

THE PERIOD OF DISCERNMENT



The Period of Discernment is a process of reflection, prayer, conversation and learning over a period normally of 12 months during which both you and the church together 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 both you and the church to see where this ministry might best happen at this time. Be open to God as you think through these next steps.

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the church together 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)
- 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 three elements:

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

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, 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 Annette Latham at Uniting College on 8416 8431.

Annette will arrange for you to have a conversation with the Period of Discernment Coordinator and academic advisor at Uniting College.

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

The mentor will work with you on a discernment plan covering the learning activities, practical involvement and reflection that you will undertake.

This plan 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 Team.

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



"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

Who is a Mentor?

A mentor is a guide, support and friend in the process of discernment. In consultation with you your mentor will be appointed by the Period of Discernment Team 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 at least 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.

The Discernment Plan

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

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

You, your mentor and the Period of Discernment Coordinator will agree to the plan and each will have a copy of the agreed plan.



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 plan may entail:

- Biblical and theological study
- A learning program in areas of ministry and mission such as pastoral care, youth or children’s ministry, worship leading, etc.
- Enrolment in the Uniting College course Ministries in the Uniting Church
- Participation in a Discernment Day and residential weekend Discernment Retreat
- Supervised ministry experience in a local congregation or community agency
- Exploration of a range of ministries of the church
- Participation in a Uniting College study topic on the Uniting Church Code of Ethics.

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

This study is undertaken through Uniting College for Leadership & Theology (either on campus or by distance mode).

The Period of Discernment team 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 present a report to the Period of Discernment Team summarising your learning and growth. This will involve a conversation with the Team about the possible ministry directions that emerged.

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



“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.”

Douglas

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 a team appointed by the Leadership Development Council.

What role does the Period of Discernment Team play?

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.

At the end of the period, the Period of Discernment Team, will participate with you and your mentor in reviewing your period of discernment. This is an opportunity for you to share what you have learnt and discerned.

The completion of the process will be acknowledged by granting you a certificate.



The Period of Discernment is a process of reflection during which both you and the church together discern God’s call for your future ministry.

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.

Another option might be that you apply to become a candidate for one of the specified ministries of the church: Pastor, Deacon, and 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?

In consultation with you, the Period of Discernment Coordinator appoints the mentor and will be involved in agreeing to your discernment plan. Your mentor will be 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 team, in considering your previous experience and any recent 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 when you have your first meeting with the mentor appointed for you—provided that your discernment plan is lodged with the Period of Discernment Team within three months of registering.

Do I have to study?

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

You can undertake this study in a range of ways—short intensive courses, regular weekly classes or distance learning through Uniting College for Leadership & Theology. An academic adviser at Uniting College will provide guidance and assistance with your study requirements. This study will be in addition to any other study you may be undertaking.

Who pays for it all?

There are no registration fees of any kind associated with the Period of Discernment. It is assumed that you will meet any costs such as study fees or books. Cost should not be a barrier to your participation in the Period of Discernment. Some scholarships for topic fees in cases of financial difficulty are available 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, 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 or by phoning on 8416 8431 or by email at annette.latham@unitingcollege.org.au



Uniting Church SA

