



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

POD Handbook



Welcome to the Period of Discernment



The Period of Discernment (POD) is a formation and education pathway designed to help you discern where God might be leading you to exercise your gifts and abilities in ministry. At its core, the POD is about deepening your participation in the mission of God as a disciple. It provides a unique opportunity to intentionally discern where God is leading you as a follower of Christ. This may be to serve God’s mission in a workplace, local community, household or church. As a missional movement the Uniting Church holds to the claim that:

“every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant. It acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ’s Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service.”¹

The fundamental point of the POD is to explore what God has gifted you with and where this can be utilised to share in God’s mission in this world.

There will be some people who undertake a POD because it is a prerequisite for entering Phase 2 formation as a candidate for specified ministry in the UCA. The POD, as Phase 1 of formation for ordained ministry, is an important step in this journey. However, the POD is intended to be a pathway that is undertaken to discern God’s leading, rather than commence a process with a fixed end in mind. This liberates people to engage in a POD with an openness to listen to what God is saying and a willingness to follow Christ’s leading.

Overview and Getting Started

The Period of Discernment incorporates a range of required activities. Each of these elements are focused on the collective goal of enabling participants to explore and discern God’s leading in their life.

Specifically, the goals of the Period of Discernment, as set down by the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, are:

1. Develop the participant’s relationship with God and understanding of themselves as a disciple
2. Give the participant opportunity to understand God’s ministry and mission in the church and the world, the variety of ministries within that ministry, and the nature, function and responsibilities of these ministries
3. Recognise, affirm and build upon the skills, knowledge and experience that the participant brings to the Period of Discernment and ministry within the church
4. Enable both the church and the participant to discern confidently the person’s gifts and graces for ministry and the type of ministry in which these may be expressed in the life of the church and the wider community.²

¹ UCA Basis of Union, para 13.

² UCA Assembly, *Guidelines for the Period of Discernment* 2008, 1.



The broad responsibilities of all POD Participants are as follows:

1. Be open to where God might be leading you.

2. Participate fully in the various requirements of the Period of Discernment process

3. Engage with your mentor

Elements of the POD

The Period of Discernment covers a range of required activities, all of which are designed to enable you and others in the church to discern God's leading. The POD pathway involves participants engaging in three integrated facets, "Go Wide", "Go Deep" and "Mentoring and Personal Reflection". A brief overview of these facets of the POD pathway are as follows:

Go Wide: provides participants with broad learning opportunities concerning ministry across the life of the church. The Go Wide aspect involves:

- **Short Courses:** Various non-accredited courses that focus on discerning God's leading and the life of the UCA
- **Biblical study:** An accredited or non-accredited unit in biblical studies through Trinity College Queensland or recognised entity
- **POD Retreat:** A one day retreat that allows participants to withdraw from everyday life and engage in spiritual practices, teaching and community which are all focused on discerning God's leading in your life.

Go Deep

- **Ministry experience:** Participants explore and discern God's leading through engaging in specific projects that provide contextualised ministry experiences

Mentoring and Personal Reflection

- **Journaling:** Where you write down reflections on what you are experiencing, learning and discerning.
- **Mentoring Relationship:** A Mentor will be your guide through the Period of Discernment.
- **Formation Plan:** This document sets out what you want to learn and the activities that will make up that learning. This must be completed in the first month of a Period of Discernment and submitted by your mentor to your presbytery Period of Discernment coordinator.
- **Record of Activities:** As you progress through the Period of Discernment you will keep a record of activities, plans, reflections and photographs of what you have been doing. At the end of the Period of Discernment you will present to your presbytery the Formation Plan and a Discernment Statement.



Resourcing the Period of Discernment

The role of Trinity College Queensland, within the POD, is to resource participants with learning opportunities that augment their discernment, and that of the church, during this phase of formation. Therefore, Trinity complements the work of the Presbytery as it provides oversight for the POD participant. Trinity will provide a range of learning requirements for the “Go Wide” aspect of the POD that includes accredited and non-accredited units, short courses and a POD retreat. This blend of learning opportunities can be undertaken in any order and as they are available.

Go Wide

This aspect of the POD pathway is focused on formation through education in the areas of discernment practices, studying the Bible and exploring the Uniting Church as a missional movement. The Go Wide dimension involves learning through:

- Short Courses
- Biblical Study
- POD Retreat

Short Courses

The Short Courses required for the Period of Discernment include:

- Discerning God’s Leading
- Uniting Church Identity, Purpose and Future
- UCA Governance and Regulatory life (incl. Code of Ethics Foundations)

Each of these short courses will be offered at Trinity and will be streamed for access by POD Participants who are not able to attend face to face. Furthermore, Trinity will work with Presbyteries to provide a lecturer who can facilitate one or all of these Short Courses within their own local context if a sufficient cohort can be gathered together.

After undertaking each of these short courses, POD participants will be required to complete a 500-word reflection on each unit taken.

These reflections will be submitted to the Dean of Formation and will be marked with a satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading. Unsatisfactory gradings will require the participant to resubmit their reflection.

Upon completing the short course a statement of completion will be issued to the participant to add to their POD portfolio.

Once the reflection for the short course has been satisfactorily completed, it will provide a helpful resource to explore in Mentoring sessions.

Biblical Study

POD participants will normally be expected to complete a unit of **Biblical Studies** in either the Old Testament or New Testament. Wherever possible POD participants will be encouraged to engage in an accredited unit of biblical study at Trinity College Queensland. However, if it is more suitable to undertake a non-accredited unit of biblical study then POD participants will complete the “Trinity on Tap” resource for either the Old or New Testament. An important part of engaging with the Trinity on Tap resource includes the completion of a 1000-word reflection on a key theological concept/s emerging from the participant’s learning.

If a POD participant has completed Biblical Studies prior to commencing the POD then conversations regarding recognised prior learning can be undertaken with the Presbytery POD Co-ordinator.



POD Retreat

The POD retreat will be a single day event that runs twice a year and will involve the following:

- Time for worshipping together
- Short Course focused specifically on exploring “What is Ordination within the Uniting Church”
- Exploring Spiritual Practices and providing space for discernment
- Outlining the Phase 2 program and considering questions and/or issues that might arise
- Opportunity for engaging with various leaders within the life of the Uniting Church

Presbytery POD Co-ordinators will be responsible for liaising with Participants regarding how the costs associated with attending the POD Retreat will be met.

Go Deep

Ministry experience

The Go Deep ministry experience is aimed at providing a significant opportunity for participants to discern God’s leading. The Go Deep ministry experience is undertaken simultaneously with the applied learning and discernment inherent in the Go Wide space.

The Go Deep experience commences once the POD Participant has met with their Mentor on at least 2 occasions. The Go Deep POD Handbook provides participants and mentors with a guide to this aspect of the Period of Discernment. The first step in the Go Deep experience is the development of a Learning Agreement (see appendix 1).

An important benefit of a simultaneous engagement in the Go Wide and Go Deep experiences is the expression it gives to the importance of balancing action with reflection process: actions (including experiences, conversations and listening and reading) and reflection (learning, prayer, journaling and conversations with your mentor). This action/reflection process is designed to help participants discern the following:

1. What are you learning about God, 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?

An essential outcome of the Go Deep experience is the completion of a contextualised project which will have specific nuances and opportunities for discernment. The Go Deep Project presents a range of options for participants to engage in. POD participants will be encouraged to choose from one of the following contexts in which to develop and complete their Go Deep Project:

- Workplace
- Home and neighbourhood
- Local Congregation
- Flexible Option

The Go Deep handbook provides an outline of the project requirements and resourcing for each of these contexts.



Mentoring and Personal Reflection

Mentor

The Mentoring Relationship is a vital activity within the POD pathway. A detailed outline of the requirements, expectations and practices of the POD mentoring relationship are provided in the “POD Mentoring Handbook”

Journaling

The practice of journaling is a very personal activity that can be expressed in a multitude of ways. The various activities of the POD pathway will generate different learnings and reflections, which should be written down or recorded to capture your discernment. As a complement to this, the following questions are provided as possible discernment prompts for journaling:

Where have I encountered Jesus in this experience or study?

- Jesus crucified (suffering)
- Jesus incarnated (loving presence)
- Jesus resurrected (hope)

What have I learnt about myself through a ministry experience or study?

- What connects with my heart/passions?
- What leaves me cold? (why?)
- What gifts do I have that connect with this ministry?
- What type of character is necessary for this ministry? Is this something I have? why/why not?
- What have I learnt about what it means to follow Jesus through this experience?
- What has surprised me?
- What has disturbed me?

Overall, what might God be saying to me at the moment?

POD Reporting and Record of Activities

As a participant progresses through the Period of Discernment, they are required to keep a record of activities. This might include various journal reflections, notes from mentoring sessions, photographs and videos from the Go Deep Project. This record of activities provides an account of what the participant has undertaken during their POD. However, this account is primarily a means to discern what God has been doing and saying through the POD.

At the conclusion of the POD the participant is required to provide the POD Co-ordinator and other relevant people in their Presbytery with the following:

- Completed Formation Plan
- Up to 1000 word Discernment Statement that succinctly articulates what the participant has discerned during their POD

The record of activities helps to inform the Discernment Statement. The Discernment Statement should clearly reflect the following:

- What the Participant has discerned God is calling them to
- Reflections on Go Wide and Go Deep units, projects and events that provide support for the Participant's discernment
- Personal reflections emerging from Mentoring sessions that inform the Participant's discernment
- Questions or challenges that the Participant has about their discernment



Formation Plan

The Formation Plan (see appendix 2) provides a clear summary of what the participant has completed during their POD. The Formation Plan is managed by the Presbytery POD Co-ordinator. There is the option within the plan for various parties, such as relevant Trinity Faculty and Mentors, to make comment about the participants capacity. Any concerns regarding competence should be sent to the POD Co-ordinator. It is the responsibility of the POD Co-ordinator to log these concerns in the relevant comments section of the Formation Plan.

A completed Formation Plan is a requirement for concluding the POD.

POD Process

The POD pathway involves a range of different people from various aspects of the church's life. The normal duration for the Period of Discernment is twelve months, though there is a flexible approach to this timeframe given the particular needs and circumstances of people. The following outline provides a streamlined overview of what is involved.

Commencing the POD

1. A person can register for participation in the Period of Discernment through their Minister or Church Council. Registrations are sent to the POD Co-ordinator of the Presbytery in which the Congregation is based.
2. The Presbytery POD Co-ordinator receives and acknowledges the registration. After doing so the POD Co-ordinator provides the participant with information and relevant resources about the overall process including the educational and formational requirements. Furthermore, the POD Co-ordinator appoints a mentor to work with the participant through their Period of Discernment. The POD Co-ordinator advises the Presbytery PRC of the participants commencement in a Period of Discernment.
3. A POD commences when the Mentor has been appointed.
4. A POD is usually completed within 12 months. However, the timeframe is flexible, especially if the POD needs to be extended.

Concluding the POD

1. The participant presents a Discernment Statement and Completed Formation Plan to the POD Co-ordinator and other appropriate people determined by the Presbytery (usually the Pastoral Relations Committee)
2. At the conclusion of the participant's POD the Mentor provides a written report to appropriate people determined by the Presbytery (usually the Pastoral Relations Committee)
3. After the completion of all required POD activities the Presbytery issues a statement of conclusion to the Period of Discernment.
4. If a participant discerns a call to Ordained ministry, then the following must occur:
 - Seek the recommendation of their Church Council to progress an application to the Presbytery.
 - If the Church Council recommends the application to the Presbytery then the prospective candidate meets with the Presbytery to gain their support, or otherwise.
 - If the Presbytery supports the application to Candidate, then the person enters the Synod Selection Panel process.



Appendix 1

Learning Agreement

The Learning Agreement is the significant point of integration for the Go Deep Project. It is the reference point for Participants and Mentors that brings clarity to the direction and shape the Project needs to take. The Learning Agreement needs to be established as part of the initial work of developing the Go Deep Project. The key components of the learning agreement are:

- **Go Deep Project Goals:** Participants and their Mentor need to develop up to 5 project goals that are directly related to the Go Deep Project. Project goals should articulate simple and specific actions that, when fulfilled, allow for the project to be completed. The goals can be sequential and/or integrated steps in completing the project. The following elements and questions are helpful guides in the development of the project goals:

Purposeful – Why are you setting this goal as part of the project?

Outcome focused – What outcomes are you expecting to see by setting this goal?

Discernment driven – How will this goal help discern God’s leading?

- **Resources:** Participants and Mentors will need to outline what resources will be required in order to fulfill the project goals. The resource list can be progressively developed during the project.
- **Outcomes and Discernment:** Participants will be required to record what the outcomes and discernment has been during the Project.

A template for the Learning Agreement is as follows:

Learning Agreement	
Participant Name:	Mentors Name:
Participant Email:	Mentor Email:
Participant Phone:	Mentor Phone:
Go Deep Project Focus:	
Learning Agreement Commencement date:	Learning Agreement Conclusion date:

Go Deep Project Goals	Resources	Outcomes and Discernment
Goal 1		
Goal 2		
Goal 3		
Goal 4		
Goal 5		

Signed:

Participant:

Mentor:



Appendix 2

Period of Discernment Formation Plan:

POD Formation Plan		
Participant Name:		Mentor Name:
Participant Email:		Mentor Email:
Participant Phone:		Mentor Phone:
Participants Presbytery:		POD Commencement Date:
Go Wide	Completed (Y/N)	Comments
Short Courses		
UCA Identity, Purpose and Future ³		
UCA Governance and Regulatory Life ⁴		
Discerning God's Leading		
Biblical Study		
New Testament Foundations or		
Old Testament Foundations		
POD Retreat		
What is Ordination in the UCA? - Short Course		
Spiritual Practices and Discernment session 1		
Spiritual Practices and Discernment session 2		
Go Deep	Completed (Y/N)	Comments
Ministry Experience Context		
The Participant and Mentor select one of the following contexts in which to develop, implement, evaluate and reflect on a Go Deep Project:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace • Home and neighbourhood • Local Congregation • Flexible Option 		
Mentoring and Personal Reflection	Completed (Y/N)	Comments
Mentoring Relationship		
Journaling		
Completion of Portfolio		

Signed:

Participant:

Presbytery POD Co-ordinator:

³ This course can be completed in the POD. If the Participant has not undertaken this short course during their POD then it will need to be completed during their Candidature,

⁴ This course can be completed in the POD. If the Participant has not undertaken this short course during their POD then it will need to be completed during their Candidature,