Preacher or Lay Pastor, Community Minister, you will then have to offer yourself as a candidate to your Presbytery. Your portfolio will then form part of the material you will bring as part of that application process. Completion of the Period of Discernment does not mean you will necessarily be accepted as a candidate for specified ministry.

**But what if I've already discerned that I'm called to be a minister?** The church believes that the call to specified ministry comes both to an individual and through the church. In other words, your convictions are confirmed by other Christians within the life of the church and vice versa. The Period of Discernment provides an opportunity for you and the church together to discern God's call on your life.

**What about Funding?** The Period of Discernment is normally self-funded. You may be eligible for some assistance through Austudy or Abstudy if you enrol for an intensive semester of study as part of the process. A limited amount of grant funding may be available through your own congregation, the presbytery or synod. There are also a limited number of scholarships available through UTC.

**What role does the Presbytery have?** The Presbytery has oversight of people engaged in the Period of Discernment. Each Presbytery appoints a contact person for people enquiring about the Period of Discernment. The Presbytery's role during your Period of Discernment includes:

- Holding the registration;
- Appointing the mentor;
- Determining, after consultation with the mentor, the participant, and the Synod agency, that the Period of Discernment is completed;
- Issuing of a statement of completion.

**What should my Portfolio statement look like?** The portfolio statement should be a relatively brief account (no more than 5 pages) and analysis of what you have done during the Period of Discernment and how you have grown during that time. It provides an opportunity to:

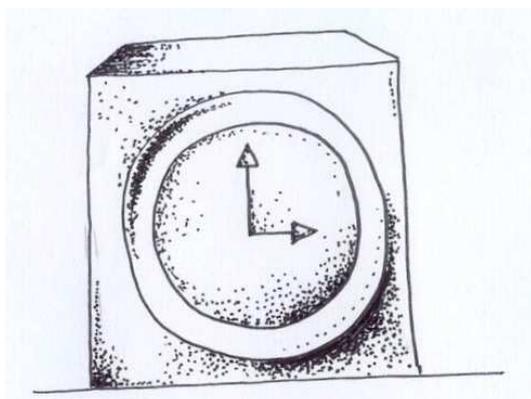
- Document your learnings about your ministry and yourself during the Period of Discernment;
- Allow the church, through the Presbytery representatives, to recognise and value these learnings;
- Outline your sense of call.

The portfolio statement should draw on a much larger collection of portfolio material (journal notes, personal reflections, sermon or lesson notes, drawings, reports, photos etc) which you have accumulated during the Period of

Discernment. It is a good idea to keep these items together for easy access when needed to form the portfolio.

The portfolio will show clearly the variety of tasks undertaken and what you with others have learned about the directions of your ministry. It should also provide evidence for this from a number of different sources, for example, reports from colleagues, accounts of your field/ministry experience and evaluation summaries and should be a reflective document rather than merely a list of tasks or achievements. It should link your understanding of ministry and mission to the tasks you undertook during the Period of Discernment.

You need not restrict yourself to written portfolios to document your learning throughout the Period of Discernment. It could, for instance, contain photos of, say, five key events during your ministry experience - the captions could form part of the evaluative process. Similarly, a video could feature key elements of your ministry experience - the voiceover providing evaluative comments or theological reflection.



**How long will the Period of Discernment take?** The POD takes a minimum of 12 months, spending up to 12 hours per week. However it is normally done over a longer period of time (average of 12 - 18 months). An example of the POD commitment at 12 hours per week:

Biblical/Theological study	3 hours per week
Ministry/Mission study	3 hours per week
Field experience	3 hours per week
Mentor session	varies
Personal reflection	1.5 hours per week

You could reduce your weekly time commitment to the Period of Discernment by taking only one unit of study per semester, thus reducing the time needed by 3 hours per week.

For more detail on study requirements contact:

**Bronwyn Murphy**, UME Consultant for:

Lay Ministry, Education, Discipleship, and Rural Ministry

Phone: **02 8267 4291**

e-mail: [bronwynm@nsw.uca.org.au](mailto:bronwynm@nsw.uca.org.au)

## My Mentor

*It was helpful for me to have a woman in full-time ordained ministry as a mentor. In the time I shared with her she was able to help me identify my gifts and affirm my passion. She asked challenging questions that helped me to articulate my faith journey and sense of call. I never felt pressured to have to come to any particular conclusions, she just encouraged me in the process of discovering things for myself and helped me reflect on what I was learning. I was also able to ask her practical questions about how she managed to maintain her marriage, raise children and look after herself while in full time ministry. These were important things for me consider as woman thinking about future ministry options that be might be long-term or full-time.*

## Planning your Period of Discernment

- 1) **Personal Growth & Spiritual Formation.** It is expected that you will seek and experience some personal growth and spiritual formation as you move through your Period of Discernment. There are many ways you address these areas:
  - you could go on retreat;
  - attend an Emmaus walk;
  - do some guided personal reflection (with or without your mentor);
  - trial a program of spiritual disciplines e.g. models of prayer (Augustine & Sadhana);
  - become part of an accountability group for spiritual support;
  - discuss spirituality with people from a range of other faith backgrounds eg orthodox, catholic, charismatic;
  - undertake a period of fasting or self sacrifice or re-examine healthy eating practices;
  - participate in an exercise program;
  - self awareness e.g. Myers Briggs or other similar programs
  - relationship and communication training.
- 2) **Mentoring.** Central to the POD process is the relationship between the person undergoing the Period of Discernment and their mentor. Your Presbytery will appoint a mentor for every person engaged in the POD. The mentor's responsibilities are:
  - To meet with you either face to face, on email, or by phone for at least 2 hours per month;
  - Help you develop your Discernment Agreement;
  - Help you reflect theologically and integrate your learning throughout your Period of Discernment;
  - Help you discern future directions for your ministry;
  - Help you develop your Portfolio.
- 3) **Field education/ministry experience - hands on experience.** This gives the opportunity to exercise ministry under supervision in a local context, followed by reflection on the experience. This could be part of a practicum at Coolamon, or field education at UTC.

- 4) **Biblical and/or theological study.** The level at which subjects for study are taken will be appropriate to your background and needs for discernment. For instance, you may study at a diploma level, however if you wish to progress to a specified ministry, you should consider studying at a Bachelor level.
- 5) **Elective study in ministry & mission.** In ministry and/or mission - a practical component such as pastoral theology, ministry and mission, conferences on specific ministry areas or accredited workshops.

## Mentoring and the Period of Discernment

The mentor relationship is a vital part of your Period of Discernment. Although you are welcome to nominate a person who you think would be suitable to be your mentor, the Presbytery will appoint the mentor for you.

Here are some guidelines of what can happen in your times together:

- Some of your early meetings you will spend time getting to know each other, and learning what is 'safe';
- You can pray together and for each other;
- Study the bible together;
- Explore questions together.

The mentor should question you about your learning, your experiences and what you are observing, and help you reflect theologically on your experiences.

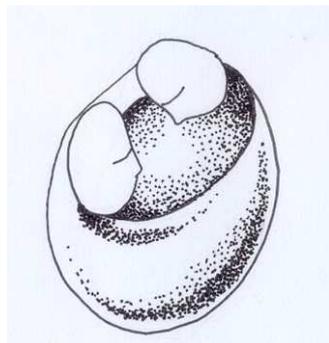
### **Me a mentor?**

*I was flattered to be asked. Then I wondered what wisdom I had. Mainly, it involved listening and valuing the other. I knew and liked the person who asked me, but I grew to love the person in a totally different way, because I had the rare opportunity to really watch what God was doing in their life and talk about it. Wow! This inspired my faith. I learnt a lot about trying to look at someone else with a pair of "see-like-God" glasses on. It also helped me to be mentored by someone else and to accept that ministry from someone.*

*We had to be a bit disciplined about time and goals. Mentoring happened in a variety of ways: person-to-person meetings, phone, letter, email & SMS. The person I was mentoring was also doing a POD - this kept us both accountable and helped give a framework for stuff. The person also ended up candidating for a specified ministry. This involved my doing a bit more research and trying to make sure the portfolio and paperwork were in a form other people would understand - i.e. the Committees and Task Groups that Candidates talk with. I still pray for the person regularly.*

Most mentors are ordinary people who are good at caring, communicating and enjoy being with other people. If mentoring for a participant in the Period of Discernment, Mentors should:

- Meet with you, the participant one to one either face to face, on email, on the phone or even by fax or letter;
- Make themselves available as much as is reasonable to meet with you - at least 2 hours once per month, and at other times as needed;
- Help you develop your Discernment Agreement;
- Be a good listener;
- Have wide experience of the Uniting Church;
- Be committed to lay and ordained ministry within the church;
- Willing and able to ask probing, challenging and thoughtful questions;
- Be able to help the participant reflect and integrate their learning and experience personally and theologically;
- Focus the discussion on your relationship with God, and growth in faith and discipleship;
- Help you discern future directions for ministry;
- Be able to help you to explore factors which may help or hinder you in ministry;
- Be willing and able to discuss and explore their faith;
- Be willing to learn themselves, and encourage you to learn;
- Know how to develop rapport with others;
- Be wise encouragers and appropriate affirmers;
- Be trusting and able to maintain confidentiality;
- Help you develop your portfolio statement for presentation to the Presbytery representative;
- Advise you honestly, or seek advice on the steps you might take to follow God's call on your life.



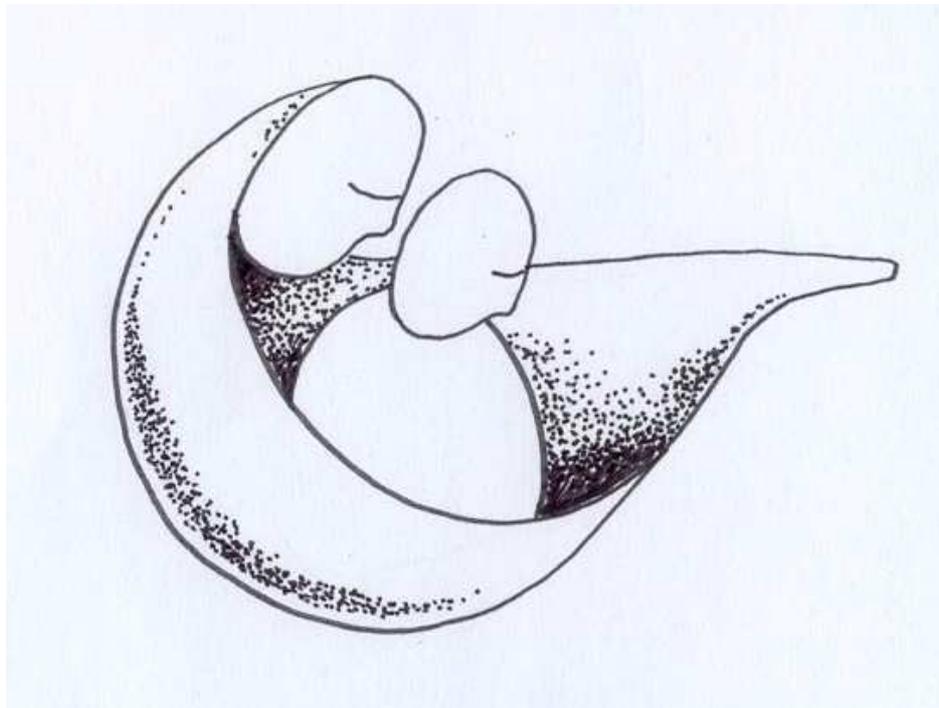
## Some guidelines for the relationship:

**Where will you meet?** It is important to meet somewhere where both parties will feel comfortable and safe, for example a café or public park. While both parties may have the best intentions for this relationship, other people must see this as being the case too.

**Be careful about physical contact.** Most people feel uncomfortable about physical contact until they know the person very well. Let the mentoree initiate any contact, and make sure you ask before giving them a hug.

**Confidentiality.** At the very beginning of the relationship establish the expectation of confidentiality, not telling anyone else about the discussions you have.

**Contracts.** Some mentoring partners decide to write a contract or covenant which expresses the commitment to meet regularly and be confidential about what is discussed. Think about whether you want to do this.



**Mentoree.** In order to make the most of the mentoring relationship the person being mentored also needs to bring something to the relationship. You should:

- Be willing to listen, reflect, grow and learn personally and spiritually;
- Be willing to be open, be challenged and explore your faith openly;
- Be trusting and sensitive;
- Take the experience seriously and contribute to the relationship;
- Be willing to meet with your mentor regularly for at least 2 hours per month, and be reliable;
- Be flexible and make yourself available when your mentor is available;
- Be willing to ask for help when needed;
- Show appreciation to your mentor;
- Care for your mentor.

It is the responsibility of the mentor **and** the mentoree to arrange meeting times and ensure that they happen. The mentor is required to make themselves available as much as is possible within reason, and to offer content and direction for those times. Participants should note that in real life and ministry, you often have to find for yourself those who will support and nurture you. That is, often you have to do the hard work to be supported. Some may do this without being asked, but often not.

The times when mentor and participant meet should be challenging, exciting and even fun. We believe that you will both benefit.

(This resource draws on the work and intellectual property of Cheryl Lawrie.)

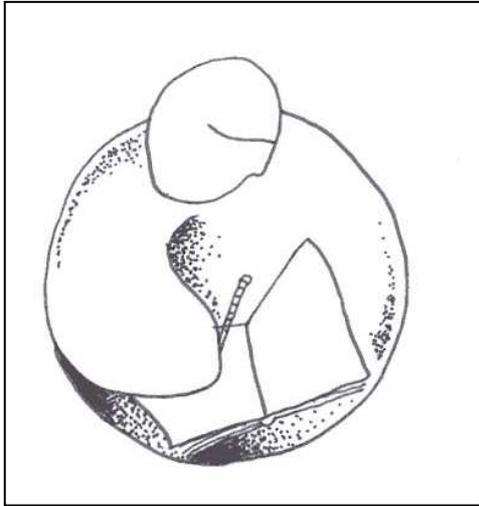
For more helpful information on mentoring, the following are recommended:

Lawrie, C, 1998. Me... a Mentor. JBCE, Melbourne

Lawrie, C, 1998. Ministry of Mentor, JBCE Melbourne

Mallison, J, 1998. Mentoring: to develop disciples and leaders. Lidcombe, NSW

(All 3 books are available for loan from Camden Theological Library, Centre for Ministry, 16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta. Ph: 02 8838 8940. Arrangements can be made to post books to rural and regional areas).



**Journaling.** Journaling is one of the simplest ways to develop a greater understanding of yourself. Different from traditional diary writing which is more a record of daily events, a journal goes beneath the surface - it can be filled with each day's events and experiences, the emotions you feel and the things that you've learned about yourself, about others and about God. "It enables us to ponder our various experiences and learn from them so we may grow personally and spiritually and our ministry become more credible." (Mallison, 1998) You may discover insights and issues that would otherwise remain hidden - some of them treasures, others dust and memories, sometimes even rubbish. It may be

important to share some of these insights and issues with your mentor particularly those things which may affect your future ministry.

A journal is a private record of your life journey which includes the journey of your mind, heart, body, soul and spirit. You may wish to include aspects of your faith, your relationship with God and others. Keeping a journal as part of your Period of Discernment is a means to spiritual and personal growth. It can also be a tool to record issues to ensure that you bring them to mentor sessions for discussion, and a place to record and note progress on short and long term goals throughout the Period of Discernment. Remember that your journal will have material that will assist you when putting together your portfolio to be presented to Presbytery at the completion of your Period of Discernment.

A journal may include stories, reflections, notes, prayers, drawings, lists - anything that helps you reflect personally and spiritually on your experiences, observations, feelings and concerns. Your journal can include your ups and downs, challenges, fears, joys, motives, doubts and opportunities.

**How do I journal?** Literally just go with the flow - don't force anything and don't repress anything. Don't worry about spelling or grammar.

If you are just starting out, make a particular notebook your dedicated journal. Try to write something every day, even just a few lines. If you can't think of anything to write to begin with, just write about your day, what you got out of your daily bible reading or reflection, a place you love, or someone you're concerned for. When writing about any of these things, use "I" language and try to write about the feelings and emotions you associate with these things. Try to be honest - write about both the positive and negative aspects of your life and ministry experiences, your relationship with others and with God. Ask yourself why you might be feeling that way. This might lead to some helpful insights or realisations. The more you journal, the more natural it will feel. As you feel more confident about journaling, begin to use your journal to reflect on your ministry experience, your biblical and ministry education and your relationship with God.

Remember to keep your journal somewhere safe - where it cannot be easily accessed by others. It is important that you feel confident to express yourself with complete honesty in your journal.

For more help on journaling see:

- Eremos Institute web site: [www.eremos.org.au](http://www.eremos.org.au)
- Mallison, J, 1998, Mentoring to develop disciples and leaders, Scripture Union Publishers and Open Book (available for loan at Camden Theological Library, Centre for Ministry).

**Intensive Journaling Workshops** are run regularly by Eremos. For more information see their website: [www.eremos.org.au](http://www.eremos.org.au) or call: 02 9683 5096



*Journaling has been an invaluable tool for me in clarifying issues in my Christian journey and personal life. It's helped deepen my understanding of myself and my ministry and has also been a great way of helping me overcome obstacles I've had to deal with along the way.*

Joanne

# Sample Discernment (Learning) Agreement

## Introduction

The Discernment Agreement is the record of what is to be undertaken during your Period of Discernment and is the basis on which progress is monitored and assessment of your Period of Discernment is made. The format shown in the sample discernment agreement is the one that should be used for your own discernment agreement. You need to develop and submit your agreement to complete your registration for the Period of Discernment.

The following is an example of what you might include in your Period of Discernment (Learning) Agreement. It is drawn from a number of people's own learning agreements in order to give an idea of the breadth of possibilities available to you in your Period of Discernment. Although it does give a range of educational and ministry examples, it is by no means, exhaustive. Why not discuss other possibilities for education and ministry with your mentor to develop the best Discernment Agreement for you.

**Your Vision.** You will need to begin by preparing a brief statement of your hopes and dreams for the Period of Discernment. What do you want to explore? At the completion of the Period of Discernment how will you have changed? What do you want to achieve?

You may want to jot down some ideas (brainstorm or mind map - whatever is most helpful for you) as they come to you. Gradually work towards those things that are essential for you and develop.

## Your Vision

"My hope for my Period of Discernment is that I will be able to discern God's leading for my life and future ministry with the help of the church through my mentor. During my Period of Discernment I hope to understand if God is calling me to ministry beyond my current voluntary congregational roles and secular employment.

I also hope to explore further my faith and how my faith is lived out in the Uniting Church. By the end of my Period of Discernment I would like to be able to understand clearly how my gifts and graces can be used either within the Church or in secular employment."

**Or**

"My vision is to seek God's intention for my life through prayer, regular reading of the bible, regular worship, personal reflection and discussion with family, friends and people involved in different aspects of ministry in the Uniting Church."

**Or**

"Lots of people have spoken to me about the importance of being mentored as a leader. I hope the Period of Discernment will give me the opportunity to learn and establish how mentoring can work for me. I particularly want to use this time to reflect on how others have influenced my current ministry leadership and where I need to seek further input in the future.

At the end of the Period of Discernment I would like to have a 3 – 5 year plan for my future ministry."

**Or**

“People keep telling me to candidate for Specified Ministry but I have doubts. Does God really want me to turn away from my current path. I hope the Period of Discernment will help me to weigh up the pros and cons of specified ministry. If I stay in lay ministry I hope to understand my role in supporting specified ministries better. If I candidate I want to be sure that I do so for the right reasons and with my eyes open.”

**Or**

“I really feel the call of God on my life. I know I need training and I am treating the Period of Discernment as an opportunity for preparation and spiritual reflection. I hope that my mentor will be a spiritual friend as I take my first steps in this difficult and challenging journey.

I’m hoping my learning agreement will help me get started in developing skills for a lifelong ministry.”

**The Goals for my Period of Discernment.** In this section you need to spell out your overall vision of the Period of Discernment into goals (1, 2 or 3 under each heading) that are:

- Specific - clear and precise
- Measurable - e.g. I will meet with my mentor at least once every 4 weeks
- Appropriate - goals must arise out of your vision and be achievable
- Realistic - is it practical, feasible but with some challenges
- Timely - is it right for this time; have you placed it within a realistic time frame.

It might be helpful for you to think about your goals in terms of where you would like to be in 3 - 5 years in terms of your ministry, and explore what educational options might help you reach that aim.

Once you have developed your goals, you would be wise to talk about them with your mentor along with your vision for the Period of Discernment. With their help you can evaluate the goals and redraft or amend them if necessary.

The following are some examples of goals of a Period of Discernment to get you started with some ideas.

## **The Goals for My Period of Discernment**

### **Biblical and/or theological study**

- To gain a better understanding of the bible as a whole
- To complete one unit from a recognised school in either biblical or theological studies

**Or**

- Take one subject at United Theological College in biblical or theological studies
- Develop a better understanding of sacraments within the Uniting Church and the role of the Minister in this area

### **Elective Study in ministry & mission**

- To develop an understanding of the specified ministry areas
- To learn about the mission of a Congregation by participating in a Presbytery Consultation Team

Or

- To better understand pastoral ministry
- To explore my potential within a pastoral ministry

### **Ministry Experience**

- To visit, reflect on, and evaluate 5 areas of ministry available within the Uniting Church, taking in both lay and ordained ministries

Or

- To work alongside a specified ministry agent for a period (say one day per week for 3 months), reflect on the experience in my journal and with my mentor

### **Personal Growth**

- To attend a spiritual retreat or Emmaus weekend to reflect on my sense of call, and my faith journey
- To explore how best to care for myself in my future ministry

Or

- To use journaling to reflect regularly on my learning and experiences throughout the Period of Discernment

### **Spiritual Formation**

- Develop my prayer life
- Spend time at least once per month with my mentor

Or

- Identify and spend time with a person actively involved in ministry
- Intentionally reflect on these ministry experiences with my mentor

### **Steps/Strategies and Resources**

Once you have identified and listed your goals for the Period of Discernment, the next step is to set out how you will achieve those goals (strategies). Write each goal at the top of a page, and job down how you think you can bring your goals into reality.

Once written, check if the strategies actually implement the steps you need to achieve your goals. Also check that you have included all that you need, and if they are in the appropriate order.

Next think about the resources you need to achieve your goals and note these next to your strategies/steps. Resources can include people, time, money, equipment and so on. Think about which resources you already have, how you can obtain those you don't already have. This might lead to you adding more action steps/strategies.

## Steps/Strategies for your Period of Discernment - Examples

Areas	Goals	Steps	Resources
Biblical &/or theological study	-Complete one unit in biblical study	-Identify appropriate Coolamon course	-Coolamon college course information -\$ cost of course
	-Join a bible study group for 12 months	-Identify suitable bible study group in local area	-study guide -commitment by group members to work with you for 12 months
Elective study in ministry & mission	-to better understand pastoral ministry -to explore my potential within a pastoral ministry	-enrol in Cert IV in Pastoral Ministry	-PCI course information -\$ cost of course -commitment of 3 hours for 27 weeks
Ministry Experience	-to visit, reflect on & evaluate 5 areas of ministry	-identify people in ministry in a range of areas both lay & ordained	-commitment of ministry agents to participate -time to reflect on experiences -weekly journaling time -monthly mentor session
Personal Growth	-to attend a spiritual retreat -use journaling to reflect regularly	-identify retreat at a suitable time/place -journaling & reflection	-\$ for retreat fees -schedule time for regular journaling
Spiritual formation	-develop my prayer life -meet once per month with mentor	-schedule time daily for prayer -schedule time with mentor	-prayer journal or prayer workbook -commitment from mentor

## Timeline and Commitment

Finally, draw up some paper (or use the blank timeline copied from this document) dividing into weekly sections for 12 – 18 months of your Period of Discernment. Fill out the timeline across the year making sure you include all 5 components included in your period of discernment (i.e. Biblical/theological study, elective study in ministry & mission, ministry experience, personal growth and spiritual formation). You may want to do a number of drafts. Make sure you spread the components out to keep your time commitments realistic over the 12 months.

It is expected that at least 12 months (sometimes longer) will be required, anticipating a commitment of up to 8-12 hours per week.

Once you're happy with your draft Discernment Agreement ask yourself these questions. Evaluate your Discernment Agreement one last time in the light of the answers:

- Does the vision statement really outline what you believe God want's you to explore in your Period of Discernment?
- Will the goals help you achieve your vision?
- Are the goals specific, measurable, appropriate, realistic and timely?
- Will the strategies/steps achieve your goals?
- Do you have, or will you be able to have access to the resources you need?
- Is your timeline realistic?

# Template for Developing a Learning/Serving Agreement

**The Learning/Serving Agreement** is the record of what is to be undertaken and is the basis on which progress is monitored and final determinations are made. This format should be used to outline your personal learning agreement. You need to develop and submit your learning agreement to complete your registration for the Period of Discernment.

**Vision:** Write a paragraph outlining your vision for the Period of Discernment. What do you hope to gain?

**Goals:** Put down 1,2 or 3 goals under each of the following headings.

- Biblical and theological study
- Elective study in Ministry & Mission
- Ministry experience
- Personal growth
- Spiritual growth and formation

**Achieving the goals.** Insert your goals for each area of study, ministry experience, personal growth and spiritual growth, followed by how you will achieve them(Steps) and what you will need in order to achieve your goals/ Refer to the sample Learning Agreement for further ideas about completing your own learning agreement.

**Biblical and theological study**

Goals[as above]	Steps[in achieving your goals]	Resources (what & where)
1.		
2.		

**Elective study in Ministry & Mission**

Goals	Steps	Resources
1.		
2.		

**Ministry experience**

Goals	Steps	Resources
1.		
2.		

**Personal growth**

Goals	Steps	Resources
1.		
2.		

**Spiritual growth and formation**

Goals	Steps	Resources
1.		
2.		

**Q.** How do I get the **best advice** so that the goals I set [and with the help of my mentor] I may make the most of the Period of Discernment?

**A.** Remember, each person begins at a different point, so the answer has a lot to do with feelings you have and the guidance you are already getting.

**If you have some ideas of where you would like to be in 2-5 years time, then ask what are the educational, training and assessment requirements?** eg. If its "becoming a youth worker", then obtain information from the College that trains youth workers. If its serving in a different capacity when I finish work, but it may involve study, Find out what level of study is involved. Remember that the beginning study needs to be at that level, even if through the Period of Discernment and new understanding of God's will at this point in your life, may lead you to a different outcome altogether.

If you begin the Period of Discernment with an idea of where you would like to be in ministry in the future, it would make sense for you to fulfill the POD educational components by undertaking study that would be required in that future ministry.

### Timeline Template for my POD Activities

<b>Month</b>	<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Week 4</b>
<b>First</b>				
<b>2</b>				
<b>3</b>				
<b>4</b>				
<b>5</b>				
<b>6</b>				
Review				
<b>7</b>				
<b>8</b>				
<b>9</b>				
<b>10</b>				
<b>11</b>				
<b>12</b>				
<b>13</b>				
<b>14</b>				

# **Period of Discernment and Candidating for the Ministries of Word and Deacon**

In the NSW Synod, the Synod Selection Panel is the body which determines applications for the Specified Ministries of Word, Deacon and Accredited Youth Worker. Under the current Regulations [National Assembly, UCA Guidelines, January 2000], a person wishing to offer themselves as a candidate for one of these specified ministries will need to have completed a Period of Discernment before she or he can apply. The candidate must also gain the formal approval of their Presbytery before their application proceeds to the Synod Selection Panel.

Presbyteries will have individuals within the Period of Discernment, who at the end of Phase 1 (completion of the POD) will wish to explore the possibility of candidating for one of the Specified Ministries. Because of this, the Presbytery Coordinator for the Period of Discernment together with the Mentor, will need to ensure that the development of the portfolio reflects that move towards application to any of the Specified Ministries.

The Synod Selection Panel expects that a number of areas will be fully explored through the Period of Discernment, prior to the applicant coming before a meeting of the Selection Panel.

These are:

1. The applicant's understanding of, and ability to accept:

**(a) the Uniting Church's position on Baptism:**

See the Readings in *Your Resource for Period of Discernment*

A Supplementary Resource Kit for Specified Ministry Applicants\* is in preparation. Some Readings there will address the validity of infant and adult baptism. In progressing beyond the Period of Discernment to becoming an applicant for a specified ministry, you will be expected to have articulated the church's position in a written form.

**(b) the Uniting Church position on the ordination or accreditation of women and men**

[See Readings 2 & 6: *Basis of Union and Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia*]; and the Supplementary Readings\* for the Statement on Ordination & Accreditation.

**(c) the various specified ministries of the Uniting Church**

[Brochures about these ministries are available through the office of the Dean of Candidates and are available on request]. Applicants are expected to be aware of the nature and expressions of each of the specified ministries, not just the one for which the applicant is applying.

**(d) the ministry of the whole people of God**

[See Reading 6: *Basis of Union, Para 13 and Para 14*];

**(e) the consensus model of meetings and decision-making**

see Supplementary Readings “*A Manual for Meetings in the Uniting Church*”..

It is recommended and expected that those undertaking a Period of Discernment attend a Presbytery [or other] meeting which uses the consensus model for decision-making.

**(f) the Uniting Church’s position on being faithful in a pastoral relationship** [Readings 3 & 4 of *Your Resource for Period of Discernment*, is about Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, and For dealing with a complaint of sexual misconduct. Reflection on this ought to be done with the Mentor.

*(Many of the resources needed for this exploration are found in: Your Resource for the Period of Discernment published by the Assembly.*

*Your Resource for the Period of Discernment is around 190 pages and is available (in a ring binder) through Uniting College for Leadership and Theology (South Australia), at a cost of: \$55, plus \$15 postage and handling.*

*Contact: [info@unitingcollege.org.au](mailto:info@unitingcollege.org.au) or; (08) 8416 8420.)*

2. The applicant’s awareness of **his or her own style of leadership and the leadership style of others** from the specified ministry for which the applicant is candidating.

**Portfolio.** Those completing the Period of Discernment with a view to responding to a call to a specified ministry, will need to demonstrate in their portfolio an awareness of leadership styles in a congregational setting.

3. Through the processes of journaling and guided reflection the applicant should gain an awareness of:
  - self and self worth
  - ways of relating to others
  - areas of personal growth
  - acknowledgement & appreciation of the different cultures
  - some experiences particular to the Uniting Church.
  - areas known to require more intentional intervention

**Presbyteries are asked to:**

- A. Hold two copies of *'Your Resource for Period of Discernment'* available from: Uniting College for Leadership and Theology (S.A.)  
Contact: [info@unitingcollege.org.au](mailto:info@unitingcollege.org.au) or (08) 8416 8420.
  
- B. Consult on appropriate ways of ensuring these areas are fully explored with the Dean of Candidates, Rev Carolyn Thornley:  
16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta  
Ph: (02) 8838 8919 Email: [dean@nsw.uca.org.au](mailto:dean@nsw.uca.org.au)

## Educational Agencies in NSW & the ACT



### United Theological College

UTC provides a range of options for ministerial and theological education and is open to those studying for both specified and lay ministries. Programs include:

- Bachelor of Theology (SCD)
- Bachelor of Theology Honours(CSU)
- Master of Arts(Cross Cultural Studies) (SCD)
- Master of Arts(Public Theology) (SCD)
- Master of Arts(Theological Studies) (SCD)
- Master of Divinity (SCD)
- Master of Ministry (CSU)
- Master of Theology (CSU)

Courses are offered in a range of modes including intensives and weekend intensives.

Visit the UTC website on [www.utc.uca.org.au](http://www.utc.uca.org.au) for more course details or contact UTC on (02) 8838 8914.

**Important Note!** UTC remains the only recognised Theological College within the NSW Synod. This may be of relevance to those whose discernment leads them towards candidating for one of the specified ministries within the Uniting Church.

### Pastoral Counselling Institute

The Pastoral Counselling Institute conducts the Certificate IV in Basic Pastoral Counselling (integrated Theology & Psychology).

It is offered in different modules:

- Weekly (27 evenings)
- As intensives (over 5 days)
- As weekends (normally Fri pm to Sun pm) or
- By arrangement at regional venues



For more information please contact:

The Administrator, Pastoral Counselling Institute, 16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta  
Ph: (02) 9683 3664 Fax: (02) 9683 6617

Email: [pcinsw@ihug.com.au](mailto:pcinsw@ihug.com.au)  
Website: [www.pastoralcounselling.org](http://www.pastoralcounselling.org)

### **Other educational bodies you may wish to consider:**

- St Mark's National Theological Centre, Barton ACT, (02)6273 1572. Offers courses in theological education from Diploma to post-graduate levels.
- Alan Walker College of Evangelism, Oatlands, Ph. (02)9630 0777, [www.collegeofevangelism.org.au](http://www.collegeofevangelism.org.au). Offers courses with particular emphasis in equipping people for mission and evangelism.
- Wesley Institute for Ministry and the Arts offers a range of courses in the arts and theological education. For more information visit Wesley Institute's website at <http://www.wi.edu.au> or call on (02) 9819 8824
- Trinity College, Brisbane, (07) 3377 9958, [www.cem.ucaqld.com.au](http://www.cem.ucaqld.com.au). Offers theological education and formation for the Queensland Synod.
- Centre for Community Welfare Training, (02)9281 8822, [www.acwa.asn.au](http://www.acwa.asn.au). Offers a range of training workshops relevant to the community and welfare sector.
- Doing a Clinical Pastoral Unit at a local hospital
- TAFE offer a wide range of vocational training and education.
- Local Community Colleges offer a range of practical vocational training and education.

## Information on Retreats and Retreat Centres

New River Leadership <a href="http://www.newriver.org.au">http://www.newriver.org.au</a> Ph: 0425 209 231 Email: <a href="mailto:info@newriver.org.au">info@newriver.org.au</a>	Castlereagh Academy 297-305 Old Castlereagh Road Castlereagh NSW 2749 Ph: 4729 0012
St Joseph's House of Spirituality 64 McKillop Dve Baulkham Hills NSW 2153 Ph: 9634 2317	The Gathering Place 4 Bancroft Street Dickson ACT 2602 Ph: 06 247 8848
John Paul II Polish Catholic Centre 211 Goyder Street Narrabundah ACT 2604 Ph: 06 295 2603	Blackfriars Retreat & Conference Centre Phillip Avenue, Watson, ACT, 2602 Ph: 6247 8557
St Benedict's Monastery 121 Arcadia Road, Arcadia, NSW, 2159 Ph: 9653 1159	St Joseph's House of Spirituality 64 MacKillop Drive Baulkham Hills NSW 2153 Ph: 9634 2317
The Chapel Hill Retreat 36 Beraming Crescent Beraming NSW 2753 Ph: 4567 2156	Kever Park Conference Centre Riversdale Avenue Burradoo NSW 2576 Ph: 4861 2075
Shalom House of Prayer Cnr Collins & Coombing Streets Carcoar NSW 2791 Post Office Carcoar NSW 2791 Ph: 6367 3058	Casino Convent of Mercy Centre Street Casino NSW 2470 PO Box 4 Casino 2470 Ph: 6662 1015
House of Prayer 42 Wirrang Drive Dondingalong via Kempsey NSW 2440 Ph: 6566 9244	St Mary's Towers Retreat Centre Douglas Park Drive Douglas Park NSW 2569 Ph: 4630 9159
Mount Kurrajong 450 East Kurrajong Road East Kurrajong NSW 2758 Ph: 4576 6199	St Clement's Monastery & Retreat Centre Galong NSW 2585 Ph: 6386 7214
The Community Of The Sisters Of The Church 96 Hereford Street Glebe NSW 2037 Ph: 9660 5708	Bishopthorpe Clinton Street Goulburn NSW 2580 PO Box 22, Goulburn, 2580 Ph: 4822 1857
St Joseph's House of Prayer 153 Taralga Road Goulburn NSW 2580 Ph: 4821 3092	St Michael's Conference Centre 13 Kenmore Street Goulburn NSW 2580 Ph: 4822 2301
Overdale Retreat & Conference Centre and House of Prayer Patterson's Road Harefield via Wagga NSW 2650 RMB; 416N, Harefield via Wagga 2650 Ph: 6928 4525	Lilies of the Field 30 Martins Point Road Harwood Island NSW 2465 Ph: 6646 4115
Benedictine Abbey 695 Jamberoo Mountain Road Jamberoo NSW 2533 Ph: 4236 0533	St Joseph's Retreat Centre 8 Humphreys Road Kincumber South NSW 2251 Ph: 4268 2805

Tenison Woods Education Centre New England Highway Lochinvar NSW 2321 Ph: 4930 7431	Sophia Centre 174 Marks Point Road Marks Point NSW 2280 Ph: 4945 4838
Redemptionist Retreat Centre 68 Woodstock Street Mayfield NSW 2304 Ph: 4968 2347	The Farmhouse Old South Road & Bong Bong Road Mittagong NSW 2575 Ph: 4872 1911
Mount Schoenstatt Retreat Centre Fairlight Road Mulgoa NSW 2745 Ph: 4773 8338	Winbourne Retreat & Conference Centre Mulgoa Road Mulgoa NSW 2745 Ph: 4773 8429
Bethany Hanging Rock Road Paddy's River via Moss Vale NSW 2577 Ph: 4884 1584	Ave Maria Retreat & Spirituality Centre 6 Wentworth Street Point Piper NSW 2027 PO Box 136 Double Bay 2028 Ph: 9327 5339
Canisius College 102 Mona Vale Road Pymble NSW 2073 PO Box 136 Pymble 2073 Ph: 9988 4309	Passionist Monastery 138 Killeaton Street St Ives NSW 2075 PO Box 116 St Ives 2075 Ph: 9449 6474
The Clare Community The Monastery, Bucketts Way Stroud NSW 2425 Ph: 4994 5303	Hermitage of St Bernardine Buckets Way Stroud NSW 2425 Ph: 4994 5372
Marist Centre 119 Rausch Street Toongabbie NSW 2146 PO Box 456 Toongabbie 2146 Ph: 9631 3402	Our Lady of the Lake House of Retreat Mercy Spirituality Centre 26 Renwick Street Toronto NSW 2283 Ph: 4959 1025
Elm Grove Sanctuary Goobarragandra via Tumut NSW 2720 Ph: 6947 5766	Mount Carmel Retreat Centre St Andrews Road Varroville NSW 2565 Ph: 9603 1269
Anawim Prayer & Retreat Centre 16 Wangi Point Road Wangi Wangi NSW 2267 Ph: 4975 4054	Maria Tal Cottages 3 Valley Road Wentworth Falls NSW 2782 Ph: 4757 2290
Star of the Sea Conference & Retreat Centre 17 Clarence Street Yamba NSW 2464 Ph: 6646 2244	Monastery of the Most Holy Redeemer Bolwarra Heights NSW 2320 Ph: 4930 1739
Hartzer Park Eridge Park Road Burradoo NSW 2576 PO Box 116 Bowral 2576 Ph: 4861 3223	Kerever Park Rereat & Conference Centre Riversdale Avenue Burradoo NSW 2576 Ph: 4861 2075
St Clement's Monastery & Retreat Centre Galong NSW 2585 Ph: 6386 7214	St Joseph's House of Prayer 153 Taralga Road Goulburn NSW 2580 Ph: 4821 3092
Benedictine Abbey 695 Jamberoo Mountain Road Jamberoo NSW 2533 Ph: 4236 0533	Edmund Rice Retreat & Conference Centre 1315 Mulgoa Road Mulgoa NSW 2745 4773 5555

Healing Ministry Centre 5 Forbes Street Newtown NSW 2042 Ph: 9557 1642	Gunnebah Nobby's Creek Road Murwillumbah NSW 2484 Ph: 6679 1565
Eremos Institute <a href="http://www.eremos.org.au/retreats">http://www.eremos.org.au/retreats</a> <a href="mailto:retreats@eremos.org.au">retreats@eremos.org.au</a>	House of Prayer 42 Wirrang Drive Dondingalong via Kempsey NSW 2440 Ph: 6566 9244
St Clement's Retreat Centre (Address-Ask for instructions) Galong NSW 2585 Ph: 6386 7353	The Centre 14 Frances Street Randwick NSW 2031 Ph: 9398 2211
Our Lady of the Lake House of Retreat 26 Renwick Street Toronto NSW 2283 Ph: 4959 1025	Yaraando Galston Ph: 9653 2228 Email: <a href="mailto:yelenaudy@optusnet.com.au">yelenaudy@optusnet.com.au</a>

For further information about a range of Catholic retreat centres see the following brochure downloadable from the Internet:

[http://www.catholicweekly.com.au/banners/Retreats\\_Guide\\_Web2.pdf](http://www.catholicweekly.com.au/banners/Retreats_Guide_Web2.pdf)

## **APPENDIX A**

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE PERIOD OF DISCERNMENT**

### **A gift for the whole church**

**“Recognising that discernment of call to ministry belongs to the life of all Christian communities, the Period of Discernment is a gift which provides opportunity for any member of the Uniting Church to explore a call to a particular form of ministry.”**

At the heart of this process is the understanding that all who have been baptized are called into the ministry of Jesus Christ. The essence of the Period of Discernment is to discern where that ministry lies. It is not simply a process to be completed prior to entry into the ordained ministry.

That ministry might be:

- Within the local congregation, faith community or church agency (eg. Youth Leader, Elder, Pastoral Carer, Lay Chaplain, Church Councilor)
- Within your normal place of work or within the wider community
- Within one of the specified ministries of the Uniting Church (eg. Deacon, Minister of the Word, Lay Preacher or Pastor)

### **Goals for the Period of Discernment**

The Period of Discernment aims to:

- 1.1 develop the participant's relationship with God and understanding of themselves as a disciple;
- 1.2 give the participant opportunity to understand God's ministry and mission in the church and the world, the variety of ministries within that ministry, and the nature, function and responsibilities of these ministries;
- 1.3 recognize, affirm and build upon the skills, knowledge and experience that the participant brings to the Period of Discernment and ministry within the church;
- 1.4 enable both the church and the participant to discern confidently the person's gifts and graces for ministry, and the type of ministry in which these may be expressed in the life of the church and the wider community.

### **Criteria for participation**

- 2.1 Any member, member in association or adherent in good standing in a congregation or faith community of the Uniting Church in Australia may participate in the Period of Discernment.
- 2.2 Those persons considering application to one of the specified ministries of the church should note the membership requirements in Regulations.

### **Registration**

- 3.1 Individuals register for participation in the Period of Discernment through their Minister or Church Council with the person or committee appointed by their Presbytery to co-ordinate the process.
- 3.2 Church Councils may affirm the registration but may not reject a registration.
- 3.3 Registration may occur at any time of the year.
- 3.4 The Presbytery, in consultation with the applicant, appoints a mentor to work with the applicant throughout the Period of Discernment.
- 3.5 In consultation with the mentor, the participant develops a discernment plan or learning agreement. This may also involve consultation with the Presbytery Coordinator and other relevant educational bodies. The discernment plan is lodged with the Presbytery.
- 3.6 The Period of Discernment begins with the appointment of a mentor.

- 3.7 The Period of Discernment will normally be one year in duration. However, variations to the duration of the Period of Discernment may be made at the discretion of the Presbytery in recognition of a participant's prior learning and/or ministry experience.

### **The mentor**

A mentor should be a person who can guide the participant through this time of discernment by listening, affirming and supporting, and asking questions that will clarify the issues and explore options.

- 4.1 The mentor will normally be a person with no involvement in a future selection process, to avoid any potential conflict of interest in the future.
- 4.2 Mentors are required to have recognized training in the role. The synod and Congress Ministerial Education Boards are responsible for providing this training.
- 4.3 Ideally, a participant should have the same mentor throughout the Period of Discernment. However, if problems arise in the relationship between the participant and the mentor, the Presbytery Coordinator should be advised in order to help resolve the situation. This may include appointing another mentor.
- 4.4 In the event that a participant discerns a call to a specified ministry, it may be desirable that the same mentor accompany them through the process of candidature.
- 4.5 The specific responsibilities of the mentor are to:
- guide the participant in developing a discernment plan;
  - meet regularly with the participant (a minimum of two hours per month);
  - monitor the implementation of the discernment plan;
  - help the participant reflect theologically and integrate learning and ministry experiences;
  - guide the participant in the development of their portfolio\*;
  - keep the Presbytery informed about the progress of the participant throughout the Period of Discernment;
  - notify the Presbytery that the participant is ready to present their portfolio, and engage with the participant and the Presbytery in the discernment of the ministry to which the participant feels called.

### **Discernment Process**

- 5.1 The development of the process for the Period of Discernment is the responsibility of the Synod and Congress Ministerial Education Boards.
- 5.2 In addition to those outcomes listed under Goals, the discernment plan for the Period of Discernment seeks to achieve:
- opportunity to engage in biblical and/or theological study (a minimum of two semester subjects);
  - opportunity to engage in particular areas of study or ministry and mission, such as ministry with young people, Church Planting, Eldership, Emerging Church etc (a minimum of two elective areas through course work, workshops or similar, each equivalent to 40 – 50 hours);
  - ministry experience, together with appropriate reflection, in a local context. It is desirable that this experience be in areas of ministry beyond the participant's experience to date;
  - ministry experience through exposure to a broad range of ministries (this is an alternative option);
  - awareness of the church's polity, and its policy on ministry ethics, including prevention of sexual misconduct.

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\* The portfolio is a short account and analysis of what has been the experience and growth during the Period of Discernment. It draws on a much larger collection of material (eg. Diary notes, personal reflections, journal, sermon notes, reports to church councils, photographs) which is the participant's personal archive. Further explanation about the portfolio can be found in the manual *Your resource for the Period of Discernment*, available from Parkin-Wesley College, Adelaide.

- 5.3 The level at which the subjects are taken should normally be appropriate to the participant's background and discernment goals. However, participants testing a call to a specified ministry should fulfill the study requirements at Diploma or Certificate level as a minimum.
- 5.4 Individual Synods may add other components to the process if these contribute to the desired outcomes for the Period of Discernment.

### **Recognition of Prior Learning and/or Experience**

- 6.1 The recognition of prior learning and experience is a significant aspect of the process. If a participant has recently (i.e. in the last five years) completed identifiable study components or ministry experience that meet the goals or outcomes of the Period of Discernment, such experience may be credited and the participant released from some requirements at the discretion of the Presbytery;
- 6.2 Participants who are released from the study and/or ministry experience requirements will normally spend six months working with a mentor to reflect on and integrate their prior learning with their new experiences and knowledge;
- 6.3 Some participants come to the formal Period of Discernment having already undergone significant discernment through individual reflection but without the intentional and formal involvement of the Church. A period of discernment then provides the process by which the Church discerns, affirms and begins to test a call to ministry.
- 6.4 All participants will demonstrate through the presentation of a portfolio how the requirements of the Period of Discernment have been met.

### **Presentation of the Portfolio**

- 7.1 After the Period of Discernment, the participant will present his or her portfolio to appropriate persons as determined by the Presbytery and the mentor. Together they will reflect on the ministry directions discerned;
- 7.2 The emphasis of the presentation will be on what the participant and mentor have discerned and on demonstrating whether the specific goals of the discernment plan have been achieved;
- 7.3 After the Period of Discernment the Presbytery will issue a Statement of Completion for the Period of Discernment. The purpose of such a statement is not to determine that the person has discerned a call to a particular ministry, but to indicate the areas of study and fieldwork completed.

### **Further Discernment**

- 8.1 After the completion of the Period of Discernment a participant who has discerned gifts for congregational or vocational ministries may, with the assistance of the mentor, explore ways of expressing that ministry within an appropriate context.
- 8.2 After the completion of the Period of Discernment a participant who has discerned a call to one of the specified ministries of the Uniting Church may, with the support of the Presbytery, apply to become a candidate for one of these ministries. (In this case, the portfolio and the Statement of Completion of the Period of Discernment may form part of the material the applicant brings to the selection process.)

*Approved by the Assembly Standing Committee, November 2008*

## **APPENDIX B**

# **Checklist of issues to be covered by Applicants to Candidate for Ordained Ministry**

(Presbytery Resource)

In the NSW Synod, the Synod Selection Panel is the body which determines applications for the Specified Ministries of Word and Deacon. The Presbytery Coordinator for the Period of Discernment together with the Mentor, will need to ensure that the development of the portfolio reflects that move towards application to any of the Specified Ministries.

1. The applicant's understanding of, and ability to accept:

**(a) the Uniting Church's position on Baptism:**

**(b) the Uniting Church position on the ordination or accreditation of women and men**

**(c) the various specified ministries of the Uniting Church**

Applicants are expected to be aware of the nature and expressions of each of the specified ministries, not just the one for which the applicant is applying.

**(d) the ministry of the whole people of God**

[See *Basis of Union, Para 13 and Para 14*];

**(e) the consensus model of meetings and decision-making**

see Supplementary Readings "*A Manual for Meetings in the Uniting Church*".

It is recommended and expected that those undertaking a Period of Discernment attend a Presbytery [or other] meeting which uses the consensus model for decision-making.

**(f) the Uniting Church's position on being faithful in a pastoral relationship**

[Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, and For dealing with a complaint of sexual misconduct.] Reflection on this ought to be done with the Mentor.

2. The applicant's awareness of **his or her own style of leadership and the leadership style of others** from the specified ministry for which the applicant is candidating.

**Portfolio.** In preparing the portfolio, those completing the Period of Discernment with a view to responding to a call to a specified ministry, will need to demonstrate an awareness of appropriate leadership in a congregational setting.

3. Through the processes of journaling and guided reflection the applicant should gain an awareness of:
  - self and self worth
  - ways of relating to others
  - areas of personal growth
  - acknowledgement & appreciation of the different cultures
  - some experiences peculiar to the Uniting Church.
  - areas known to require more intentional intervention

## ***Some thoughts for Mentors***

- LEARNING AGREEMENT** – Establish Goals and Methods
- TIMETABLE** – Establish a pattern for meeting. Set dates to complete different tasks.  
Monthly meetings might include:
  - Initial meeting and discussing Goals and possible Strategies. Draft Learning Agreement.
  - Finalize Learning Agreement. Set some initial reading and reflection tasks.
  - 4 x monthly meetings to discuss and reflect on progress. (This may include working through issues in the Checklist for people applying to Candidate.)
  - Review Progress.
  - Initial meeting with Ministry Committee.
  - Start working on Portfolio
  - 4 x monthly meetings to discuss and reflect on progress. (This may include working through issues in the Checklist for people applying to Candidate.)
  - Review Progress.
  - Finalize Portfolio.
  - Concluding meeting with Ministry Committee.
- PORTFOLIO** - What is the purpose of the Portfolio?  
Who will read it and why?
- RESOURCES**
  - Basis of Union
  - Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice
  - (NEW) Resource about Introducing Reflective Practice with Lay Leaders
  - PoD Kit
  - 'Mentoring' by John Mallison
  - A Manual for Meetings
  - Information about the different Specified Ministries
  - Information about Baptism
  - Information about Men and Women in Church Leadership
  - Contact details for
    - Presbytery PoD Contact
    - Uniting Mission and Education
    - The Dean of Candidates
- INVITATION** – invite the Discernee to visit Church Council, Presbytery and/or Synod (if not a Member)
- ENCOURAGE** - encourage the Discernee to explore their gifts and graces for Ministry in a range of ways and in a variety of settings. This is not just about their personal and individual discernment, but also about their future service in the Church – as a volunteer, a lay worker or in specified ministry.

## **APPENDIX C**



**UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA  
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
MINISTERIAL EDUCATION COMMISSION**

**REGISTRATION FOR THE PERIOD OF DISCERNMENT**

An application to the Presbytery of .....through the  
Congregation of ..... for participation in the Period of Discernment.

*Completed forms should be returned to your Presbytery office.*

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION (refer Uniting Church Privacy Policy)**

Surname ..... Given names .....

Preferred Title (Ms etc) ..... Gender  Male  Female

Postal Address .....  
..... Postcode .....

Telephone (daytime) ..... (Evening) .....

Mobile.....E-mail.....

Occupation .....

Age Group []  Under 21  21 to 30  30 to 40  40 to 50  50+

Membership of the Uniting Church in Australia

Baptised member  Confirmed member  Member-in-Association  Adherent

Other (Please specify) .....

Educational background: [Attach separate page if space is insufficient]

Institution	Year	Description of Award
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....

Are you a permanent resident of Australia?  Yes  No

Conditions apply (from Dept. of Immigration) to those on student visas or non-residents of Australia.  
An overseas student on a Visitor or Temporary Visa must be informed about the new ESOS Act.

Is English your first language?  Yes  No

If **No** give your first language and, if known, details of your English competency test scores.

.....

Have you ever applied to be a Lay Pastor, Deacon, Minister of the Word or Youth Worker in any church?

No  Yes If yes, give details: .....

.....

Have you commenced/done the Period of Discernment before  No  Yes

Church roles you've undertaken (say, in last five years)

.....

.....

Signature of applicant ..... Date ...../...../.....

**Attach a brief statement (100-200 words) outlining what you hope to achieve as you participate in the Period of Discernment. Give your application to your minister or Church Council for endorsement and forwarding to your Presbytery contact person. Also, each participant is to have a mentor appointed by the Presbytery. You need someone who has the ability to help in theological reflection and someone with whom you feel comfortable working. If you wish to nominate (ie suggest) someone, please write that person's name, address, and daytime phone number, after your brief statement. Tell us if you have discussed this possibility with the person.**

**To be completed by the Minister (or approved person):**

Person registering:.....is a member/ member-in-association/adherent(circle one)

in good standing of the ..... congregation.

I am aware of, and support this application.

Phone.....

Name[Print].....Position.....

Signature.....

Date .....

**Presbytery Use:**

Date registration form received by..... on ...../...../.....

Mentor.....Address/Phone.....

Learning Plan submitted and approved ..... Date of commencement ...../...../.....

Portfolio assessment: .....

..... by..... Date .....

Presbytery Person & Role receiving registration .....