

Contents

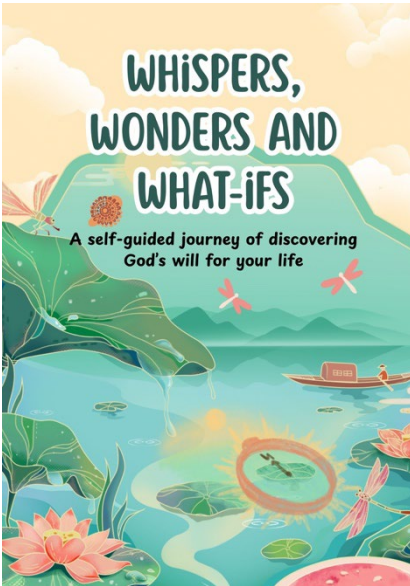
Changes to the Period of Discernment Process	2
Mentors	3
Outline of Mentoring Sessions.....	4
Concluding Phase 1	4
Appendix 1 – The <i>What? So What? Now What?</i> Reflection Model	5
Appendix 2 - Mentor Reflection questions.....	6
Appendix 3 – Summary of responsibilities within the Phase 1 (POD) process.....	7
Appendix 4 – Ten Commandments of a Good Mentor.....	8

Changes to the Period of Discernment Process

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.

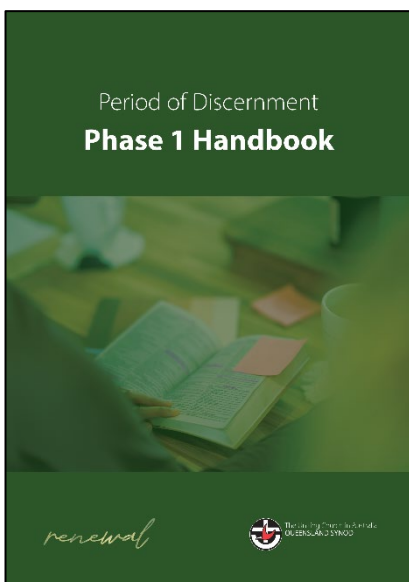
It is agnostic about a call to ordained Ministry, encouraging participants to take up Option 2 if they sense such a call.

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

It can be found here -

<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>

The document you are reading is a companion to the Phase 1 document and outlines the role of the mentor. You should read the Phase 1 document in conjunction with this document to more fully understand the process.



Mentors

The mentoring relationship is crucial to the participants' learning and discernment during Phase 1. The mentor aims to enable the participant to reflect on their experiences and make sense of the learnings emerging from their journey. The relationship between mentor and participant is at its best when both parties engage, reflect, and discuss things openly and honestly.

The mentor is not assessing the participant for ministry but journeying with them along a discernment pathway. The mentor's primary goal is to enable the participant to hear God's voice for themselves.

Mentor Skills

It is vital that people with significant ministry experience and suitable training in the POD pathway are engaged as mentors. Mentors should have the following qualities:

- Listening skills
- an active spirituality
- be wise and affirming
- a wide experience of the Church
- be trustworthy and able to maintain confidentiality
- be willing and able to discuss and explore their own faith
- be committed to lay and ordained ministry within the Uniting Church
- be willing and able to ask probing, challenging and thoughtful questions

Mentors will be required to exercise the following practical skills in relation to Phase 1:

- make themselves available to meet with the participant either face-to-face or online (Mentors and participants should aim to meet monthly)
- assist participants in the development of their **Discernment Plan**
- assist participants to theologically reflect and integrate their learning and experiences
- focus the discussion on the participant's relationship with God and growth in faith and discipleship
- help participants discern future directions for ministry
- assist participants in the development of their **Portfolio** and **Discernment Statement** for presentation to the presbytery
- advise participants honestly on the steps they might take to follow God's call on their lives

It is the responsibility of the participant to arrange meeting times. The mentor should honour all reasonable requests to meet and shall determine the content and direction of those meetings.

The participant should be coached by the mentor to be able to articulate:

- What they have learnt about God, ministry, mission and the church
- What that have learnt about themselves and their faith, gifts, passion and character
- Where they believe God is leading them through these learnings

Mentor Training

Mentor training should be available through the training institutions of the Uniting Church or other training organisations. If you are approached to be a mentor and don't feel you have adequate skills or experience, ask your Presbytery POD coordinator where you can access training.

Outline of Mentoring Sessions

Purpose

To reflect on the participant's progress and experiences to date.

- The first sessions will include the mentor and participant getting to know one another including their respective faith stories, and establishing a clear understanding of the Phase 1 pathway, including the development of the Discernment Plan and any application for Recognition of Prior Learning. These should be finalised by the end of the second session and sent to the Presbytery POD Coordinator
- The final mentoring session will provide an opportunity for the participant to articulate the discoveries and conclusions from the journey, to celebrate what God has done, and to conclude the mentoring relationship.

Suggested process

1. Welcome and prayer
2. Debrief of ministry experiences and study using the *What, So What and Now What* reflection model (See appendix 1)
3. Consider questions raised by the participant regarding:
 - themselves
 - theology/faith
 - church
 - call
4. Work through any planning required by the participant's **Discernment Plan** regarding study and Ministry Experiences. Helping the participant stay on track
5. Any other topics the participant wishes to discuss
6. Note down what the mentor and participant need to do before next session:
 - Participant to email mentor a summary of reflections from the previous month before the next session
7. Prayer for the participant
8. Set date and time for next meeting.

Concluding Phase 1

At the conclusion of Phase 1, the mentor shall prepare a report, not exceeding 1,000 words, on the participant's discerned calling, including any affirmations and/or concerns, as well as any other information the mentor deems helpful for the Presbytery moving forward.

You should collect the documents listed below, and forward them to the Presbytery POD coordinator:

- **Completed Discernment Plan**
- **Participants Discernment Statement**
- **Mentor Report**

The participant holds onto their **Portfolio** to show people as requested. The **Journal** is private and should not be collected.

Appendix 1 – 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?

Appendix 2 - Mentor Reflection questions

Below are some suggested questions that may help you in the mentoring process...

- 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 process so far (what was helpful/not helpful)?

The following questions are intended for self-reflection to offer feedback to the Participant

- What gifts/passions/abilities do you discern in the participant?
- How is the participant hearing/not hearing the voice of God?
- How do you perceive what they have written in the Discernment Plan compared with what they are doing and learning? In other words, how are they processing (internally) their (external) experiences and actions?
- 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 a 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:
 - Preparation for mentoring sessions
 - Openness to reflect on experiences and new possibilities
 - Organisation
 - Character (how they have handled conflict, disappointment, success, obstacles)
- Have you had any other thoughts for the participant at this point?

Appendix 3 – 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 4 – Ten Commandments of a Good Mentor

1. You are here for the other person's needs, not your own
2. Listen more than you speak
3. Ask, don't tell
4. Remember the purpose of Phase 1, and ensure your sessions address it
5. Turn up, follow up
6. An honest answer delivered with compassion is kinder than a kind answer delivered without honesty
7. Maintain professional boundaries in accordance with the Code of Ethics and confidentiality
8. Don't do anything the other person can do for themselves
9. This is a spiritual process – how are you ensuring this is true?
10. Exemplify what you would see them become