

GUIDELINES FOR THE PERIOD OF DISCERNMENT

The Period of Discernment is a process to enable the church and an individual together to discern God's call upon the person for future ministry expression. This ministry may be:

- within the local congregation (eg. elder, lay leader),
- vocationally within the community or workplace (eg. teaching, administration), or
- within one of the specified ministries (eg. Minister of the Word, Deacon, Youth Worker, Community Minister, Lay Pastor or Lay Preacher).

The understanding that discipleship and ministry are a calling upon all those who have been baptised is at the heart of this process. The essence of the Period of Discernment is discerning where that ministry lies.

1. **Goals**

- 1.1 To develop the participant's relationship with God and understanding of self as a disciple.
- 1.2 To give the participant opportunity to understand the ministry of the church, the variety of ministries within that ministry, and the function, purpose and responsibilities of these ministries.
- 1.3 To recognise, affirm and build upon the skills, knowledge and experience that the participant brings to the Period of Discernment.
- 1.4 To enable both the church and the participant to better discern the person's gifts and graces for ministry and the type of ministry in which these may be expressed.

2. **Criteria for participation**

- 2.1 Participants will be members, members-in-association or adherents of good standing in a congregation of the Uniting Church in Australia. Persons considering one of the specified ministries should note the membership requirements in Regulations 2.2.2(a)(i) (Minister of the Word, Deacon), 2.8.4(a)(i) (Lay Preacher), 2.9.2(a)(i) (Youth Worker), and 2.12.5(c) (Community Minister).

3. Registration

- 3.1 Individuals will register for participation in the Period of Discernment through their minister or church council with the person or committee appointed by their presbytery to co-ordinate the process (herein referred to as the ‘presbytery co-ordinator’).
- 3.2 Registration may occur at any time of the year.
- 3.3 The presbytery, in consultation with the participant, appoints a mentor to accompany the participant through the Period of Discernment.
- 3.4 The participant develops a discernment plan for the Period of Discernment in consultation with the mentor. This may also involve consultation with the presbytery co-ordinator and the relevant educational body.
- 3.5 The Period of Discernment begins with the appointment of the mentor. The discernment plan is lodged with the presbytery co-ordinator.
- 3.6 The Period of Discernment will normally be for a minimum of one year. Variations in recognition of prior learning and/or ministry experience may be made at the discretion of the presbytery.

4. The mentor

- 4.1 The mentor will normally be a person with no involvement in a future selection process to avoid any potential conflict of interest.
- 4.2 The mentor is to have recognised training in the role. The Synod and Congress Ministerial Education Boards are responsible for providing this training.
- 4.3 Ideally, an individual should have the same mentor throughout the Period of Discernment. In the event that the Period of Discernment leads to candidature for one of the specified ministries, it is desirable that the same mentor accompany the individual through the whole ministry education process.
- 4.4 If problems arise in the relationship between the participant and the mentor, the presbytery co-ordinator should be advised in order to help resolve the problem. This may include the appointment of another mentor as for 3.3.
- 4.5 The specific responsibilities of the mentor are:
 - to guide the participant in developing a plan for the Period of Discernment,
 - to meet regularly with the participant (a minimum of 2 hours per month)
 - to monitor the implementation of the discernment plan,

- to help the participant reflect theologically and integrate their learning and ministry experiences,
- to guide the participant in the development of a portfolio^{*},
- to keep the presbytery informed on the progress of the participant through the Period of Discernment,
- to notify the presbytery co-ordinator that the participant is ready to present their portfolio and engage with the participant and the presbytery in the discernment of the ministry to which the person is called.

5. Discernment Process

5.1 The development of the process for the Period of Discernment is the responsibility of the Synod and Congress Ministerial Education Boards.

5.2 A discernment plan for the Period of Discernment seeks to achieve several outcomes:

- an opportunity to engage in biblical and/or theological study (a minimum of two semester length subjects);
- an opportunity to engage in applied studies in areas of ministry and mission, eg. rural ministry, eldership, youth ministry (a minimum of two elective areas/subjects through course work, workshops, or similar, each equivalent to approximately 40-50 hours);
- ministry experience offering opportunity to exercise ministry in a local context with appropriate reflection; it is desirable that this be in areas of ministry beyond the participant's experience to date;
- participants may opt to include exposure to a range of ministries as a part of their ministry experience;
- awareness of the church's policies on prevention of sexual misconduct.

5.3 The level at which subjects are taken will be appropriate to the participant's background and needs for discernment. The minimum level will be Diploma or Lay Preacher Certificate as in the Coolamon College Program A.

5.4 Individual synods may add other components to the process if these contribute to the desired outcomes for the Period of Discernment.

6. Recognition of prior learning and / or experience

6.1 The recognition of prior learning and experience is a significant aspect of the process. If a participant has recently (e.g. within the previous five years) completed identifiable study components or ministry experience that meet the goals or outcomes of the Period of Discernment then that experience may be accredited and the participant released from some requirements at the discretion of the presbytery.

* The "portfolio" is a short account and analysis of what has been the experience and growth during the period of discernment. It draws on a much larger collection of material (diary notes, personal reflections, journal, sermon notes, reports to church councils, photographs etc) which is the participant's personal archive. Further explanation about the portfolio can be found in the manual "Your resource for the period of discernment", available from Coolamon College.

- 6.2 Participants who are released from the study and / or ministry experience requirements will normally spend a minimum of six months working with a mentor [see 4.1] to reflect on and integrate their prior learning with new experiences and knowledge.
- 6.3 All participants through the presentation of a portfolio will demonstrate how the requirements of the Period of Discernment have been met.

Note: Changes in guideline number **6 (Recognition of prior learning and / or experience)** were made followed by the November 2003 Assembly Standing Committee meeting.

7. Presentation of Portfolio

- 7.1 After the Period of Discernment the participant will present their portfolio to appropriate persons determined by the presbytery and participant (eg. minister, presbytery co-ordinator, college faculty) including the mentor. Together they will reflect on the ministry directions perceived.
- 7.2 The emphasis of the presentation will be on displaying if/how the specific outcomes of the discernment plan have been achieved.
- 7.3 After the Period of Discernment the presbytery will issue a Statement of Participation in the Period of Discernment. This is not to prove that the person has discerned a call to a particular form of ministry, but would indicate the areas of study and fieldwork completed.

8. Further Discernment

- 8.1 After the Period of Discernment the participant
- having discerned gifts for congregational or vocational ministries will be assisted by the mentor in exploring ways of expressing that ministry within an appropriate context;
 - may apply to become a candidate for the ministries of Word, Deacon or Youth Worker; the portfolio and Statement of Participation in the Period of Discernment will form part of the material the applicant brings to the selection process.

*Approved by Assembly Standing Committee
November 2003*