

# *Period of Discernment* Handbook

Version 1.0

# PERIOD OF DISCERNMENT HANDBOOK (UPDATE 2023)

**Version 1.0.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE FIRST PEOPLES OF THE LAND

*We acknowledge those who were here before us, Burramattagal peoples of the Darug Nation, the first inhabitants of this place. We honour them for their custodianship of the land and surrounding waters where we gather to learn and worship each day.*

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This Handbook has been developed by the Synod of NSW/ACT Period of Discernment Co-ordinator in collaboration with Presbytery representatives. It is part of the leadership development framework of Vital Leadership Pathways (<https://www.nswact.uca.org.au/mission-education/>) and is an expression of the continuing evolution of the PoD and Phase 1 formation. It will be reviewed in 2024. Suggested amendments may be directed to the Synod Period of Discernment Coordinator at: [pod@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:pod@nswact.uca.org.au)

Further resources:

Assembly Period of Discernment guidelines. <https://assembly.uca.org.au/policies/item/446-period-of-discernment-guidelines>

Period of Discernment documents, forms, and links: <https://www.nswact.uca.org.au/resources/period-of-discernment-information/>

Phase 1 information: <https://www.nswact.uca.org.au/resources/phase-1-of-formation/>

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## THE WHY OF DISCERNMENT

“All who have been baptised are called into the ministry of Jesus Christ... Every member of the Church is... endowed... with a diversity of gifts, and there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ.”

Basis of Union, Paragraph 13

Each of us has skills, abilities, passions and gifts, and in turn each of us is called to use what we have to serve others in mission and ministry. Your unique combination of personality, life experience and growth, comes with a unique calling. This might be to ministry within a church or faith community, an organisation of the Church, the workplace, or the broader community. It may also be in a specified ministry of the Uniting Church in a Ministry of Deacon, the Word, Lay Preacher or Pastor.

The Period of Discernment is an intentional journey to explore who God has made you to be, the gifts you have been endowed with, and how God might be calling you to use them in this time of your life. How you undertake this discernment journey will be unique to you. This is a time set aside for you, in the context of the community of the Church, to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit. The PoD is intended to be a blessing of the Church to God's people, so that everyone's gifts might not be neglected, but rather affirmed, supported, and given opportunity to flourish, in order that everyone might experience the fullness of life in God, and participate in the mission of Jesus Christ with meaning and joy.

## THE COMMUNITY OF DISCERNMENT

The Period of Discernment is not a solitary journey but rather an invitation to discern in the context of community. This begins with your local **congregation** or faith community. You may like to invite your congregation and/or Church Council to support you through prayer, fruitful conversation or other means. You are encouraged to engage in ongoing conversation with your Minister or trusted church/faith Community leader about your hopes, intentions and progress through your PoD. They will also be able to connect you with your PoD Presbytery representative. [NB If you don't currently have a Minister, or are unsure who to speak to, the Synod Period of Discernment Co-ordinator can connect you to the appropriate person in your Presbytery.]

**Presbyteries** have oversight responsibilities for all ministry practice within their geographical bounds, including oversight and care of the processes and people in Periods of Discernment. You will submit your PoD registration and completion forms with your Presbytery and they will be an integral part of your discernment community.

Your Presbytery are responsible for appointing a **mentor** to walk with you through your PoD. You may suggest a person whom you would like to be your mentor – perhaps someone who has served in this role for you unofficially already. Your Presbytery will work with you to find a suitable match. Your mentor will help you develop a Discernment Plan and then meet with you regularly throughout your PoD, to guide you in the action-reflection process of discernment. They will listen, affirm and support you, asking questions that help you delve deeper, explore and clarify your discernment.

The **Synod** Period of Discernment Co-ordinator will be a further resource to you and your Presbytery for information, support, and discernment activities such as retreats, workshops and study opportunities. They are a part of your discernment community.

Sometimes Periods of Discernment will be undertaken as a **group**. This may be people exploring a particular discernment journey together, such as a Church Council exploring their gifts as a team, or a community exploring a particular time of life or theme of discernment together (such as entering retirement, finishing high-school, or creative arts). In these cases, a facilitator may serve as mentor to the whole group, rather than individually, and will complete registration on behalf of the group.

If you are undertaking a PoD individually but would like to journey with others, you have the opportunity to join a **cohort**. This is a group of discerners who intentionally journey together, sharing their stories and discernment in community. To be a part of a cohort, contact the Synod PoD Co-ordinator to discuss this option ([pod@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:pod@nswact.uca.org.au)).

## THE ACTIVITY OF DISCERNMENT

Discernment is an enquiry process of **action and reflection** within a framework of discipleship, ministry and mission. To begin your PoD you will submit a Registration Form with your Presbytery. When you have been assigned a mentor you will meet with them to create a Discernment Plan articulating the specific questions of your discernment and the pathway in which you hope to engage in your discernment. You will then engage in intentional action and reflection with your mentor until you feel as though this specific discernment journey has concluded. If one of your discernment questions is, "Am I called to ordained or specified ministry?" you will also engage in the Phase 1 program of the Period of Discernment (See Phase 1 Handbook).

As you create your Discernment Plan, you are invited to use a framework of discipleship, ministry and mission. **Discipleship** is the development of your relationship with God and your understanding of yourself as a disciple. How might you continue growing into the fullness of who God has made you to be? This involves self-awareness and self-reflection as you discern your gifts and graces with your community.

**Ministry** and **Mission** is the exploration of how your particular gifts might be of service to God in the Church and in the world. How might you, in the context of your community and time of life, participate in the work that God is doing? This may involve broadening or deepening your understanding of a variety of ministries, their nature, function and responsibilities. It may also involve recognising, affirming and building on your current skills, knowledge and experience.

Beyond meeting with your mentor regularly, there are no set requirements or obligations of how you complete your PoD. You are invited to discern at your pace, in your own way. You are encouraged to have an approach of curiosity, imagination, flexibility, humility and courage as you explore who you have been made to be and how you might live in response to God's call on your life.

## PHASE ONE

If you at any point in your Period of Discernment are discerning a call to ordained ministry, you will need to undertake the Phase 1 component of the PoD. Details of this can be found here:

<https://www.nswact.uca.org.au/resources/phase-1-of-formation/>

## THE CONCLUSION OF DISCERNMENT

Discernment is a lifelong process. However, this period of intentional discernment is for a limited period of time. You will have established in your discernment plan how you will know when you have concluded your PoD. It might be a set period of time passing, or finding clarity, having satisfactorily discerned answers to your questions.

At the conclusion of your Period of Discernment, you are encouraged to celebrate your discernment. This may include a testimonial sharing of your journey with your congregation, Presbytery, or the wider Church. It may include the presentation of a certificate, or a special blessing for the ministry you have discerned you are gifted for. There are many options, and your community of discernment will work with you to determine what will work for your context. Not only will this honour and affirm your own discernment, it also serves as encouragement and inspiration to the Church to remember and celebrate the diversity of our gifts and ministries.

It is hoped that after your Period of Discernment you will continue your journey of discipleship, mission and ministry, with a clearer sense of your gifts and how you might use these to serve in the Church and the world.

## THE PROCESS OF DISCERNMENT

1. Have a conversation with your Minister/church/faith community leader.
2. Submit PoD Registration Form to Presbytery who will assign a mentor.
3. Meet with your mentor and create a discernment plan. (Your PoD officially begins with this first meeting)
4. Engage in the action and reflection of your discernment pathway with your mentor and community of discernment.
5. When PoD has concluded, submit PoD Completion Form to Presbytery.
6. Celebrate discernment with your community, congregation or Presbytery.
7. Continue or step into new forms of discipleship, mission and ministry.

## RESOURCES FOR DISCERNMENT

The Synod and your Presbytery will provide resources for your ongoing discernment. These include courses, retreats, cohorts and connections. There are also several excellent workbooks for use by discerners and their mentors – alone or in groups. For an up-to-date list of courses and resources:

- Check the Synod website: [www.nswact.uca.org.au/resources/period-of-discernment-information](http://www.nswact.uca.org.au/resources/period-of-discernment-information)
- Email the Synod Period of Discernment Co-ordinator, to receive regular PoD news: ([pod@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:pod@nswact.uca.org.au)).

## PERIOD OF DISCERNMENT REGISTRATION FORM

Registration to the Presbytery of ..... through the  
Congregation of ..... for participation in the Period of Discernment.

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Given name(s) ..... Surname .....

Preferred Title ..... Pronouns .....

Postal Address .....

..... Postcode .....

Mobile ..... Other Phone .....

E-mail .....

Occupation .....

Age Group []     Under 21     21 to 30     30 to 40     40 to 50     50+

### PERIOD OF DISCERNMENT INFORMATION

Mentor

I would like to request/suggest ..... as my mentor.

Contact details: .....

I would like assistance in attaining a mentor.

Phase One

I will be engaging with the Phase 1 program as part of my Period of Discernment

Yes     No

Signed ..... Date .....

Copies of your completed form are to be returned to your Presbytery Representative and to the Synod Period of Discernment  
Coordinator ([pod@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:pod@nswact.uca.org.au))



## PoD DISCERNMENT PLAN - EXAMPLES

To be completed by discerner with a copy to be given to mentor

Discerner: .....

Mentor: .....

### DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS

Through this PoD I will explore the following question(s):

Example questions:

- “What are my gifts and how am I called to use them in this time of my life?” or
- “How can I use my love of creativity to serve the Church?” or
- “What are my speaking/leading gifts and how could I use them in my local congregation?”
- or
- “How could I actively serve God in my current workplace?” or
- “What can I do with my retirement to faithfully respond to God's call on my life at this time?”

### DISCERNMENT PATHWAY

I will explore Discipleship, Mission and Ministry through the following tools of discernment:

[A good place to start creating your discernment pathway is to reflect on ways in which you have discerned the voice of God in your life in the past. What has helped you make decisions? What activities will open you up to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to be able to discern faithfully?]

Your discernment plan might include options like:

- Meeting with my mentor monthly to discuss the journey.
- Writing in my journal weekly to intentionally reflect on my discernment.
- Engaging in a retreat, workshop or study of spiritual gifts, strengths, and/or discernment.
- Exploring a new prayer/meditation/spiritual practice to be open to hear God's voice in new ways.
- Doing some writing to intentionally reflect on my life journey so far and how God has worked in and through me in the past.
- Talking to X, Y and Z about their missional/ministry work.
- Exploring and trying new expressions/forms of ministry.
- A writing or creative project exploring my gifts.
- Joining a PoD cohort (a group of other discerners)

### DISCERNMENT CONCLUSION

We will know this PoD is concluded when:

Would you like to set a particular amount of time aside for your PoD – 6 months? 12 months?  
Or will it be when you have a clear sense of an answer to one or more of your core questions. This may change as your PoD moves forward. Be open to the path, and to the wisdom of your mentor who will help you make these decisions.

Signed – Discerner	Signed – Mentor	Date

## PoD DISCERNMENT PLAN

Discerner: .....

Mentor: .....

### DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS

Through this PoD I will explore the following question(s):

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### DISCERNMENT PATHWAY

I will explore Discipleship, Ministry and Mission through the following tools of discernment:

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### DISCERNMENT CONCLUSION

We will know this PoD is concluded when:

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Signed - Discerner	Signed - Mentor	Date

**PERIOD OF DISCERNMENT COMPLETION FORM - Discerner**  
**TO BE COMPLETED BY DISCERNER**

Name .....

Mobile ..... Email .....

Congregation ..... Presbytery .....

PoD start date ..... PoD conclusion date .....

My PoD did not include Phase One.

OR

My PoD included Phase One AND

I would like to continue discernment towards selection as a candidate for Ministry.

OR

I would not like to continue discernment towards selection as a candidate for Ministry.

The core question(s) I explored through my PoD:

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What my pathway of discernment included:

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What I have discerned (including what I hope is next for my discipleship, mission and ministry):

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How I would like to acknowledge and celebrate my discernment:

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## **PERIOD OF DISCERNMENT COMPLETION FORM – Mentor**

### **TO BE COMPLETED BY MENTOR**

Name .....

Mobile ..... Email .....

Mentor's overview of the discernment journey, what has been discerned together and what the next steps might be for the celebration of the conclusion of the PoD and the discerner's discipleship, mission and ministry:

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Signed – Discerner	Signed – Mentor	Date

Copies of this completed form are to be returned to your Presbytery Representative and to the Synod Period of Discernment Coordinator ([pod@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:pod@nswact.uca.org.au))

