

Period of Discernment

Participant and mentor
handbook



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD





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Introduction

Welcome to the Period of Discernment

The Period of Discernment (POD) is a process designed to help you grow in faith, hope and love and discern where God might be leading you to exercise your gifts and abilities in ministry. Your key tool for this is the action/reflection process: actions (including experiences, conversations and listening and reading) and reflection (prayer, journaling and conversations with your mentor). This action/reflection process is designed to help you discern three learnings in particular:

- What are you learning about God, church, faith, ministry and mission?
- What are you learning about yourself in terms of character, passion and skills?
- Through this, where do you believe God might be leading you?

Specifically, the goals of the Period of Discernment as set down by the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia are:

1. develop the participant's relationship with God and understanding of themselves as a disciple
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
3. recognise, affirm and build upon the skills, knowledge and experience that the participant brings to the Period of Discernment and ministry within the church
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.

Your responsibilities are to:

- participate in the POD process
- engage with your mentor
- be open to where God might be leading you

Note: It is important to note that the goal of a POD is not candidating for a specified ministry, but discerning where God is leading you. This may be to exercise ministry in a workplace, local community or church. One outcome may also be candidating, but this is not the default. Of course, if during the POD you discern that God might be leading you towards candidating for a specified ministry then this needs to be explored as part of your POD.



Period of Discernment

Process and key terminology

The normal duration for the Period of Discernment is twelve months, though some people may take longer depending on their needs. The Period of Discernment has the following elements:

Ministry experience: ‘Go Wide’ in the first six months. ‘Go Deep’ in the second six months.

Elective study: Discipleship, ministry and mission in first six months. Participant’s choice in the second six months.

Biblical study: Normally completed through Trinity College Queensland—unless testing a call to specified ministry—usually starting with New Testament studies.

Journaling: Where you write down reflections on what you are experiencing, learning and discerning.

Mentoring: Your guide through the POD process.

Portfolio: As you progresses through the POD you should keep a record of activities, plans, reflections and photographs of what you have been doing. At the end of the POD you will choose a selection of these materials to present to your presbytery in the form of a folio.

Learning agreement: This document sets out what you want to learn and the activities that will make up that learning. This must be completed in the first month of a POD and submitted by your mentor to your presbytery POD coordinator.

A guide to these elements including suggested time needed for each one per week can be found in Appendix 1 – The POD Process

Period of Discernment

Overview and getting started

At the heart of the POD experience is action and reflection. The POD participant acts in Ministry Experience and study, and then reflects both individually in their journal and then with their mentor in discerning what they have learnt about God and themselves and what this means for discerning where God might be leading them. The elements, expected time requirements and structure of the POD are described in more detail later in this document.

POD and candidating

While the POD process is a pre-requisite for candidating for specified ministry, it is not only for people testing a call to candidating, but for anyone who is seeking to discern where God is leading them. If you are thinking that God might be calling you to ordained ministry then it is important to recognise that completing the POD process is to help you decide whether you believe God is calling you to candidate, not whether you have a call to ordained ministry. It is in the candidating process that the church discerns whether you have a call to ordained ministry or not.

The only difference for those who are testing a call to candidate in the POD is the level at which the biblical study is done. For those who are testing a call to candidate it is expected that this will be done at bachelor level through the Australian Catholic University (ACU) or an equivalent university (see below).

If you start off the POD not thinking about candidating, but then decide that this might be where God is leading you, you will need to complete the second unit of biblical study at bachelor level.

Ministry experience

The POD has been broken into two sections:

1. Go Wide: where you experience the breadth of ministry within the Uniting Church (see Appendix 2)
2. Go Deep: where you choose one context to go 'deep' in experiencing (see Appendix 6 and separate resource the *Go Deep Guide* on the Synod website)

Elective study

This is study in mission and ministry. The elective study for the first six months is a resource called *Discipleship, Ministry and Mission in the Uniting Church in Australia*. This is an action/reflection resource and has one session for every two weeks. It is a resource in PDF format and you need to ask your POD coordinator to email it to you (or print and send it if you don't have email access).

In the second six months you will choose your own study, however there are selected books that are suggested with the various Go Deep ministry options.

Biblical/theological study

You need to complete two units. If you are not testing a call to ordination enroll in a unit at [Trinity College Queensland](#), the college for the Uniting Church in Queensland. *BS001 New Testament* is suggested first.

If you are testing a call to ordination, enroll in a unit from [Australia Catholic University](#). *THBS100 Introduction to the Bible* or *THCT100 What Christians Believe* is suggested.

Note: Participants who have done theological study or significant ministry experience can apply for recognition of prior learning but will need to contact their presbytery Period of Discernment coordinator.

Period of Discernment

Process



First half: Go Wide (usually six months)

Ministry experience: two hours per week (40 hours per semester)

Theme—What is discipleship, ministry and mission?

Go Wide: six months exploring the different forms of ministry in the Uniting Church and the community.

Mentoring: two hours per month

Reflecting on theology of discipleship, ministry and mission

What does being called by Jesus mean?

What are the implications for your life?

What type of ministry context should you explore in the second six months?

Personal/spiritual growth: one to two hours per week

Journal

Spiritual disciplines

Personal reflections

What am I learning?

What is God saying in this process?

Elective: one to two hours per week

Action/reflection resource: *Discipleship, Ministry and Mission in the Uniting Church in Australia*

Enrol through Trinity College Queensland

Biblical/theological study: three hours per week

Enrol in *Christology* (unless exploring candidating for specified ministry in which case you need to talk to mentor and Trinity College Queensland)



Halfway review

Mentoring

Mentor's feedback

Personal and spiritual growth

Reflection on progress so far

Period of Discernment

process



Second half: Go Deep (usually six months)

Ministry experience: two hours per week (40 hours per semester)

Theme: What does discipleship, ministry and mission look like for me?

Go Deep into a ministry experience by doing six months in one of the following areas:

- congregational ministry
- Uniting Church agency chaplaincy
- school chaplaincy
- a community organisation

Or doing a project in one of the following areas:

- church
- workplace
- local community

To be negotiated with mentor in first six months

Mentoring: two hours per month

Reflecting on ministry experience

Where is God in this experience?

How does this tap into my passion and skills? What am I learning?

Personal/ Spiritual Growth: one to two hours per week

Journal

Spiritual disciplines

Personal reflections

What am I learning?

What is God saying in this process?

Where do I believe God is calling me from here?

Elective: one to two hours per week

To be explored with mentor

Biblical/theological study three hours per week

Enrol in New Testament or Old Testament studies at Trinity College Queensland (unless exploring candidating for specified ministry in which case you need to talk to mentor and Trinity College Queensland).

Period of Discernment process



Final review

Ministry experience

Feedback from experience or project

Mentoring

Mentor's feedback

Personal/spiritual growth

What is God calling me to?

Mentoring process

The mentoring process is the key tool for you in learning and discerning where God is calling you. The mentoring relationship allows you to reflect on your experiences and questions and seek to make sense of and come to new learnings. Your role in this is to engage, reflect and discuss openly and honestly. You are not being assessed.

Most mentors are ordinary people who are good at caring, communicating and enjoy being with other people. Mentors should:

- meet with you, the participant, one-on-one either face-to-face, via email, on the phone or even by fax or letter
- make themselves available as much as is reasonable to meet with you: at least two 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 Uniting Church
- be willing and able to ask probing, challenging and thoughtful questions
- be able to help the you reflect and integrate your learning and experiences 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 own 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.

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 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 two 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.

The times when mentor and participant meet should be challenging, exciting and even fun!

(This section draws on the work and intellectual property of Cheryl Lawrie and Karyl Davidson.)

In particular, as a mentoree, through the reflection process, you should be helping to articulate:

- What have I learnt about God, ministry, mission and the church?
- What have I learnt about myself and my faith, gifts, passion and character?
- Where do I believe God is leading me through these learnings?

Period of Discernment

Timeline and checklist

Start – Month 1

- Meet with mentor
- Work on Learning Agreement
- Enroll in New Testament Trinity College subject
- Get *Discipleship Mission and Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia* materials from POD coordinator
- Do first two sessions of *Discipleship, Ministry and Mission in the Uniting Church in Australia*
- Do two Go Wide visits
- Start New Testament subject
- Start reflections in your journal
- Email summary reflections to mentor

Month 2

- Meet with mentor
- Finalise Learning Agreement (mentor emails to POD coordinator)
- Do second two sessions of *Discipleship, Ministry and Mission*
- Do two Go Wide visits
- Do New Testament subject
- Reflections in your journal
- Email summary reflections to mentor

Month 3

- Meet with mentor
- Do third two sessions of *Discipleship, Ministry and Mission*
- Do two Go Wide visits
- Do New Testament subject
- Reflections in your journal
- Email summary reflections to mentor

Month 4

- Meet with Mentor
- Do fourth two sessions of *Discipleship, Ministry and Mission*
- Do two Go Wide visits
- Do New Testament subject
- Reflections in your journal
- Start to think about what Go Deep ministry experience you want to do, what needs to happen to set that up and what electives you might want to do
- Email summary reflections to mentor

Month 5

- Meet with mentor
- Do fifth two sessions of *Discipleship, Ministry and Mission*
- Do two Go Wide visits
- Do New Testament subject
- Reflections in your journal
- Start planning Go Deep subject for biblical studies and electives
- Email summary reflections to mentor

Month 6

- Meet with mentor
- Do sixth two sessions of *Discipleship, Ministry and Mission*
- Do two Go Wide visits
- Do New Testament subject
- Reflections in your journal
- Fill out halfway reflection
- Email summary reflections to mentor
- Mentor provides feedback form
- Mentor emails POD coordinator with progress so far

Month 7–11

- Meet with mentor
- Do Go Deep project
- Do Trinity College (or ACU) subject
- Do electives
- Reflections in your journal
- Email summary reflections to mentor

Month 12

- Fill out POD reflection guide and where to from here?
- Prepare your portfolio
- Meet with mentor
- Organise time to present to presbytery
- Mentor provides feedback form
- Mentor emails POD coordinator with completion and feedback

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 1

Beginning

Purpose

The participant is clear about the POD process and has started their Learning Agreement.

Outcomes

1. Participant is clear about the POD process.
 - Participant knows about Go Wide ministry experiences and what they have to do
 - Participant has Discipleship, Ministry and Mission in the Uniting Church in Australia from POD coordinator
 - Participant knows about enrolling in New Testament through Trinity College Queensland (or ACU if testing call to candidate)
 - Participant knows about journaling and starting their portfolio
2. Learning Agreement started.
3. Participant knows what they have to do before next mentoring session.
 - Complete Learning Agreement and send to mentor
 - Enrol in biblical courses (Trinity or ACU)
 - Start Go Wide ministry experiences
 - Start journaling
 - Email mentor summary of Go Wide and journal reflections before next session

Resources

Appendix 2 – Go Wide ministry experiences

Appendix 3 – Sample POD participant journal

Appendix 4 – The Learning Agreement

Suggested process

1. Introductions: mentor and participant introduce themselves and some of their story to start building relationship and understanding.
2. POD process: mentor walks participant through POD process to make sure they understand.
3. Learning Agreement: talk about the following areas which form the basis of Learning Agreement:
 - Vision: what do you hope to achieve through the POD? How will you be different?
 - Ministry experience: what do you want to learn through your ministry experience?
 - Biblical study: what do you hope to learn through biblical study?
 - Electives: what other areas of ministry do you want to learn about? (These may be changed later.)
 - Personal and spiritual growth: What ways do you wish to grow spiritually and personally?

These form the basis for goals. Then discuss what tasks and resources are needed to enable each goal.
4. Any further questions/issues?
5. Note down what mentor and participant each need to do before next session.
 - Participant to email mentor brief summary of reflections from month before next session.
 - Participant to complete Learning Agreement.
6. Set date and time for next meeting.

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 2

Go Wide >> month one

Purpose

To reflect on progress and experiences to date, review Learning Agreement and identify other resources the participant may need.

Outcomes

1. Reflect on POD experiences so far.
2. Discuss questions/issues that have been raised for participant.
3. Review Learning Agreement.
4. Plan for next month and any resources needed.

Resources

Appendix 5 – The What, So What, Now What reflection model

Suggested process

1. Welcome
2. Debrief of ministry experiences and study using reflection model
3. Are there questions raised by the participant about:
 - themselves
 - theology/faith
 - church
 - ministry and mission?
4. What other topics does participant wish to discuss?
5. Review Learning Agreement and any changes
6. Any further questions/issues?
7. Note down what mentor and participant need to do before next session
 - Participant to email mentor brief summary of reflections from the month before next session
 - Participant to email mentor completed Learning Agreement before next session
 - Mentor to forward completed Learning Agreement to POD coordinator
8. Set date and time for next meeting.

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 3

Go Wide >> month two

Purpose

To reflect on progress and experiences to date.

Outcomes

1. Reflect on POD experiences so far
2. Discuss questions/issues that have been raised for participant
3. Plan for next month and any resources needed

Resources

Appendix 5 – The What, So What, Now What reflection model

Suggested process

1. Welcome
2. Debrief of ministry experiences and study using reflection model
3. Are there questions raised by the participant about:
 - themselves
 - theology/faith
 - church
 - ministry and mission?
4. What other topics does participant wish to discuss?
5. Any further questions/issues?
6. Note down what mentor and participant need to do before next session
 - Participant to email mentor brief summary of reflections from the month before next session
7. Set date and time for next meeting.

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 4 Go Wide >> month three

Purpose

To reflect on progress and experiences to date.

Outcomes

1. Reflect on POD experiences so far
2. Discuss questions/issues that have been raised for participant
3. Plan for next month and any resources needed

Resources

Appendix 5 – The What, So What, Now What reflection model

Suggested process

1. Welcome
2. Debrief of ministry experiences and study using reflection model
3. Are there questions raised by the participant about:
 - themselves
 - theology/faith
 - church
 - ministry and mission?
4. What other topics does participant wish to discuss?
5. Any further questions/issues?
6. Note down what mentor and participant need to do before next session
 - Participant to email mentor brief summary of reflections from the month before next session
7. Set date and time for next meeting.

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 5

Go Wide >> month four

Purpose

To reflect on progress and experiences to date, reflect on spiritual gifts and passion discernment from *Discipleship, Ministry and Mission in the Uniting Church in Australia* elective, session 6, start to reflect on what Go Deep experience the participant wants to explore.

Outcomes

1. Reflect on POD experiences so far
2. Discuss questions/issues that have been raised for participant
3. Reflect on results: spiritual gifts and passion discernment
4. Start to plan for Go Deep ministry experience
5. Plan for next month and any resources needed

Resources

Appendix 5 – The What, So What, Now What reflection model

Appendix 6 – Go Deep ministry experience
Discipleship, Ministry and Mission in the Uniting Church in Australia, Session 6

Suggested process

1. Welcome
2. Debrief of ministry experiences and study using reflection model
3. Debrief results: spiritual gifts and passion discernment
4. Where does participant believe they want to explore Go Deep? What needs to happen?
5. Are there questions raised by the participant about:
 - themselves
 - theology/faith
 - church
 - ministry and mission?
6. What other topics does participant wish to discuss?
7. Any further questions/issues?
8. Note down what mentor and participant need to do before next session
 - Participant to email mentor brief summary of reflections from the month before next session
9. Set date and time for next meeting.

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 6

Go Wide >> month five

Purpose

To reflect on progress and experiences to date, and start preparing for Go Deep ministry experience and study for second six months.

Outcomes

1. Reflect on POD experiences so far
2. Discuss questions/issues that have been raised for participant
3. Keep planning for Go Deep ministry experience
4. Plan what study for biblical study and electives is wanted
5. Plan for next month and any resources needed

Resources

Appendix 5 – The What, So What, Now What reflection model

Appendix 6 – Go Deep ministry experience
Go Deep resources

Suggested process

1. Welcome
2. Debrief of ministry experiences and study using reflection model
3. Are there questions raised by the participant about:
 - themselves
 - theology/faith
 - church
 - ministry and mission?
4. What planning needs to happen for Go Deep project?
5. What study is planned for second six months?
6. What other topics does participant wish to discuss?
7. Any further questions/issues?
8. Note down what mentor and participant need to do before next session
 - Participant to email mentor brief summary of reflections from month before next session
 - Complete POD participant halfway reflection and email to mentor
9. Set date and time for next meeting.

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 7

Go Wide >> month six

Purpose

To reflect on progress and experiences to date and how the POD has been going, any changes that need to be made and any feedback the mentor has for the participant. Reflect on where the participant believes God is leading.

Outcomes

1. Reflect on first six months of POD
2. Where might God be leading?
3. Discuss any changes that may need to be made to the Learning Agreement
4. Discuss feedback from Mentor
5. Finalise Go Deep ministry experience
6. Plan for next month and any resources needed

Resources

Appendix 5 – The What, So What, Now What reflection model

Appendix 6 – Go Deep ministry experience

Appendix 7 – POD participant halfway reflection

Appendix 8 – Mentor Feedback for Participant Go Deep ministry experiences

Suggested process

1. Welcome
2. Debrief of ministry experiences and study using reflection model
3. Where does participant believe they want to explore Go Deep? What needs to happen?
4. Are there questions raised by participant about:
 - themselves
 - theology/faith
 - church
 - ministry and mission?
5. What other topics does participant wish to discuss?
6. Any further questions/issues?
7. Note down what mentor and participant need to do before next session
 - Participant to email mentor brief summary of reflections from month before next session
 - Participant to look at what further learning they wish to engage in for their Elective (see suggested resources for each Go Deep option)
8. Set date and time for next meeting.

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 8

Go Deep >> month one

Purpose

To start on the Go Deep process and to add any new points to Learning Agreement

Outcomes

1. Review where Go Deep arrangements are at
2. Review extra learning needed for Elective

Resources

Go Deep resources (see Dropbox folder)

Suggested process

3. Welcome
4. Finalise Go Deep process
 - What arrangements need to be put in place? Does participant need help?
 - Has participant decided/enrolled in Biblical/Theological subject?
 - What is the participant hoping to learn in this process (answers become part of Learning Agreement for ministry experience)?
 - What extra learning is needed – look at suggested options for each Go Deep option – answers are added to Learning Agreement under Electives
 - Has the participant decided that a call to Specified Ministry might be where God is leading? Need to contact college and enroll in BTh level subject and also talk to POD coordinator if this is the case
5. Are there questions raised by the participant about:
 - themselves
 - theology/faith
 - church
 - ministry and mission?
6. What other topics does participant wish to discuss?
7. Any further questions/issues?
8. Note down what mentor and participant need to do before next session
 - Participant to complete Ministry Overview sheet from Go Deep and email to Mentor
 - Participant to update Learning Agreement adding learning goals for Go Deep ministry experience and Electives and email to Mentor
 - Participant to start Go Deep
 - Participant to complete Ministry/Mission reflection sheet from Go Deep and email to Mentor
9. Set date and time for next meeting.

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 9

Go Deep >> month two

Purpose

To start on the Go Deep process and to add any new points to Learning Agreement

Outcomes

1. Review Learning Agreement changes
2. Reflect Go Deep Experience

Resources

Appendix 5 – The What, So What, Now What reflection model

Go Deep Resources (see Dropbox folder)

Suggested process

1. Welcome
2. Has study/resource option been decided for Elective?
3. Review ministry overview and Learning Agreement additions
 - Are both mentor and participant happy?
4. Review Ministry/Mission Reflection Sheet using Action reflection Model
5. Are there questions raised by the participant about:
 - themselves
 - theology/faith
 - church
 - ministry and mission?
6. What other topics does participant wish to discuss?
7. Any further questions/issues?
8. Note down what mentor and participant need to do before next session
 - Mentor to send updated Learning Agreement and Ministry Overview to POD Coordinator
 - Participant to complete Ministry/Mission reflection sheet from Go Deep and email to Mentor
9. Set date and time for next meeting.

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 10

Go Deep >> month three

Purpose

To reflect on progress and experiences to date

Outcomes

1. Reflect on POD experiences so far
2. Discuss questions/issues that have been raised for participant
3. Plan for next month and any resources needed

Resources

Appendix 5 – The What, So What, Now What reflection model

Go Deep resources (see Dropbox folder)

Suggested process

1. Welcome
2. Review Ministry/Mission Reflection Sheet using Action reflection Model
3. What has the participant learned from biblical theological subject and elective
4. Are there questions raised by the participant about:
 - themselves
 - theology/faith
 - church
 - ministry and mission?
5. What other topics does participant wish to discuss?
6. Any further questions/issues?
7. Note down what mentor and participant need to do before next session
 - Participant to complete ministry/mission reflection sheet from Go Deep and email to mentor
8. Set date and time for next meeting.

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 11

Go Deep >> month four

Purpose

To reflect on progress and experiences to date and start preparing to finish

Outcomes

1. Reflect on POD experiences so far
2. Discuss questions/issues that have been raised for participant
3. Start finishing process

Resources

Appendix 5 – The What, So What, Now What reflection model

Go Deep resources (see Dropbox folder)

Portfolio – see Appendix 9 FAQ

Suggested process

1. Welcome
2. Review Ministry/Mission Reflection Sheet using Action reflection Model
3. What has the participant learned from Biblical theological subject and elective
4. Are there questions raised by participant about:
 - themselves
 - theology/faith
 - church
 - ministry and mission?
5. Preparing to finish
 - a. What has participant learnt about themselves so far in terms of gift, passion etc.? What have they learnt about God and ministry and mission?
 - b. From this is a sense of where God is leading starting to emerge?
 - c. Will the participant have completed all their POD requirements in the next 2-3 months? If not how long is needed?
 - d. Is the participant ready to finish POD and report to presbytery in next 2-3 months?
 - e. Note – not having a clear sense of where God might be leading is NOT a reason to extend the POD indefinitely. If participant is unsure then the POD might finish with the recognition the participant is not clear on where God is leading and articulating a next step for the participant in their journey e.g. on going spiritual direction
6. Any further questions/issues? If not how long is needed?
7. Note down what mentor and participant need to do before next session
 - Participant to complete Ministry/Mission reflection sheet from Go Deep and email to mentor
 - Mentor to contact POD coordinator with update on participant progress and discuss any extra time that may be needed and/or time for participant to present to presbytery.
 - Participant to look at portfolio requirements and start to assemble their portfolio
8. Set date and time for next meeting.

Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 12

Go Deep >> month five

Purpose

To reflect on progress and experiences to date and start preparing to finish

Outcomes

1. Reflect on POD experiences so far
2. Discuss questions/issues that have been raised for participant
3. Continue finishing process

Resources

Appendix 5 – The What, So What, Now What reflection model

Go Deep Resources (see Dropbox folder)

Portfolio – see Appendix 9 FAQ

Suggested process

1. Welcome
2. Review Ministry/Mission Reflection Sheet using action/reflection model
3. Preparing to finish
 - a. Reflect on conversation about what participant has learned about themselves, God and ministry. Has any new insights emerged over last month?
 - b. From these reflections, what has participant discerned so far about where God is calling? This may be about where they believe that their gifts/skills are best suited, a particular sense of vocation, a sense of the general direction that they believe that God is calling them or a desire to explore candidating
 - c. Discuss what is needed to finish up including portfolio and presentation to presbytery.
4. Any further questions/issues?
5. Note down what mentor and participant need to do before next session
 - Participant to write a short summary of learning and where they believe God is leading for mentor
 - Mentor to finalise date for presbytery presentation with POD coordinator
 - Participant to finalise portfolio
6. Set date and time for next meeting.



Period of Discernment

Mentoring session 13

Go Deep >> month six

Purpose

To reflect on POD experience and celebrate what has happened.

Outcomes

1. Celebrate participant's completion
2. Reflect on the journey and provide feedback for the POD process

Suggested process

1. Welcome and celebrate the participant's journey
2. Discuss participant's summary learnings and discernment
3. Discuss where to from here for participant
4. What feedback does participant have for
 - POD process
 - electives
 - biblical/theological study
5. Spend time in prayer thanking God for participant and learnings
6. Mentor to inform POD coordinator that participant has completed POD and provide relevant feedback.

Appendix 1

Period of Discernment

Process



First half: Go Wide (usually six months)

Ministry experience: two hours per week (40 hours per semester)

Theme—What is Discipleship, Ministry and Mission?

Go Wide: six months exploring the different forms of ministry in the Uniting Church and the community.

Mentoring: two hours per month

Reflecting on theology of discipleship, ministry and mission

What does being called by Jesus mean?

What are the implications for your life?

What type of ministry context should you explore in the second six months?

Personal/spiritual growth: one to two hours per week

Journal

Spiritual disciplines

Personal reflections

What am I learning?

What is God saying in this process?

Elective: one to two hours per week

Action/reflection resource: *Discipleship, Ministry and Mission in the Uniting Church in Australia*

Enrol through Trinity College Queensland

Biblical/theological study: three hours per week

Enrol in *Christology* (unless exploring candidating for specified ministry in which case you need to talk to mentor and Trinity College Queensland)



Halfway review

Mentoring

Mentor's feedback

Personal and spiritual growth

Reflection on progress so far

Appendix 1

Period of Discernment process



Second half: Go Deep (usually six months)

Ministry experience: two hours per week (40 hours per semester)

Theme: What does discipleship, ministry and mission look like for me?

Go Deep into a ministry experience by doing six months in one of the following areas:

- congregational ministry
- Uniting Church agency chaplaincy
- school chaplaincy
- a community organisation

Or doing a project in one of the following areas:

- church
- workplace
- local community

To be negotiated with mentor in first six months

Mentoring: two hours per month

Reflecting on ministry experience

Where is God in this experience?

How does this tap into my passion and skills? What am I learning?

Personal/ Spiritual Growth: one to two hours per week

Journal

Spiritual disciplines

Personal reflections

What am I learning?

What is God saying in this process?

Where do I believe God is calling me from here?

Elective: one to two hours per week

To be explored with mentor

Biblical/theological study three hours per week

Enrol in New Testament or Old Testament studies at Trinity College Queensland (unless exploring candidating for specified ministry in which case you need to talk to mentor and Trinity College Queensland).

Appendix 1

Period of Discernment process



Final review

Ministry experience

Feedback from experience or project

Mentoring

Mentor's feedback

Personal/spiritual growth

What is God calling me to?

Appendix 2

Go Wide ministry experiences

Goal:

To help participant experience the breadth of the ministry of the Uniting Church.

Ask your local minister how to access different ministries if you are unsure.

POD participant must complete 12 of following. Please note, the goal is to broaden your experience of the Uniting Church so please choose options with which you are least familiar.

Compulsory:

Each participant must do the following:

- Visit another Uniting Church congregation (or if none within reach, another church) taking note of how they do worship/preaching and what activities they do as part of their life and ministry
- UnitingCare: visit a chaplain in a UnitingCare agency and find out about what that agency does and what the role of the chaplain is
- Administration: what is the business of doing church? Interview church council chair to understand pastoral and governance role of church council
- Presbytery: attend presbytery meeting or presbytery zone meeting

Must do at least one of following (if options are not available in your local church, visit one in another church):

- Children's ministry: visit children's ministry, talk with leaders about joys/struggles and place within the church
- Teenage ministry: visit youth group, talk with leaders about joys/struggles and place within the church
- Family ministry: visit family ministry event, talk with leaders about joys/struggles and place within the church

Must do at least one of following (if options are not available in your local church, visit one in another church)

- Visit groups that church has that connect with the wider community (playgroup, emergency relief)
- Outreach/evangelism: Visit a group (or people) that seek to share Gospel in the community

Must do one of the following (note in these cases, in the "Understanding the Ministry" section of the worksheet, reflect on the goals and methods of the organisation):

- Visit a local community organisation
- Reflect on your workplace, including the goals of the workplace and its relational dynamics
- Walk around your local community, reflect on what issues you see in your community's life, and what organisations are part of your local community trying to address these issues

Other:

- Team: Ministry – interview people who are part of team ministry (what it means to work in a team, how do they experience Christ in this team, not just ministry to, but ministry with)
- Worship planning: sit with minister/worship leader. Go through liturgy. What is liturgy? What is the lectionary? Why are the elements there? Discuss different styles of worship
- Prayer: participate in different forms of prayer (e.g. prayer group, healing service)
- Pastoral care (as appropriate): hospital visit with minister, home visit with minister
- Visit with elder in baptism process
- Small group: attend a small group
- Attend church council meeting
- Synod: visit the Synod office and look at roles and services offered. If distance precludes visiting, arrange a conversation by phone and research the Synod website ucaqld.com.au
- Visit a church from another denomination
- (other possible visits can be negotiated with your mentor)

Appendix 2

Go Wide reflection

For each visit fill out following reflection

Ministry visited

Date

Contact name

Understanding the ministry

In what ways does this ministry seek to develop people's faith in Christ?

In what ways does this ministry seek to encourage/grow/develop the body of Christ (church)?

In what ways does this ministry seek to proclaim the love of Christ to the world?

Processing the experience

In what ways does this ministry connect or not connect with your heart and gifts?

Could you could see yourself involved in this ministry in your future? (Why/why not)

Describe how your relationship with God and your growth as a disciple been affected by this experience.

Period of Discernment

Date

Letter to Minister of Period of Discernment participant

To the local minister:

As you are aware, the bearer of this letter is involved in doing a Period of Discernment. The first six months of the Period of Discernment are called 'Go Wide' where the participant gains exposure to the range of ministry and mission opportunities in the Uniting Church and local community.

Please take the time to go through the list of Go Wide experiences with the participant, and where they are unsure how to get information or access an option please help them. Also there are some options which might require some of your time, please be open to making time available for the participant.

You might like to go through the list with the participant, and where appropriate suggest other possibilities or opportunities for exposure to the breadth of ministry and mission opportunities within the Uniting Church and local community.

Finally, while the participant has a mentor who will be processing the experiences with the participant, you may wish to spend some time reflecting with the participant on what they have been experiencing and learning.

If you have any questions please contact me.

Thank you for your time.

Regards

Name

XX Presbytery Period of Discernment coordinator

Email

Phone



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

Appendix 3

Sample journal reflection process

Goal:

To help people intentionally reflect on their POD journey, focusing on what have they learnt about themselves, God and where God might be leading them, plus tools and resources for doing this.

Some reflection questions for each month in journal:

1. Ministry experience

- a. Where have I encountered Jesus in this experience?
 - Jesus crucified (suffering)
 - Jesus incarnated (loving presence)
 - Jesus resurrected (hope)
- b. What have I learnt about myself?
 - What connects with my heart/passions?
 - What leaves me cold? (why?)
 - What gifts do I have that connect with this ministry?
 - What type of character is necessary for this ministry? Is this something I have? why/why not?
- c. What have I learnt about what it means to follow Jesus through this experience?

2. Bible study/electives

- a. What has surprised me?
- b. What has disturbed me?

3. Overall, what might God be saying to me this month?

Each month, the participant emails a summary of key points from their journal to their mentor which forms the basis of reflection conversation together.

Appendix 3

journal reflection process

The following is taken from the *Learning Period of Discernment Guide (2010)*

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 Broyles, Anne, *Journalling: a Spiritual Journey*, Upper Room Books, 1999

Appendix 4

The Learning Agreement

The Learning Agreement sets out what the POD participant wants to achieve through the POD and the tasks and resources they need to achieve this. The Learning Agreement may be modified in the future so if the participant is not yet sure what Go Wide area or other elective they wish to explore, the Learning Agreement should be completed anyway, knowing that it can be changed later.

Sample Learning Agreement

The following is an example of what someone has done in the past to help you understand what a Learning Agreement looks like.

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 how God is calling me to ministry in youth ministry 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.

Area	Goal	Tasks	Resource
Go Wide ministry experience	To explore the different ways the Uniting Church in Australia does ministry and mission	Talk to minister about facilitating experiences. Organise different visits.	Go Wide resource Minister Mentor
Go Deep ministry experience	To explore what ministry in a high school context is like and whether I am gifted in it.	Talk to local Chaplain about what this would involve. Work with chaplain to help with ministry in school. Do and reflect on experiences.	Go Deep resource Chaplain Mentor
Biblical/theological study	To gain skills in understanding how to read and interpret the Scriptures	Enroll in Trinity College Queensland (or ACU)	Trinity Mentor Minister
Electives	To gain skills in working with Young people	Find a suitable training option.	Presbytery youth worker Mentor Minister
Personal and spiritual growth	Understand what I am gifted in	Spiritual gifts guide. Reflection with mentor.	<i>Discipleship, Ministry and Mission in the Uniting Church in Australia</i> Mentor
	Understand how my work can be part of my ministry	Reflect on work as ministry. Read books on vocational ministry.	Mentor
	Develop different ways of praying	Buy <i>Renovare</i> Book	Renovare

Appendix 5

The What, So What, Now What

reflection model

This structure for reflection questions is perhaps the most widely known and used. It is a basic way to promote discussion that begins with reviewing the details of the experience and moves toward critical thinking, problem solving, and creating and action plan.

What?

This all about facts, questions like

1. What did you do?
2. What happened?

The point is to get the participant to bring back to mind the experience, asking questions to help the participant be descriptive.

So what?

Here is where the participant processes their experiences to make learnings or abstractions:

1. Shift from descriptive to interpretive
2. Meaning of experience for participant
3. Feelings involved, lessons learned
4. Why?

Now what?

The final movement is in generalising learnings to apply them to new contexts

1. Contextual: seeing this situation's place in the big picture
2. Applying lessons learned/insights gained to new situations
3. Setting future goals, creating an action plan

(taken from www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection_manual/activities.html)

Brief example

Mentor – what did you do in Discipleship, Ministry and Mission this month? (What?)

Participant – I did the first two sessions 'Called on an Adventure' and 'What's my story' which focused on the church as a movement and how Jesus has been calling us

Mentor – what parts stood out to you the most? (What?)

Participant – The part where it talked about the church as movement not a denomination, and doing the life mapping exercise

Mentor – why did those stand out? (So What?)

Participant – Well I guess I had never thought about the church as a movement rather than an institution, and the life mapping exercise was amazing in seeing how God has been involved in my life

Mentor – What do you take away from those two learnings? (Now What?)

Participant – Well I am not quite sure about the church as movement – but it is starting to change the way I think about church, and the life mapping exercise has shown me that I need to keep reflecting on where I have been to help understand how God has been working in my life

Other resources

Memorable Debriefs for Memory and Retention
elearnmag.acm.org/featured.cfm?aid=1999654

Appendix 6

Go Deep ministry experiences

Goal

To help POD participant explore what discipleship, ministry and mission looks like in a particular context.

Options

1. Local congregation

- a. Option 1 – Embed: Join an existing ministry and help provide leadership in that ministry
- b. Option 2 – Project: In consultation with your minister design a small project that you can plan, do and evaluate within six months. Ideas could be:
 - organise and run an event that connects church and community
 - organise and run an event that educates your church on a particular issue
 - develop and run a four-session bible study course on a specific topic
 - run a creative worship event

2. Uniting Church Agency

- a. Option 1 – Embed: Join an existing volunteer program and help provide leadership in that ministry
- b. Option 2 – Project: In consultation with the chaplain, design a small project that you can plan, do and evaluate within six months. Ideas could be:
 - help connect the church agency to a congregation through some events
 - run a small group

3. School

Contact a local school chaplain to volunteer over six months. This may take the form of just helping out, or planning and running a small project for the chaplain.

4. Community

- a. Option 1 – Embed: Join an existing community group and support that group in its work
- b. Option 2 – Project: Design a small project that you can plan, do and evaluate within six months. Ideas could be:
 - run a small event that connects people in your street
 - organise local people to tackle local issue e.g. clean up local waterway

5. Home and hospitality

Reflective practice: With a combination of reading, action and reflection, explore how your home and hospitality can be more intentionally part of your ministry.

6. Work

Reflective practice: With a combination of reading, action and reflection, explore how your workplace can be more intentionally part of your ministry including both your relationships and how you do your work.

See the *Go Deep* Guide on the Synod website.

Appendix 7

Period of Discernment

participant halfway reflection

Well Done! You are now at the halfway point for your POD.

Fill in the following reflection guide and email to your mentor for discussion at the next mentoring session.

During the last six months:

What have you learnt about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus?

What have you learnt about what it means to be a part of the Uniting Church in Australia?

What are some things that you have learnt about God/church/mission/ministry?

What are some things that you have learnt about yourself, your faith, gifts, passion and character?

Where do think that God might be leading you through this process?

What feedback do you have about the POD process so far (what was helpful/not helpful)?

- Go Deep
- *Discipleship Ministry and Mission in the Uniting Church in Australia*
- POD process

Appendix 8

Mentor feedback for participant

To help the participant through this discernment process offer thoughts (positive reinforcement and constructive criticism) on the following areas:

What gifts/passions/abilities do you discern in the participant?

How do you perceive what they have written in the Learning Agreement compared with what they are doing and learning?

Do you have any reflections on what call you might discern God may have on the participant? (E.g. do you believe that there are possibilities for call that the participant is not exploring? This might be a call to greater leadership in a particular area, new ministry style or specified ministry.)

What feedback do you have for the participant around:

1. Preparation for mentoring sessions
2. Openness to reflect on experiences and new possibilities
3. Organisation
4. Character (how they have handled conflict, disappointment, success, obstacles)

Have you any other thoughts for the participant at this point?

Appendix 9

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. 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.

When does the POD Start?

The POD starts the first time you meet with your mentor provided you submit your Learning Agreement to the presbytery POD coordinator within six weeks. Else your Period of Discernment will start on the date your Learning Agreement is received

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.

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 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.

Appendix 9

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I wish to apply to candidate for a specified ministry?

If you have discerned a call to one of the specified ministries, Deacon, Minister of the Word, Lay Preacher or Pastor, 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. People registering for the POD who feel that they are being called into an ordained specified ministry in the Uniting Church should contact Trinity College Queensland on 07 3377 9950 or ask@trinity.qld.edu.au for advice on educational components.

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. A limited amount of grant funding may be available through your own congregation or presbytery.

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, participant, and 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 five 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 with the voiceover providing evaluative comments or theological reflection.

ucaqld.com.au

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The Uniting Church in Australia
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