



## **Period of Discernment Guide for Mentors**

“Christian mentoring is a dynamic, intentional relationship of trust in which one person enables another to maximise the grace of God in their life and service.”

John Mallison, *Mentoring to Develop Disciples and Leaders*, p8

Mentoring someone through their Period of Discernment (PoD) is a blessing and a privilege. It is strongly recommended that all mentors engage in training to strengthen their practice as a mentor. This is a requirement for Phase 1 PoDs.

### **What's involved?**

As mentor, you will be a trusted companion for your mentee, and a central person in their community of discernment. You will meet regularly with them either in person or on Zoom, for approximately 2 hours a month. You will spend most of your time listening to your mentee, as well as guiding their discernment through asking open, reflective and specific questions.

At times, you will offer your own reflections, however, your role as mentor is not to have all the answers and to impart wisdom. Your role is to help your discerner to reflect deeply in the *action-reflection* cycle of their PoD. This may involve helping them articulate their experiences, consider things from different perspectives, reflect theologically, and integrate their experiences. You will walk closely with your mentee as they discern, and you too will be discerning your sense of their gifts, and how they might use these gifts to serve God in the church and the world.

You will be a safe space for your mentee, and a source of encouragement, support and care. Whilst you will communicate with the Presbytery regarding the progress of the PoD, you will not report on your mentee as such. The discerner-mentor relationship is designed to be a safe space for the discerner to be vulnerable and open. It is important therefore to establish healthy boundaries from the outset, regarding confidentiality and the nature of this intentional mentor-discerner relationship.

### **Meetings**

You will initiate contact with your mentee to organise the first meeting. Choose a time and place to meet that will be comfortable, safe and convenient for both of you. Ensure that you organise the next meeting at the end of this first meeting so that you both know when and where you expect to meet again. Do this at every meeting. Even if you know each other already, it is good to spend some initial time getting to know your discerner so that you can have a fuller picture of who they are and their life and ministry experience. At the end of each meeting, agree together when and how to meet next time.

## Discernment Plan

At this first meeting you will also help your mentee create their Discernment Plan. Explore why they are engaging in a PoD at this time, what questions they are discerning and how they might wish to engage in their discernment. Support them to consider and articulate a clear discernment question (or questions). Ask how they have experienced discernment in the past – and what practices might be of benefit for this PoD. You may be able to offer new ideas to your discerner – practices, relevant books or courses, or people that might be beneficial for them to connect with. It's OK if you don't have ideas on this at this first meeting – it may be something you could research and bring back to your mentee at future meetings.

When the Discernment Plan is being created, establish a sense of how you will know when the PoD has been completed – will it be after a set amount of time (6 or 12 months) or when a sense of discernment has occurred (a clarity around an answer to a question) or when a project or set goals have been completed (the completion of a course of study or the implementation of a project)? This “endpoint” may shift throughout the PoD. One question may be answered but may in fact raise another question. Encourage deep, authentic discernment throughout the journey. Encourage flexibility, curiosity, and commitment.

## Areas of exploration

Throughout the PoD, there are many areas you can support exploration and discernment. Keep the framework of discipleship, ministry and mission in mind (as outlined in the PoD Handbook). Some areas for exploration include:

- their life story and experiences to this point – how God has worked in and through them
- gifts, interests, and passions – where have these been evident, as well as where they may be potentially untapped or underdeveloped
- current and potential ministries – where could they witness, experience and practice ministry in their current and new contexts
- boundaries, self-awareness, self-care, health and wellbeing
- the key relationships in their life
- understanding of and relationship with God
- faith and spiritual practices

## Completing the PoD

When you and your discerner feel as though the PoD is completed, your discerner will fill in the Completion Form and you will complete the Mentor section. You will inform the Presbytery and submit the Completion Form. You will also need to work with your discerner to find a way to celebrate the completion of the PoD authentically and meaningfully. This may include the formal presentation of a certificate of completion, a sharing of their discernment journey (as a spoken testimony or as an article), or a prayer, blessing, or commissioning of some kind. This may occur in their regular congregation, at a Presbytery meeting or church magazine.

Finally, you have a key role as an advocate for your discerner in how they might take the next steps in their ministry and mission. If they have discerned particular gifts and callings, how can these now be put into action – either in new forms of ministry and mission or in supporting and affirming existing forms? Walk with your mentee through this process and connect them to others in the Church as needed.

## **Mentoring a Phase 1 PoD**

If your mentee is exploring a sense of their call to formal ministry, they will complete a Phase 1 PoD. A mentor for Phase 1 will normally be a person with no involvement in a future candidate selection process, to avoid any conflicts of interest in the future. Phase 1 mentors are required to have recognised training in the role. The Synod runs regular mentor training. In the event that a discerner discerns a call to specified ministry, and this is affirmed by the Church, it may be desirable that the same mentor accompany them through Phase 2 of formation as well.

Throughout a Phase 1 PoD, you will need to support your mentee to explore what ordination is and the difference between ordained and lay ministry. We are all called to ministry. Are they called to serve the whole church for their whole life, in ministry and leadership? Is this as a Minister of the Word or Minister of Deacon? Is a lay specified Ministry of Pastor a better fit? If your mentee discerns a call to formation for ordained ministry, and you affirm this call as well, you are encouraged to help your mentee clearly articulate their sense of call and what this means for them. Why formal ministry? Why now? Why the UCA?

Throughout a Phase 1 PoD, your discerner may engage in a variety of subjects through the Uniting Learning platform or through Pilgrim Theological College's accredited introduction subjects. This provides comprehensive resources for your discerner to work through areas they need to consider whilst in their PoD. None of these subjects are compulsory. You will work with your mentee to discuss which subjects will be most beneficial for their discernment, based on their previous learning and experience. As they complete subjects (in whichever order suits them), you can use these topics as a basis for your discussions. If you are aware of missing pieces in their discernment, you can direct them to the subjects you believe will be beneficial for them. It is a good idea to spend some time familiarizing yourself with these modules so that you can support your mentee well. As mentor, you will have access to your mentee's responses.

Yours is a vital role in the discernment process. It is an immense privilege to journey with someone who is considering what God is calling them to in their vocation. Please approach this responsibility with a sense of care, and a sense of hope for the future of this individual and the future of the Church.

## **Support**

If you have any questions about mentoring, the Period of Discernment, or Phase 1, please contact the Period of Discernment Coordinator for your Presbytery or Synod ([pod@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:pod@victas.uca.org.au)).

See the PoD resource page <https://victas.uca.org.au/pod-resources/>

