

THE PERIOD OF DISCERNMENT

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The Period of Discernment is a process of reflection, prayer, conversation and learning over a period normally of 12 months during which both you, with the help of your Mentor, seek to discern God's call for your future ministry.



a time for seeking direction about discipleship and ministry

Is God calling you to step out in a new direction?

We believe that God calls us through baptism to discipleship and ministry. As followers of Jesus Christ we are called to serve God in the world with our gifts, time and energy.

The Period of Discernment will help you to see where this ministry might best happen at this time in your life. Be open to God as you think through these next steps.

The Period of Discernment is a process of reflection, prayer, conversation and learning over a period normally of 12 months.

During this process, you with the help of your Mentor, seek to discern God's call for your future ministry.

This future ministry may be:

- Within a congregation (worship leader, elder, pastoral visitor, youth ministry, lay ministry team etc), or
- In your local community or work place (teaching, plumbing, office work, the home, voluntary community service, etc), or
- In one of the church's specified ministries (Minister of the Word, Deacon, Pastor, Lay Preacher).

What can you expect?

The Period of Discernment has four elements:

1. Hands-on ministry experience
2. Guided reflection with a Mentor
3. Study

4. Discernment Retreat

Through this experience you can expect:

- To enrich your relationship with God as a disciple of Jesus Christ.
- To gain an understanding of the ministries of the church and the many ways of serving God.
- To recognise and build on your skills, passions, knowledge and experience.
- To engage in a process that will help both the church and yourself discern your gifts and graces for ministry.
- To discern what kind of ministry you are being called to in the church or in the community at this time in your life.

Registering for the Period of Discernment

You can register for participation in the Period of Discernment with Uniting College for Leadership & Theology. You can register at any time of the year.

First talk to your Minister/Pastor or Church Council Chairperson. Then contact the Period of Discernment Administrator at Uniting College on 8416 8431.

The Administrator will arrange for you to have an interview with the Period of Discernment Coordinator and receive academic advice at Uniting College.

In consultation with you, a Mentor will be appointed to assist and support you through the discernment process.

Your Mentor will work with you on the 'Learning and Serving Agreement' covering the learning activities, practical involvement and reflection that you will undertake.

This agreement might include reading, one-to-one conversation, prayer and reflection, formal study, "trial ministry" activities and journal writing among other things.

The Period of Discernment will normally be for one year - but it can be for a longer or a shorter period with the approval of the Period of Discernment Coordinator.

The length and nature of your program will take into account any prior learning and experience when your agreement is devised.

Who is a mentor?

A Mentor is a guide, support and friend in the process of discernment.



"Journeying alongside someone who is seeking to discover God's call upon their life is an incredible privilege. I have found being a Mentor to a person undertaking a Period of Discernment to be a very rich, rewarding and fulfilling experience".

John

The discernment learning and serving agreement

The discernment agreement for the Period of Discernment will enable you to deepen your understanding, faith and experience of ministry in a number of areas.

Your agreement will take into account your home, work and other commitments.

You, your Mentor and the Period of Discernment Coordinator will agree to the Learning and Serving Agreement and each will have a copy of the agreed plan.

In consultation with you, your Mentor will be appointed by the Period of Discernment Coordinator and prepared for his or her supporting role. He or she is a guide and support through and possibly beyond the Period of Discernment.

You will meet with your Mentor for approximately 2 hours per month.

The Mentor will check your progress through the discernment plan and help you reflect on what you are learning.

Your conversations with your Mentor remain confidential.

Your Mentor will engage with you in the discernment of the ministry to which you may be called.



This ministry to which God is calling you may be in your local community or workplace or within a congregation or church agency.

Your portfolio a record of your journey

During your Period of Discernment you will be asked to assemble a portfolio. Your portfolio is like a scrapbook; an open record of what you have undertaken and how you have grown through the process.

It might contain diary entries, notes from your journal, photos, sermon notes, and reports to church councils.

You can be as creative as you wish in compiling your portfolio, using photographs, artwork, music, video as well as writing.

Your portfolio will include a transcript of your academic record arising from your study with Uniting College.

It is hoped that your portfolio will be a rich and memorable record of your journey of faith through this time.

The portfolio will be an important resource in your conversation with the Period of Discernment Team.

A typical learning and serving agreement must entail:

- Exploration of a range of ministries of the church.
- Completion of the Uniting College sessions in 'Ministries in the Uniting Church'.
- Participation in at least one other Adelaide College of Divinity study unit, preferably in the area of Biblical studies.
- Participation in the 'Discernment Day' and/or residential weekend 'Discernment Retreat'.
- Ministry experience in a local congregation or community agency, such as pastoral care, youth or children's ministry, worship leading, etc.

Any formal study that you undertake will be at Certificate level or higher.

Your Mentor will take note of your previous experience in leadership and ministry and any recent study you have undertaken and take this into account when developing the discernment plan with you.

Towards the end of your Period of Discernment, you will advise the PoD Coordinator that you are nearing completion. The PoD Coordinator will then arrange for you to meet with the PoD Team. A Mentor's report will also be requested. You will present your portfolio and your report to the PoD Team summarising your learning outcomes and growth. This meeting will involve a conversation with the Team about the possible ministry directions that have emerged.

Upon completion of the discernment process you will receive a Statement of Participation in the Period of



"At first sight the Period of Discernment seems bewildering, so open ended and vague. But with the support of a Mentor and the Uniting College the process became far clearer. Looking back, I don't think I could have discerned God's will as clearly without it."

Denise

Discernment at the 'Celebration of Ministers Service', Annual Synod Meeting.

Frequently asked questions

Why do we have a Period of Discernment?

Many people are searching for a way in which they can be truer to their calling to discipleship. The Uniting Church is responding by offering the Period of Discernment as a process that may help people discover new directions in lay and ordained ministries.

Who is responsible for the Period of Discernment?

The Assembly Ministerial Education Commission has established national guidelines for the Period of Discernment.

In South Australia the Period of Discernment is overseen by the Period of Discernment Coordinator, appointed by the Leadership Development Council.

From time to time during your Period of Discernment, the Coordinator may contact you and your Mentor to see how you are traveling on the journey.

Do I need to attend both the Discernment Day and the Discernment Weekend Retreat?

Participation in both the Discernment Day and Discernment Weekend Retreat is highly desirable, however attending at least one is essential.

Will my Mentor be offered training?

Yes. All Mentors will be offered a training program every year at the College.



The Period of Discernment will help you to gain an understanding of the ministries of the church and the many ways of serving God.

Next steps acting on your insights

Once you have discerned your gifts for ministry, your Mentor will support you in finding ways to express this ministry.

This ministry may be in your local community or workplace or within a congregation or church agency: Lay Preacher, Children's/Youth Worker, Pastoral Worker.

Another option might be that you apply to become a candidate for one of the specified ministries of the church: Minister of Pastor, Minister of Deacon, or Minister of the Word.

Each of these ministries has particular selection and training processes. Information about each of these ministries is available from the College.

FAQ cont...

Who appoints the Mentor, and can I change Mentors?

Your task is to find a Mentor whom the Period of Discernment Coordinator, in consultation with you, will appoint. Your Mentor will be involved in planning your Learning and Serving Agreement. Your Mentor will be offered trained for his or her role. If there are problems with the Mentor relationship, a new Mentor may be appointed.

What is the minimum or maximum time for the Period of Discernment?

Generally a period of twelve months is seen as the normal duration. The Period of Discernment Coordinator, in considering your previous ministry experience and any recent theological study you have completed, may reduce this time. On the other hand, some people may take 18 months or longer.

When does the Period of Discernment commence?

The Period of Discernment commences once the Period of Discernment Administrator has received your Learning and Serving Agreement that you have completed together with your Mentor.

Do I have to study?

Yes. The Period of Discernment will include some formal learning through Uniting College for Leadership & Theology and the Adelaide College of Divinity, unless you have recently undertaken sufficient learning of this kind. This study is designed to stretch you in terms of understanding, faith and skills.

Uniting College is a constituent member of the Adelaide College of Divinity. The Adelaide College of Divinity is a Registered Training Organisation.

You can undertake study in a range of ways— including short intensive courses, sessions or distance learning.

Completing the study sessions 'Ministries in the Uniting Church' is however essential for completing the Period of Discernment.

The Period of Discernment Coordinator at Uniting College will provide guidance and assistance with your study requirements, if required.

Who pays for it all?

There are no registration fees associated with the Period of Discernment. It is assumed however, that you will meet any costs such as study fees, books, Discernment Day, Discernment Retreat Weekends. Cost should not be a barrier to your participation in the Period of Discernment. Some scholarships are available, in cases of financial difficulty, through Uniting College for Leadership & Theology.

What if I don't wish to apply for one of the specified ministries?

The Period of Discernment is designed for any person wishing to undertake an intensive time of seeking God's will in terms of Christian service. It does not necessarily involve a career change, becoming a minister, moving house or resigning from your job—then again, who knows what might happen as you respond to God's call?

How do I register or make an enquiry?

The Period of Discernment Administrator, Annette Latham, can be contacted at Uniting College for Leadership & Theology, 34 Lipsett Terrace, Brooklyn Park SA 5032, by phoning on 8416 8431; or by email at annette.latham@flinders.edu.au; or on the college website www.unitingcollege@org.au



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