

# Vocational Discernment Discussion Guide

A resource for Parish  
Vocational Companions



*Almighty and everlasting God,  
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church  
is governed and sanctified:  
hear our prayer which we offer  
for all your faithful people,  
that in their vocation and ministry  
they may serve you in holiness and truth  
to the glory of your name;  
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.*

Common Worship: Times and Seasons, © The Archbishops' Council 2006

# Welcome

Thank you for being a Vocational Companion for someone enquiring about a vocation to ministry in the Anglican Church.

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, and still others find it in ministry in their church, as a layperson or an ordained minister.

It is assumed that the person you are companioning:

- is a committed Christian with a deep love of God and an active faith life in prayer and worship;
- worships or works in an Anglican faith community;
- enjoys serving in some way in your Anglican faith community;
- feels that they are called to something 'more' in the church.

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

The Enquirer should become familiar with the policy document *God Calling*, which is available at the Vocations website ([www.anglicanchurchsq.org.au/vocations](http://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 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.

May your journey be blessed as you explore the vocation of your companion in a prayerful and open manner.

# 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. They are listed here for your information. The discussions you will have with the Enquirer form part of Stage 2 and may continue into Stage 3 and beyond.

## **Stage 1 - Personal Exploration (resources available on website)**

- Pray intentionally
- Intentional involvement in parish life and ministry

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

- Discussions with Parish Priest
- Spiritual director/mentor/companion

## **Stage 3 - Formal Enquiry (engagement with DDF office)**

- Interview with Director of Discernment
- Obtain Parish Priest reference

## **Stage 4 - Mutual Discernment**

- Meet with an Examining Chaplain
- Interview with the Regional Bishop

## **Stage 5 – Vocation Discernment Conference**

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



# Guided Exploration | Conversations

Conversations with a prayerful and faithful companion are a blessing to anyone considering a vocation to ministry. While God's call may be an inner one, it must be affirmed by others in order that it may find its fullest expression in the Anglican context.

This guide contains suggested conversation topics for six intentional sessions. It is suggested that you and the Enquirer meet once a month over a six month period, and each time talk about a different aspect of their 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.

Your job is not to test the person's vocation but to help them better understand the promptings that have led them to explore a vocation to ministry and to reflect back to them what you are hearing or seeing.

Each session should begin and end with prayer, and you should approach them with a sense of deeply listening to how God is at work in the life of the enquirer, their family and faith community.

The sessions might look like this:

1. Greeting and catch up on life's happenings, followed by prayer (10 mins)
2. Introduce the topic for the session and see how the person is feeling about it. (5 mins)
3. Move through the suggested questions as seems natural. You may jump from question to question and miss some out if they don't seem relevant. Allow the conversation to flow naturally. (30 – 40 minutes)
4. Feed back to the enquirer some of the things that have stood out for you in the session. (10 minutes)
5. Decide on some things that the enquirer could do before your next session. (5 mins)
6. Conclude with a prayer or mutual blessing.



# Conversation Guides

## ***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 should be discussed.

*Suggested prompt questions:*

- When you look back over your life, how has God been at work?
- Tell me about your prayer life. What prayer practices work for you?
- Describe the role that corporate worship has/has had in your faith.
- Tell me about how you read the Bible. How would you describe the Bible and its place in the Church's life, and in your own?
- Is there any person in the Bible with whom you particularly identify?
- What questions do you still have about your faith in Jesus or about the Church? What do you do with these questions?
- In what ways has Anglican tradition shaped your faith?
- In what ways would an observer of your life know you are Christian?

## ***Session 3 – God's Call***

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

*Suggested prompt questions:*

- Tell me the story of your call. When did it start? Who influenced it?

- Tell me about your experience participating in the life of the Church. How has this been satisfying, or not?
- How have you shared God’s love with others?
- Frederick Buechner defines call as an intersection of “where our deepest gladness meets the world’s deepest need.” What is your deepest gladness? Where does your gladness meet a need in the world?

#### ***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, you will explore questions of where God has gifted particular skills to the enquirer and how they have developed them. In particular, skills in leadership, interpersonal relationships and self understanding should be considered along with other spiritual gifts.

##### *Suggested prompt questions:*

- What are your spiritual gifts and how have you recognized them and used your gifts for ministry? How have those gifts been received or affirmed?
- Tell me about your experience of leadership within and outside the church. How did you learn the skills required?
- How have you exercised pastoral care for others? What was that like?
- How do you feel about making mistakes? How do you think God views your mistakes? Do you associate mistakes with disaster or opportunity?
- What do you do regularly to take care of yourself? Are there any persistent struggles that affect your wellness?

#### ***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 should discuss how the enquirer might further this mission through ordained ministry or otherwise. The person’s understanding of ordained ministry should be explored in this conversation.

##### *Suggested prompt questions:*

- What do you love about the Anglican Church? Why do you stay?

- If a newcomer to the Church asked you about what ordained ministry is, how would you describe it? How does that fit with the ministry of the whole Body of Christ?
- When you reflect on your current sense of call to ordained ministry, what are your fears? Why?
- How have people in your community responded when they hear that you are discerning for ordination? Who has supported you? Has anyone been surprised? If so, why? Has anyone reacted negatively? If so, why?
- What is your vision of your life in ordained ministry? Who do you feel called to serve?

### ***Session 6 – Reflective Review and Report***

In this final session, you will discuss how the preceding conversations affirm or direct the enquirer in their vocational journey. Allow the person to come to their own conclusions, rather than giving your opinion. Together, you will explore which further step is appropriate. 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.

You may then write a brief report to the Parish or Faith Community priest, informing them of your sense of the enquirer's call. You may recommend further steps that you and they have discerned together. The priest can then help the enquirer 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 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 the enquirer personally and to your faith community, no matter what ministry they end up doing.



# Next Steps

Once your initial vocational conversations have come to an end, there are some really important things you can do for the enquirer.

## ***Continue to Pray***

Your prayers for God’s guidance and comfort during this time will be very important. Regardless of the vocational pathway taken by the enquirer, knowing that they are upheld in prayer will be a strength and comfort.

## ***Encourage and Support***

If the enquirer continues to exercise some form of ministry in your faith community, your encouragement and support will be valuable. Seeing this person take up ministry tasks may encourage others to do so as well, which will be an added blessing.

## ***Build a community which values vocational conversations***

Your conversation with this enquirer will hopefully not be your last. While you may continue to journey with this individual, it may be that God will raise up others for ministry, for whom your support and prayer may be valuable. It is hoped that all faith communities will be places where future ministers and leaders will emerge and be supported.



# Conclusion

Thank you for your faithfulness and generosity in companioning an enquirer. May you find in every conversation a richer understanding of God's loving mission in the world and in people's lives.

If you have found this process helpful, please do pass on your feedback to the Discernment Office at [vocations@anglicanchurchsq.org.au](mailto: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 vocation together.

# Contacts

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*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.574