

Period of Discernment

# **Presbytery Coordinator Handbook**

*renewal*



The Uniting Church in Australia  
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

## Contents

Presbytery Period of Discernment (POD) Coordinator.....	2
Details of the Process .....	4
Appendix 1 – Summary of responsibilities within the Phase 1 (POD) process.....	6
Appendix 2 – Phase 1 (POD) Registration Form .....	7
Appendix 3 – Phase 1 Discernment Plan: .....	8
Appendix 4 – Phase 1: Recognition of Prior Learning:.....	9
Appendix 5 – The What, So What, Now What? Reflection Model .....	10

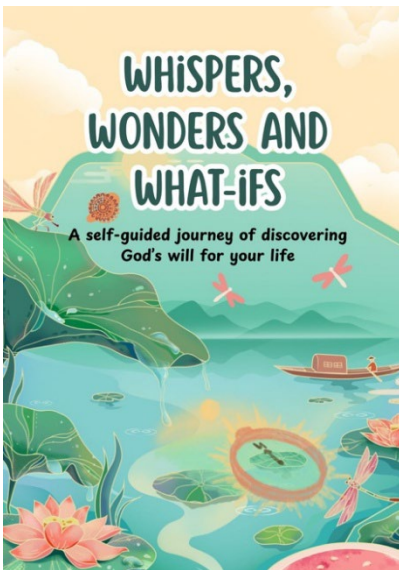
## Presbytery Period of Discernment (POD) Coordinator

The Presbytery POD Coordinator is an important role in the life of the church. The Uniting Church wants to encourage active discipleship in its members that includes ongoing discernment with God, and more intentional times of discernment on specific issues.

In 2026, the Synod, through the Board for Christian Formation (BCF) in consultation with Presbyteries, modified the Period of Discernment (POD) process.

Recognising the challenge of developing a process that fulfils the Assembly's goals of serving as *both* a discernment tool for any church member seeking to dedicate purposeful time in seeking God's guidance, *and* the first phase of discernment for a call to ordained ministry, the BCF adopted the approach of the NSW Synod and divided the POD into two parts.

**Option 1** – Available in a variety of languages.



**Whispers, Wonders and What-ifs** is a 13-step self-guided journey of discovery that provides a Biblical and responsible pathway for anyone to discern the will of God for their life.

It does not require an application to the Presbytery or a presbytery-appointed mentor. It assumes some enthusiasm among local church leaders for its use. Participants are encouraged to source their own guiding partner/group and take responsibility for their own journey.

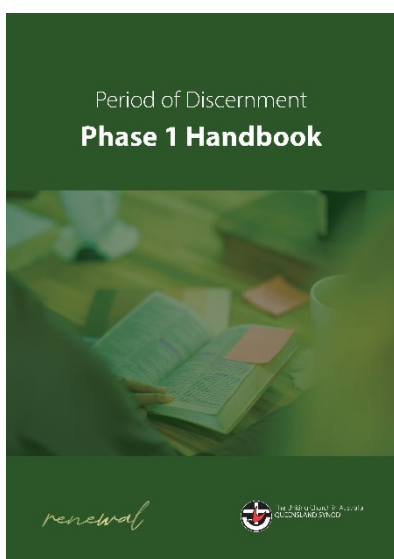
It is agnostic about a call to ordained Ministry, encouraging participants to take up Option 2 if they sense such a call.

Option 1 neither opposes nor is a prerequisite for Option 2.

It can be found -

<https://hub.ucaqld.com.au/resources/ministries/#period-of-discernment>

**Option 2 – Phase 1** – Available in a variety of languages.



**Phase 1** is a document designed as the first step in the discernment process for Ordained Ministry. It is intended to help a participant and the church begin the discernment process together.

It intentionally prioritises discernment for ministry, requiring participants to register with the Presbytery, have a mentor appointed by the Presbytery, and engage in some level of theological study, ministry practice and theological reflection as essential steps in the journey.

It can be found -

<https://hub.ucaqld.com.au/resources/ministries/#period-of-discernment>

This document you are reading is a companion to the Phase 1 document, outlining the role of the Presbytery POD coordinator in relation to Phase 1. You should read the Phase 1 document in conjunction with this document to more fully understand the process.

There is also a **Phase 1 Mentor Handbook** to help Mentors:

<https://hub.ucaqld.com.au/resources/ministries/#period-of-discernment>

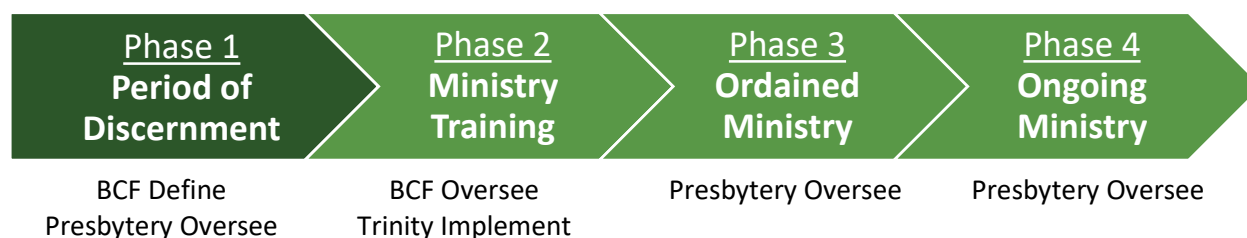
This means you have two tools at your disposal:

### ***Whispers, Wonders and What-ifs***

Your only responsibility with this document is to ensure people are aware of it and can easily get their hands on it.

### ***Phase 1***

This is the process you have responsibility over for the Presbytery. *Phase 1* is the first phase on the process to Ordained Ministry.



### **Your role is to:**

- Keep a record of, and some oversight on those engaging in Phase 1
- Keep a record of, recruit and direct to training **Mentors**<sup>1</sup> for Phase 1
- Ensure you have the latest documentation for the **POD/Phase 1** process
- Determine **Recognition of Prior Learning** for Phase 1 Participants
- Offer any feedback on the POD/Phase1 to the Board for Christian Formation (BCF) so they can keep it up to date as per their Assembly responsibilities.

### **The Standard Process is listed below:**

- Receive Phase 1 registrations from Participant through their Congregation or Ministry agent
- Record them in your records
- Advise the relevant Presbytery body that a person has commenced Phase 1
- Appoint a **Mentor** for a Participant's Phase 1
- Provide Participants & Mentors with all documentation (*Phase 1 Handbook* and *Mentor Handbook*)
- Receive any application for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and work with the Participant and Mentor to determine any RPL from previous study and/or ministry experience
- Receive all documents from the Mentor at the end of Phase 1, ensure they are complete.
- Submit such documents to the relevant Presbytery body for them to assess
- Organise any interaction between a Participant and Presbytery to enable the Presbytery to award them a Certificate of Completion, or otherwise.

You can read the [Assembly Guidelines for the Period of Discernment here](#).

We will go into more detail of the above steps on the next page.

<sup>1</sup> We say more about the qualifications of Mentors below

## Details of the Process

### Receive Phase 1 registrations from participant through their Congregation or Ministry agent

According to the Assembly Guidelines, registrations cannot be rejected by a Church Council, but a Church Council can affirm them. Sometimes a congregation in conflict may not pass on a registration. Individual registrations direct to presbytery should thus be accepted.

### Record them in your records

An accurate database of POD/Phase1 participants should be maintained by the Presbytery, perhaps by the Admin staff, including the final result of the POD process. Some participants have come back several years later to candidate, only to find Presbytery records ambiguous towards their POD status – i.e. no final status recorded.

### Advise the relevant Presbytery body that a person has commenced Phase 1

This is usually the Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC). It would be good practice for the POD Coordinator to be on the PRC and keep this topic on their agenda.

### Appoint a mentor for a participant's Phase 1

The POD/Phase1 process rises and falls on the quality of the mentors. Mentors need to understand Ministry and the Uniting Church, being able to see beyond their own approach to Ministry, i.e. *Ministers come in many varieties. We aren't looking for clones.*

Some people have a gift for mentoring; others need to develop the process. The *Phase 1 Mentoring Handbook* describes the gifts and character needed in a Mentor. More details are in the [Assembly Guidelines](#). You would hope that all Ministry agents would be able to fulfill this role. You will need to keep a record of mentors and gather feedback on how they go with Participants.

Some Participants may need a more proactive mentor. Some people, when feeling the call don't see what relevance the church's opinion is – they have heard God, set me free! Others have a very caricatured view of Ministry which needs to be broadened. Some mentoring relationships simply don't work – don't be afraid to let the participant and mentor have a 'testing' phase.

When training is advertised, promote it among your Presbytery. The more mentors you have the better the outcomes.

### Provide participants & mentors with all documentation (*Phase 1 Handbook* and *Mentor Handbook*)

It's worth checking each year if any of the documents have been updated.

### Receive any application for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and work with the participant and mentor to determine any RPL from previous study and/or ministry experience

We often receive feedback from people that they have been on a journey of discernment for years. When they are ready to make the big decision and jump, they are surprised by the POD process being thrust upon them with little flexibility.

The POD process is supposed to be a gift to the church, not a burden. It's supposed to be helpful, not frustrating. As the Presbytery POD Coordinator, you have the ability – supported by Presbytery – to give people RPL that empowers their journey.

If someone has been a member of the Uniting Church. Regularly participating in Ministry (ie preaching, visiting), undertaken some theological study (ie Lay Preachers Course), under the watch of a wise Ministry agent, this can all be recognised as RPL for Phase 1, meaning they can move towards the Candidating process.

You need honest references from their Ministry agents – *can they confirm this discernment journey and affirm the person's gifts for Ministry?* – and evidence of Ministry (ie a Portfolio of some sort) and course certificates. This is not about finding loopholes or shortcuts. If the discernment is recognised by others, there is no need to do this again.

Where some caution needs to be taken: If someone comes with lots of Ministry experience and study but outside the Uniting Church, these items can be used for RPL, but there does need to be some significant experience, understanding and owning the vision and culture of the Uniting Church. We are a different beast. Ministry falls apart when leaders and their congregations have a different understanding of the polity and governance of the church.

This is about ensuring you sense a person has been on a genuine journey. You can consult with the PRC and the Dean of Formation if you need help to make such decisions.

### **Receive all documents from the mentor at the end of Phase 1, ensure they are complete.**

- **Completed Discernment Plan** – See Appendix 2 of the Phase 1 document
- **Participants Discernment Statement** – Up to 1,000 words from the participant. Described in the Phase 1 handbook
- **Mentor Report** – Up to 1,000 words from the Mentor, described in the Phase 1 Mentor Handbook
- The participant keeps their **Portfolio**. This will serve as a resource to present to the Presbytery at any further stages

### **Submit such documents to the relevant Presbytery body for them to assess**

The guidelines suggest the PRC (or a small group) interview the participant and view their portfolio, to finish the process. A 'Statement of Completion' is awarded that does not assess if they are called to Ministry or otherwise – but simply affirms that they have completed the Study, Ministry Experience and Mentoring elements.

The PRC could advise a participant that the Presbytery does not sense they have a call to Ministry in the Uniting Church at this point. They could give them things to work on before applying, or encourage them to apply. This is not part of their Statement of Completion.

The Statement of Completion could be given at a Presbytery gathering, or in a worship service in their home congregation.

### **Organise any interaction between a participant and Presbytery to enable the Presbytery to award them a Statement of Completion, or otherwise.**

If the participant has not completed the elements of Phase 1, a Statement of Completion should not be given, but the outstanding elements named. It could be that the study and experiences were done, but their reflections showed a decided lack of theological engagement.

## Appendix 1 – Summary of responsibilities within the Phase 1 (POD) process

### Participant

- Register
- Develop a Discernment Plan with your mentor
- Complete Short Courses
- Complete Biblical Studies
- Complete Ministry Experiences
- Organise, attend and be prepared for all mentoring sessions
- Undertake journaling that captures various reflections from your journey
- Build a Portfolio from Ministry Experiences (i.e. copies of sermons, activities, photos, certificates and feedback)
- Complete Discernment Statement

### Mentor

- Run mentoring sessions
- Work with the participant to complete their Discernment Plan
- Complete a Mentor Report
- Submit all required documents to the Presbytery POD Coordinator at the conclusion of Phase 1

### POD Coordinator

- Receive Phase 1 registrations
- Advise the relevant Presbytery body that a person has commenced Phase 1
- Appoint a mentor for a participant's Phase 1
- Provide participants and mentors with all documentation
- Work with the participant and mentor to determine recognition of prior learning from previous study and/or ministry experience
- Receive all documents from the mentor at the end of Phase 1
- Submit all completed documents to the relevant Presbytery body
- Maintain a register of all Phase 1 participants
- Advise current and potential mentors about Phase 1 mentor training

### Presbytery

- Appoint a POD Coordinator
- Receive all documentation from the POD Coordinator at the conclusion of a participant's Phase 1
- Determine that the participant has satisfactorily completed Phase 1
- Issue a *Statement of Completion* to the participant

### Minister or Church Council Chairperson

- Submit Phase 1 registrations to the Presbytery POD Coordinator. All registrations should be forwarded. The Minister/Church Council may include a letter or note of support for the participant



## Appendix 3 – Phase 1 Discernment Plan:

Phase 1 Formation Plan		
Participant Name:	Mentor Name:	
Participant Email:	Mentor Email:	
Participant Phone:	Mentor Phone:	
Participant's Presbytery:	POD Commencement Date:	
Learning Opportunities	Completed (Y/N)	Certificate attached?
<b>Short Courses (min 2 units)</b>	<b>Completed (Y/N)</b>	<b>Certificate attached?</b>
UCA Basis of Union		
Discerning God's Leading		
Ordination		
Biblical Study (Lay Preacher or academic program)	Completed (Y/N)	Certificate attached?
Ministry Experiences	Completed (Y/N)	Comments
Mentoring and Personal Reflection	Completed (Y/N)	Comments
Mentoring Sessions		
Discernment Statement		
Mentor Report		

Signed:

Participant:

Presbytery POD Coordinator:

## Appendix 4 – Phase 1: Recognition of Prior Learning:

If you believe you have undertaken activities and actions that meet the POD requirements, complete this form, collect your certificates and letters of support, and, with your mentor, submit them to the Presbytery POD coordinator. Remember, this is not about ticking boxes, but about recognising where you have already done the discernment process described in this document and are ready to move to the next step.

Phase 1 Formation Plan		
Participant Name:	Mentor Name:	
Participant Email:	Mentor Email:	
Participant Phone:	Mentor Phone:	
Participants Presbytery:		
Learning Opportunities	Completed (Y/N)	Certificates attached?
Short Courses (min 2 units)		
UCA Basis of Union		
Discerning God's Leading		
Ordination		
Biblical Study (Lay Preacher or academic program)	Completed (Y/N)	Certificates attached?
Ministry Experiences	Completed (Y/N)	Letters of Support attached
Mentoring and Personal Reflection	Completed (Y/N)	Letters of Support attached
Mentoring Sessions		
Discernment Statement		
Mentor Report		

**Signed:**

**Participant:**

Please attach certificates for courses undertaken, and letters of support from people with ministry experience who can verify that you have been on a discernment journey. If these references are from outside the Uniting Church, the Uniting Church may invite you to engage in Ministry experiences in the Uniting Church so both yourself and the church can test your compatibility with the Uniting Church itself.

## Appendix 5 – The *What? So What? Now What?* Reflection Model

Below is a simple structure for reflection. It is a basic way to promote discussion that begins with reviewing the details of the experience and progresses to critical thinking, problem-solving, and the creation of an action plan.

### What?

This is all about facts and includes questions such as:

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

The objective is to encourage the participant to recall their experience by posing questions that facilitate descriptive responses.

### So what?

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

The *So What* stage marks a shift from descriptive to interpretive which seeks to uncover the meanings inherent in various experiences through exploring questions such as:

1. How did that make you feel?
2. Why is that significant?
3. What could have been done differently?
4. What might God have been saying during this experience?

### Now what?

The final movement is in generalising learnings to apply them to new contexts, which gives rise to questions such as:

1. What discernment will you seek from God because of what you now know?
2. What spiritual practices will you undertake to facilitate this discernment and pursuit of God?
3. How does the learning provide an understanding of how the experience fits into the bigger picture of the ministry context?
4. In what ways can the new learnings be integrated and applied as a means for change in a current context?