

Discerning for ministry guidelines

Some questions for church leaders and teams/PCCs (September 2018)

Not all ministries in church need an explicit discernment process of a PCC. People run groups and ask others to help, or individuals are tasked to do particular things, that as long as they are done safely and with respect, are effective expressions of ministry.

Some tasks/roles, particularly those of a more 'representative' nature, need the incumbent and PCC to agree what people do and how it fits in with the direction/vision of the local church. In essence, they are seeking to discern Gods calling both for the individual or team within a discerned need of the local Christian community. The discernment process needs to be particularly steeped in prayer as the expectations and outcomes of this ministry has significant repercussions as an expression of the ministry of Christ within his church. for example...

Starting with tasks/roles

What are the jobs or tasks that need to be done now or in the future?

- Are they short term jobs or roles with ongoing responsibilities?
- What gift/skill sets does a person need to fulfil the task/role sufficiently or well?
- What needs authorisation by the PCC? Public affirmation in a church service? etc
- ?

Starting with people

Discerning of individuals calling to serve particular mission or ministry roles or tasks

- Does this person have the character/temperament to carry out a particular role or task with a sense of service that arises from their discipleship?
- Does this person have the necessary gifts or skills for this particular role/task?
 - Could they do it now?
 - Could they do it with training? Eg. do they have the capacity but need particular skills? Do they have a skill set from another discipline or workplace, and need support transferring those to a different context?
 - What training/development would enable them to do it? eg. courses, shadowing, coaching, etc
- If they were to be affirmed by the PCC to engage in this role/task, what kind of authorisation or commissioning as a team would give this person the necessary affirmation to do the task/role, and the congregation to accept this ministry?
Eg. ALM authorisation or a simple affirmation to go ahead accountable to ? or to be part of a team

Example of discernment practice in the Acts of the Apostles Chapter 6:1-7

1Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. 2And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait at tables.

3Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men (people) of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task,

4while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.’ 5What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

How vocational is your church environment?

How are peoples gifts/skills/talents identified and developed as a calling vs. simply doing a job?

- How does your church ‘encourage’ people to find their gift/skill/talent ‘set’ and offer themselves for ministry?
- How can you get to know people and what they might do in your church? How important is that?
- How does your church help people develop a different and potential gift/skill/talent?
- Who would someone in your church speak with if they had a hunch about a ministry role they wanted to explore?
- What gifts or skills set from everyday life could be offered as service to the local church?
- What questions would you ask a prospective flower lady/school governor/intercessor etc. before asking them to actually do something?

Guiding principles for local ministry discernment

- We need to provide an environment of trust to explore gifting with others because our gifting is linked to our identity and how we think about ourselves
- We are not simply ‘finding helpers’ but ‘developing disciples’.
- We are not simply ‘filling gaps’ but ‘developing people’
- Gifting can change through the seasons of life, many gifts can remain hidden.

Resources for Discerning local ministry

- Read and study scripture re gifts, Ephesians 4.11-13, Romans 12.4-8, 1 Corinthians 12.4-11.
- The [SHAPE](#) course asks participants to look at who they are as a gift from God. Each person has gifts to use in the service of God in our families, work, schools, and the wider world community.
- [Deepening Discipleship](#) is a 8 session course sponsored by local churches to help deepen the understanding and practice of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ today.
- [Explore More](#) - a six session small group exploration of how God guides us
- [intentional Discipleship \(iD\)](#) is a 6 session small group learning set that seeks to shape the patterns of spiritual life that best support the disciple in their life and ministry.