

Vocational Discernment Guide

A resource for
exploring vocation
in the Anglican Church
Southern Queensland.



*Creator God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless
until they find their rest in you:
teach us to offer ourselves to your service,
that here we may have your peace,
and in the world to come
may see you face to face;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*
Amen

A Prayer Book for Australia p.57

Welcome

Welcome to your guided journey of vocational discernment!

Whether you are a person responding to God's call, a parish priest, a friend or mentor, this little booklet is designed to provide you with guidance and support as you seek God's call.

In the Anglican Church Southern Queensland (ACSQ), we believe strongly that all people have a vocation. For some it is found in their day-to-day work, for some it comes through volunteering in a charity, and still others find it in ministry in their church, as a layperson or an ordained minister.

If you are reading this, it is likely that you:

- are a committed Christian with a deep love of God and an active faith life in prayer and worship;
- worship or work in an Anglican faith community;
- enjoy serving in some way in your Anglican faith community
- feel that you are called to something 'more' in your church.

These constitute the foundation on which your vocation in the Anglican church can grow and flourish.

If you've found this resource and do not belong to an Anglican faith community but would like to – that's fantastic! Please visit www.anglicanchurchsq.org.au to find a local church, or contact the Discernment office (details inside the back cover) and we can direct you to a church to welcome you!

Because vocation is best discerned in community, you'll find that this program requires the support and prayers of your church and its minister. From this point on, it will be assumed that you have the above four characteristics and will build on that solid foundation to help you discern where God might be calling you to serve.

The material in this booklet should be read in conjunction with the policy document *God Calling*, which is available at the Vocations website (www.anglicanchurchsq.org.au/vocations) and details the requirements for selection to be formed for ordained ministry in the ACSQ.

The ACSQ embraces and celebrates Anglican comprehensiveness as central to our identity as a Diocese of the Anglican Church of Australia. This means that our clergy, people and faith communities reflect the breadth of Anglican theology and liturgical style. We seek ordained leaders who reflect this diversity, and who can work collaboratively and generously with people who may express their faith and ministry differently.

We are seeking ministers (lay and ordained) who embody the following:

- A compelling spiritual life and a passion for the Gospel;
- Spiritual maturity, self-awareness, and authenticity;
- The ability to communicate the Gospel in ways that people and communities find engaging and relevant to their lives.

Some will also possess leadership skills to empower, organise and equip others for ministry in an innovative, creative and flexible manner. Some will be called as priests and deacons, others as lay ministers. Pray that God will reveal to you the special and unique vocation to which you are called.

May your journey be blessed!

The Vocational Discernment Process

Exploring vocational direction, especially testing a vocation to ordained ministry, is a journey which will take time, prayer and commitment. In the ACSQ, there are five distinct stages in the Vocational Discernment Process. This booklet will guide you through the first two stages.

Stage 1 - Personal Exploration (resources available on website)

This stage is normally to be a minimum of one year.

- Pray intentionally
- Immerse yourself in parish life and ministry
- Read a selection from the recommended reading list
- Explore contemplative exercises e.g. journaling
- Read and reflect on relevant **anglican focus** articles on the ACSQ Vocations website

Stage 2 - Guided Exploration (with your priest and faith community)

This stage is normally to be a minimum of six months.

- Discussions with Parish Priest
- Spiritual director/mentor/companion
- Discussion with Parish Support Group
- Meet with a Seekers or Enquirers Group

Stage 3 - Formal Enquiry (engagement with DDF office)

This stage is normally six months in duration, commencing in June.

- Interview with Director of Discernment
- Write a letter of application
- Write reflective Essays – The Nature of God, The Nature of the Priesthood
- Obtain Parish Priest reference
- Complete Form 1
- Meet with an Enquirer group

Stage 4 - Mutual Discernment

This stage is normally six months in duration, commencing in January.

- Meet with member of the Discernment Panel (2 ECs + DD)
- Interview with the Regional Bishop
- Parish group interview with the Bishop

Stage 5 – Vocation Discernment Conference

The VDC is normally held in August, with outcomes delivered in September.

- Psych assessment
- Group activities
- Panel interviews
- Written tasks



Stage 1 | Personal Discernment

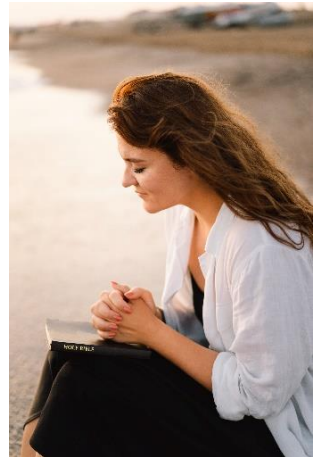
This is a foundational stage of vocational discernment because it focusses primarily on your own relationship with God and your inner sense of calling. The hallmarks of this stage are **prayer**, **experience** and **reflection**. Resources for this stage can be found at the ACSQ Vocations website.

Prayer

A relationship with God in Christ is the sustaining factor in any person's faith life, especially if they undertake ministry and service. Anglicans are committed to a regular routine of prayer and regular, prayerful reading of the Bible. During this stage of discernment, it is important that you are immersed in the life of a faith community, normally a parish church, or in some cases an Anglican School faith community.

You should continue your prayerful habits, as well as exploring some prayer practices which are distinctly Anglican. These could include, but not be limited to the following suggestions:

- using the Daily Office (located in *A Prayer Book for Australia* pp. 381-484);
- read the Bible daily, using the lectionary or other guide;
- joining in prayer services at your local parish;
- visiting the Cathedral for Evensong or weekday services if you work in the city;
- trying a different form of prayer such as meditation or *lectio divina*;
- exploring prayer with a bible study or other group.



Experience

During this time of personal discernment, it is helpful to get a taste of what ministry feels like. There are a whole lot of things that you can do as a volunteer layperson in your parish to see what kind of ministry suits your temperament and gifts. You may already be doing some of these things, but with the permission, guidance and support of your priest, have a go at something new and see how that feels. On the next page, we've provided a

list of activities you could try. This list is not exhaustive, but work with your faith community leaders to gain as much experience as you can in this intentional personal discernment period. In short, have a go!

Reflection

Intentional reflection it is the very best way to gain the most from ministry experiences. There are some simple ways to do this, such as keeping a journal, meeting with a spiritual companion or simply talking about it with a small group. Whatever your reflective practice, be sure to ground it in prayer and offer all your efforts to the Lord, in faith that God will reveal to you the areas where you will be best able to serve the mission of God.

Reflection questions are included in this booklet. You may like to use these reflections as a stimulus for discussion with a small group or a spiritual companion.

Ministry Experience Menu

Tick the activities you've done. Have a go at the ones which are new to you.

Read the Bible aloud in church	Be a server at a Eucharist	Help with a children's or youth group
Prepare the church for worship	Attend a bible study	Help in the parish office
Lead intercessions in worship	Attend a Parish Council meeting	Join your priest on a pastoral visit
Visit a different church in your local area	Be a welcomer at church	Join in with an outreach ministry

Add your own selection of new activities at the bottom if you wish!

Personal Reflection

For each of the activities that are new to you, consider the following:

- How did you feel while you were doing the activity?
- How did other people respond to you? Record any feedback you received from others.
- How did that role contribute to the mission of the church? In what way did you get a sense of being part of something larger than yourself?
- Could you see yourself doing this in the future, or was it really not what you are called to do?
- What was your biggest learning from doing that task?

Offer your thoughts and feelings to God in a time of prayer.

Reading Recommendations

While exploring your sense of call, it is good to listen to many and varied voices, especially from those who have researched and lived out the practices necessary to discern God's voice. While you immerse yourself in Anglican church life through prayer and worship, it is recommended that you select a number of the books listed below to fuel your contemplation.

Select the titles which you feel touch on areas you are unsure about, or that are stirring the most questions within you. Most of these books are available in the Roscoe Library at St Francis Theological College. All Anglicans are encouraged to become members of the Roscoe Library. It's absolutely free and wonderful resource. Visit <https://www.stfran.qld.edu.au/library> for more information.

Podcast are also a way to stimulate thought and reflection. Some excellent podcasts are listed for you to explore and consider.

Books about Vocation

Becoming Reverend: a Diary	Matt Woodcock
Being a Deacon Today	Rosalind Brown
Being a Priest Today	Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown
Called or Collared? An Alternative Approach to Vocation	Francis Dewar
Leaving Church	Barbara Brown Taylor
Let Your Life Speak	Parker Palmer
Resilient Disciples	Rick Hill
Steel Angels: the personal Qualities of a Priest	Magdalene Smith
The Christian Priest Today	Michael Ramsey
The Fire and the Clay	George Guiver
The Road to Daybreak	Henri Nouwen
The Theology of Women's Priesthood	Ali Green
The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call	Eugene Peterson and Marva Dawn
Vocation. Singing the Lord's Song	Stephen Platten
Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC	Frederick Buechner
With Open Hands	Henri Nouwen

Books about Spiritual Practices

A Rhythm of Prayer	Sarah Bessey (editor)
Holy Longing	Ronald Rolheiser
Just This: prompts and practices for contemplation	Richard Rohr
Surrender to love, The Gift of Being Yourself, and Desiring God's Will	David G. Benner
Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy-Tale	Frederick Buechner
The Practice of the Presence of God	Brother Lawrence
The Rebirthing of God	John Philip Newell
The Wounded Healer	Henri Nouwen
Uncommon Gratitude: Alleluia For All That Is	Joan Chittister & Rowan Williams

Biographical Books

A View from the Ridge. The Testimony of a Pilgrim	Morris West
Legacy: What can the All Blacks Teach Us about the Business of Life	James Kerr
Living Faith in Public Life: Fifty Two Australian Voices	R Prescott & P Marshall (editors)
Long Walk to Freedom	Nelson Mandela
The Happiest Man on Earth	Eddie Jaku

Books about Being Anglican and Apologetics

All things Anglican: who we are and what we believe	Markus Throup
A Passionate Balance	Alan Bartlett
Reasons for My Hope: Responding to Non-Christian Friends	Benno van den Toren
God, Actually	Roy Williams

Podcasts about Leadership

Carey Nieuwhof Leadership podcast
Church Pulse Weekly

Podcasts about Theology and Spirituality

On the Way
The Church Times podcast
Ask NT Wright anything
Unbelievable?
Homebrewed Christianity

Podcasts about Preaching

Pulpit Fiction

Stage 2 | Guided Exploration

This stage of vocational discernment involves engagement with your faith community leader (such as your parish priest or school chaplain). In the Anglican church, vocation arises in a faith community and is affirmed by a faith community. While your call to ministry may be an inner one, it must be affirmed by those around you in order that it may find its fullest expression in the Anglican context.

It is suggested that in this stage, you are encouraged to meet with their parish priest (or other faith community priest) and/or a small group of prayerful people (the 'Discernment Committee') or a mentor/companion ('Discernment Companion') in your faith community who can help you reflect on your faith and calling.

A separate guidebook is available for your parish to assist you in completing this program of reflection.

It is suggested that you meet once a month over a six month period, and each time talk about a different aspect of your faith and calling. Each meeting should be no longer than one to one and a half hours, and should be held in an open, relaxed and supportive environment.

These people are not testing your vocation, but helping you to better understand the promptings that have led you to explore a vocation to ministry.

Each session should begin and end with prayer, and the Discernment Committee or Companion should approach their role with a sense of deeply listening to how God is at work in the life of the faith community, as well as in your life.



The six sessions should look something like the following.

Session 1 – Orientation

The priest, Discernment Committee or Companion and the enquirer should all attend this first meeting. The priest will outline the Guided Discernment program and the group should get to know one another if they don't already. In this time, the group will set some shared understandings around when and where to meet, topics to be covered and group confidentiality and respect.

Session 2 – Faith, Spirituality and Relationship with God

The first and most important criterion in discernment of ministry is the faith of the Individual. Those who are considering ordination must love God with heart, mind, and soul, and love the person of Jesus Christ. During this session, the enquirer should talk about their own faith life and how God has been at work in their life. Topics of prayer, reading and study of the Bible, and personal worship can be discussed through questions which will be provided to the Discernment Committee or Companion.

Session 3 – God's Call

This session focusses on the experience of 'being called'. You can tell the story of how your call was first experienced, and how it has progressed in your life. You may especially like to talk about how your Personal Discernment experiences have shaped this understanding of being called and clarifying exactly what ministry you feel God is calling you to.

Session 4 – Gifts for Ministry

A person called to ministry – especially ordained ministry – must have particular gifts and skills (or the capacity to develop them). In this session, the group will explore questions of where God has gifted particular skills to you and how you have developed them. You will also be able to think about where particular learned skills or experience in the workplace may be utilised in a ministry setting.

Session 5 – The Mission of the Body of Christ

This session explores the nature of the Anglican Church, its structures, traditions and leadership, and how the mission of God is expressed through it. You will be asked to describe how you might further this mission through ordained ministry or otherwise. Your understanding of ordained ministry will developed in this conversation.

Session 6 – Reflective Review and Report

In this final session, the group discusses how the preceding conversations affirm or direct you in your vocational journey. Together, you will explore which further step is appropriate for you. Your parish or faith community priest is a good person to have present for this conversation, and if you feel it's appropriate, you could invite the Diocesan Director of Discernment to join you.

The Discernment Committee should then write a brief report to the Parish or Faith Community priest, informing them of the Committee's sense of your call and the recommendations for further steps that you and they have discerned together. The priest can then help you to take the next step, whatever that might be. It could include, but not be limited to:

- Continuing to exercise lay ministry in the faith community as a final vocational outcome.
- Applying for a Liturgical Assistant's licence.
- Enquiring about lay ministry such as Youth or Children's ministry.
- Formally making application to enter the Vocational Discernment Program to explore ordained ministry.

If your pathway is discerned to be in lay ministry, the Director of Discernment can help guide you into the appropriate theological or other education that might be helpful. Ongoing theological and biblical studies are a great blessing and will be a rich resource to you personally and to your faith community, no matter what ministry you end up doing.



Group Activities

During this Guided Discernment stage, there will also be opportunities for you to gather with other people exploring vocation.

Online Vocation Conversations

These are held throughout the year, covering topics such as:

- Your Story, God's Story
- Who is this God who calls us?
- What is ordination?

Seekers Days

St Francis Theological College hosts a number of Seekers Days during the year. These are often in conjunction with College Open Days and provide an opportunity to come on campus and see what theological education and ministry training are like.

Quiet Afternoons

You will also have the chance to reflect with others on your vocational journey through Quiet Afternoons. These are held to give you the space to intentionally reflect on your vocational journey and were God might be calling you.

Details of these will be on the ACSQ Vocations website.

www.anglicanchurchsq.org.au/vocations

Conclusion

The process of discernment is never truly at an end. Wherever this process has led you, you should continue to be open to God's Holy Spirit's nudging and nurturing presence.

If you have found this process helpful, please do pass on your feedback to the Discernment Office at vocations@anglicanchurchsq.org.au. We value all feedback and look forward to hearing how this Discernment Guide has been of value to faith communities all over this Diocese.

May God continue to bless you as you discern and explore your vocation.

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