

Period of Discernment

Phase 1 Handbook



renewal



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

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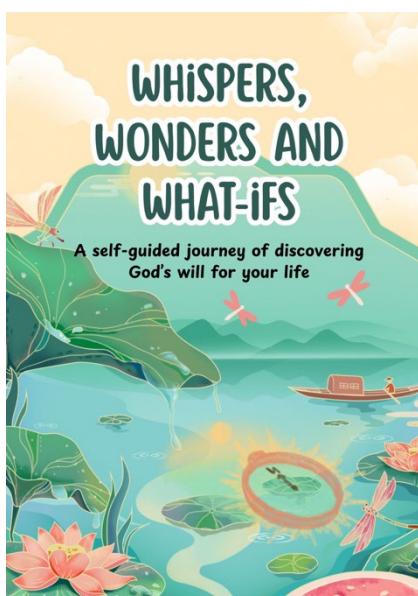
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Is this the right Document for you?

The Uniting Church believes in the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9). That is, all those who are disciples of Christ are called to ministry in the world (Matt 28:16-20). This ‘ministry’ can take many forms, from being parents and caregivers, builders and architects, leading worship and prayer teams, to becoming a Minister or missionary. Scripture says that Christ has given us all gifts to use in his service (Romans 12:6-8).

To this end, the Uniting Church in Queensland has developed two documents to assist its members in discerning their gifts and determining how they may best use them:

- This Document: **Phase 1**
- **Whispers, Wonders and What-ifs**



Whispers, Wonders and What-ifs, has been prepared for use by any and everyone involved in the Uniting Church. Whether you are finishing school and wondering where God might be leading you, or planning to retire and considering your options – or anywhere in between – this is the handbook for you.

It is a self-guided journey of discipleship and discernment. You can re-visit it as many times as you like in your life. It should be available in your local congregation, or via this link...

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

Phase 1

If you are sensing or considering a *call to Ministry* in the Church as a Minister of the Word or Deacon, this document is intended for you. This document is the *Period of Discernment (POD)* or **Phase 1** of the call to Specified Ministry.



Phase 1 is a significant time to *test the call to Ministry* by engaging in the practices required for a life of service under the guidance of a wise mentor. The Uniting Church believes a call to Ordained Ministry is a call to a *covenantal life*, in which we pledge ourselves to serve Jesus Christ through the Church.

A covenant life involves two parties committing to one another, like a marriage. As such, Phase 1 is also the beginning of the Church discerning whether they sense God's call on your life. That is why you undertake it under the guidance of a mentor.

What happens in Phase 1?

During Phase 1, you will be given opportunities to...

1. **Learn:** As a Minister, you become a theological resource for your community: proclaiming the gospel in the language of our day, ensuring its truth is maintained, and grounding people's discipleship in good theology.
2. Engage in **Ministry Practice:** Ministry is more than just preaching on Sunday. It is a lifelong commitment to selfless service. While many lay people exercise ministry in the life of the church, Phase 1 allows you to come alongside those in specialised Ministry areas to see if you have the beginnings of the skills, gifts, character and charisma for the call.
3. **Reflect with a Mentor:** Ministry is being a disciple who discipled others. Meeting with an experienced Minister who can disciple you in this process is crucial to self-reflection and awareness.

To engage effectively in this process, participants must fully commit to the journey by:

- Dedicating time to spend with God: learning, serving, growing
- Regularly meeting with their **Mentor**
- Maintaining a **Journal** of your reflections and learnings
- Developing a **Portfolio** of your resources that demonstrate your ministry experiences and learnings
- Writing a final **Discernment Statement** outlined below

How long should it take?

We recommend taking as long as you need. Twelve months is a good guide.

I've already been on this journey informally

Perhaps you are reading this and thinking, *this describes the last few years of my life! God has been knocking on my heart, and I have been undertaking these exact opportunities.*

Phase 1 is not a box to tick mindlessly. If you have course certificates, ministry experience, and a person or two with pastoral experience in the Uniting Church who are willing to write a reference for you, you may apply for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for all or part of Phase 1 (see Appendix 5).

Remember, Phase 1 is not simply a discernment journey for you but also for the Church. The Church needs time to assess your call to Ministry, so it may encourage you to continue engaging in parts of the process.

What's the Process?

- A. Register (Appendix 1)
- B. Develop a Discernment Plan with your Mentor (Appendix 2)
- C. Complete Short Courses (Page 5)
- D. Complete Biblical Studies (Page 5)
- E. Complete Ministry Experiences (Page 6)
- F. Organise, attend and be prepared for all mentoring sessions
- G. Undertake Journaling that captures various reflections from your journey (Page 7)
- H. Build a Portfolio from Ministry Experiences (see below)
- I. Complete Discernment Statement (Page 7)

Let's step through this in more detail...

1. Fill in the **Registration form** (Appendix 1) with your Minister or Church Council. Registrations are sent to the POD Coordinator of your Presbytery.
2. The Presbytery POD Coordinator receives and acknowledges the registration. The POD Coordinator arranges a **Mentor** to work with you through this period of discernment.
3. At the first meeting with your mentor, complete the **Discernment Plan** (Appendix 2). You should arrange to meet with your mentor monthly.
4. Undertake the **Learning** and **Ministry Experiences** outlined in your Discernment Plan.
5. Reflect on these in your **Journal**, and with your mentor.
6. Collect items for your **Portfolio**. Your portfolio is an A4 or A3 display folder in which you collect certificates of your studies, copies of your sermons, devotions, photos of your creations/ministry times, feedback. It's a 'showcase' of your discernment process.
7. On completion of all the elements of your *Discernment Plan*, meet with your mentor for a final time. Discuss your conclusions from your time together. Complete your *Portfolio* and write your **Discernment Statement**. Your mentor will write a report to the Presbytery. You may be invited to share your journey with a team from Presbytery and be issued with a Statement of Completion.
8. At this point, if you want to continue to follow the call into Ministry, talk to your Minister or Mentor.

Learn

Ministry leaders become ‘guardians of the gospel’ for a community. They hold the wisdom of Scripture, teach it to the church and proclaim it to the world. As such, it is good to be exposed to the rigours of theological learning to assess whether you have the attitude and aptitude to carry such responsibility.

Theological education is part of the *renewing of the mind* that Paul writes about in Romans 12. Theological education isn’t just about growing in knowledge. It is being formed by the very gospel itself into the likeness of Christ. Expect to be transformed as you explore Scripture.

Theological Education can be undertaken at a few levels, depending on how much time you have available. Any study you undertake will count towards future ministry training if you proceed. We recommend you...

1. Complete at least two Short Courses

Short Courses are non-accredited¹ courses designed to explore an aspect of ministry practice or understanding. They range from two hours to two days. [Trinity College](#) and Moreton Rivers Presbytery’s [Centre for Ministry & Leadership](#) (CML) run regular short courses. Visit their websites or call them to learn more about their programs. Trinity College offers numerous short courses online you can complete at your own pace.

Below are highly recommended courses for anyone considering Ministry in the Uniting Church. They provide essential information about Ministry and the Church...

- **Basis of Union & Ethos of the UCA** – This course examines the foundations of the Uniting Church
- **Discerning God’s Leading** – Examines the different types of ministry in the UCA
- **Ordination** – Explores what ordination means in the Uniting Church

We would encourage you to take more short courses that interest you or may stretch you.

After completing a short course, ask for a *Statement of Completion* to be sent to you. Add it to your portfolio and mark it off on your **Discernment Plan** (Appendix 2).

2. Engage in Biblical Study

You can engage in introductory-level Biblical study through the *Lay Preachers course*, or at an academic level through Trinity College’s academic program. To be ordained, you will need to complete a higher level of Biblical study.

Lay Preachers Training

Lay Preachers’² training is available through Trinity College’s [‘Trinity on Tap’](#) Podcast with workbooks series, or through Moreton Rivers Presbytery’s ‘Learning for Living’ course. These courses are considered the basic standard for becoming a Lay Preacher in the Uniting Church and are good introductions to theological education.

Academic Study

[Trinity College](#) is the Uniting Church’s Theological College in Queensland. You can complete an introductory *Undergraduate Certificate in Theology* all the way to a *Masters of Divinity*. They would love to hear from you and help you enrol in one of their courses.

¹ They don’t count towards an official educational award like a graduate certificate or degree.

² A *Lay Preacher* is someone who has done the training required and Presbytery has certified them to preach in any Uniting Church.

Ministry Experience

Ministry is a people and action-oriented call. Part of Phase 1 is to engage in people-centred ministry. By engaging in ministry practice that stretches your past experiences, you have a chance to test and reflect on the call and the rigour of ministry.

If your mentor is not your Ministry leader, you will need to negotiate with your minister about how you can serve in your local church and beyond. If all your past ministry experience is within your local congregation, discuss with your mentor how to gain experience beyond your local congregation.

With your mentor, define some Ministry experiences you would like to undertake as part of Phase 1 that allows you to explore and stretch your ministry practice.

This could be **going wide** – seeking a variety of experiences; or **going deep** – focussing on one or two things at a much deeper level than you have before. Write these experiences into your **Discernment Plan** (Appendix 2).

For example, you may want to³...

- Preach in a variety of settings: Main worship, youth worship, nursing home, children’s talk, rural church, neighbour church, or non-church setting.
- Preach a 4-6 week series on a topic or the lectionary.
- Allocate time to visit *all* of a congregation’s ministries several times throughout the year, shadowing the minister and participating as able.
- Spend time throughout the year focusing on a particular ministry, leading it, developing it, or working with its leadership team to learn about the ministry.
- Visit and spend time in a variety of the Ministry contexts the Uniting Church has to offer, e.g., Hospital Chaplaincy, Nursing Home Chaplaincy, Prison Ministry, School Chaplaincy, Playgroup Ministry, Lifeline, Connect 100, Uniting Early Learning Centre, Youth Group, etc.
- Dive deep into a Ministry opportunity *outside* a congregational setting (like some of the ones listed above) for 6-12 months.
- Take responsibility for the discipleship of a small group of people for 12 months – i.e., a home group, youth group, children’s group, or a group of people seeking to help each person grow in their relationship with Christ. Reflect on how you could scale this across a whole congregation.
- Journey with a church plant in your area to learn about and support their work.
- Become part of the pastoral care ministry of the congregation and undertake to learn as much as you can about this ministry area from others and from lived experience. This could also be the

Minister of the Word or Deacon?

The Uniting Church recognises two ordained ministries, held in parity rather than hierarchy. They share equal status and serve the Church through different focus and vocation.

In Acts 6, we read about the appointment of Deacons in the Church. The Apostles wanted to continue their focus on preaching the word and prayer, both inside and outside the church, so they appointed others to undertake a more service-orientated ministry, i.e. helping widows, the poor, etc. (The Greek for servant is where we get the word Deacon.)

Traditionally in the Uniting Church, a Minister of the Word has taken pastoral leadership for a congregation, seeking to lead them into mission. A Minister of Deacon has worked outside the church in hospitals, schools and community spaces, leading mission in those settings and connecting back to the church.

While there must be overlap between these Ministries, you may feel a stronger affinity for a service-based or a word-based ministry. This should be something you explore with your mentor. Alternatively, you may like to find a Deacon and explore this ministry with them.

³ You need to ensure you complete all church safety and training requirements for any ministries you undertake *before* you undertake them.

congregation's Mission Team, Worship Team, Children's Ministry, Seniors Ministry, or some other aspect outside your usual experience.

- Join the leadership of regional activities such as DayCamp, Badeya, Easter Madness or other ministries outside of the Uniting Church run by Scripture Union or Hotel Chaplaincy to gain experience in a non-denominational setting.

Remember, this experience is about *discernment*, not assessment. Are these activities, even if you are not that great at them to begin with, something you can see becoming part of your future practice? An action/reflection process is central to Phase 1 and is designed to help participants explore the following:

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

Journaling

As you undertake these Ministry experiences it is imperative that you take time to journal your work and what you learn along the way. This is a life-long self-reflective activity that is central to your growth and discipleship journey. As you do, ask yourself:

- What are you noticing about the activity?
- What are you noticing about yourself?
- What are you learning?
- Where do you see God at work?
- What warms your heart in this?
- How could things be improved?
- What are you finding challenging and why?

A key skill in Ministry is theological reflection – spending time reflecting on your practice, mindful of God's presence and the implications of good theology. If you haven't engaged in theological study, this can be a new and difficult experience. You can explore what this means with your mentor. You might ask yourself:

- Does your practice align with the teachings of Christ?
- How do you ensure you are acting in a Christ-like manner?
- Whose needs are being met during your pastoral encounters and ministry activities?

Your journal becomes a key resource for your times of reflection with your mentor. It also informs your final reflection in your **Discernment Statement**. Appendix 3 can help you find a framework for your journal, or search 'STREC Wesleyan Quadrilateral' for another helpful framework. Your journal is private and you are never asked to hand your journal in, or to let someone read it. You can share things from your journal as you choose.

Reporting

At the conclusion of your journey, you need to write a final reflection called a **Discernment Statement**. This is 1,000 words that describe how God has (or has not) met you during this journey, and outlines your learnings and conclusions.

You may want to include the Scriptures that have spoken to you, the wisdom others have shared, the divine convictions that have moved in your heart, how God's call will stretch your character, and what you are feeling called to. The discernment statement allows you and the Presbytery to discern together.

Along with your documents, the mentor will complete a mentor report. With your mentor, collect and collate all these documents and submit them to the Presbytery POD Coordinator.

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

Hold onto your **Portfolio**. This will serve as a resource to present to the Presbytery at any further stages.

Appendix 1 – Phase 1 (POD) Registration Form

Registration Form	
Participant Name:	
Participant Email:	
Participant Phone:	
Participant's Home Church:	
Participant's Presbytery:	
POD Commencement Date:	
Participant's reason for commencing Phase 1	
Participant's education in theology or ministry	
Participant's ministry experience	
Minister/Church Council Chairperson reference	

Signed:

Participant:

Minister/Church Council Chairperson:

Appendix 3 – 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 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:	
Participant's 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 that both you and the church can test your compatibility with the Uniting Church itself.