

When a person senses a call to Ordained Baptist Ministry the local church has an important role to play.

Church leaders should be helping all people within their church to understand their unique gifts and exercise them in ministry. In fulfilling this role they will be on the lookout for those whose gifts and exercise of ministry may be appropriate to the ministry of Ordained Baptist Ministry.

When these people are identified, the church leadership is encouraged to prayerfully approach them and encourage them to consider a ministry in Ordained Baptist Ministry.

However, sometimes it happens the other way. An individual may sense a call to Ordained Baptist Ministry without any prompting from others. If this happens, they should approach the church leadership to seek assistance and confirmation.

A person considering the vocation of Ordained Baptist Ministry should (with their spouse, where applicable) meet with their Pastor or Church Secretary for an exploratory conversation and then meet with the Director of Ministries (**DoM**) and the Whitley Principal along with their senior pastor (or appropriate church delegate if they are the senior pastor).

If a possible call to Ordained Baptist Ministry is identified by the person, the church leadership and the DoM, the church is asked to appoint a Discernment and Support Group to set up a process for discerning pastoral calling and giftedness. In some cases, a small support group may already be functioning and it is suggested that either the existing group or a modified group be endorsed as the Discernment and Support Group for this more formal process.

Appointment of a Discernment and Support Group (DSG):

The DSG has an important role in the process of discernment and evaluation of the person's call to Ordained Baptist Ministry. In convening this group, it is recommended that:

1. A group of no more than four or five persons be appointed by the church meeting (at the initiative of the applicant) on the recommendation of the church leadership.
2. Both genders be represented. Where appropriate the DSG should include a multicultural representation.
3. At least one person have some experience in local church leadership. This may include the pastor (if it is a person other than the pastor who

is exploring the call to Ordained Baptist Ministry) or other appointee who should also have had local church leadership experience.

4. The DSG Members are to be able, by experience and background, to undertake the responsibilities assigned to the DSG.
5. The Chair selected be able to ensure the group meets at least six times and complete the report in time to have it submitted by the August 31st deadline.
6. Those appointed be able to participate in regular meetings with the person exploring the call. This should be seen as a top priority for all participants.
7. Members of the group need to be able to offer feedback and suggestions in honest, sensitive and constructive ways.

The Discernment and Support Group (DSG) has the following responsibilities:

1. To support the person testing their call to Ordained Baptist Ministry and their spouse where appropriate.
2. To seek to provide the applicant with a variety of ministry experiences within the congregation (in consultation with the pastor and/or deacons as may be locally appropriate).
3. To provide truthful, loving and thorough ongoing evaluation of the applicant's ministry in the life of the church. This will require the DSG to design and implement relevant feedback and review processes along with the provision of nurture for the person's continuing growth and maturity in ministry. Suggested topics for discussion and possible questions are set out at the end of this document.
4. To have regularly scheduled meetings to provide for effective communication and accountability. The DSG must be under way by the end of February in the year that the application is being submitted, have *at least* six meetings in order for a report to be finalised. It may be that such a process might take 12 months or longer. A minimum of six months is needed so that the DSG can provide the applicant with ministry opportunities and constructive feedback and observe their willingness to learn and grow.
5. To encourage the applicant to be engaged in the wider life of the denomination to assist them in their orientation to the life and ministry of the Baptist family of churches in Victoria. This will include encouraging:
 - Attendance at BUV Gathering Conferences and reflection upon them.
 - Meeting BUV personnel.
 - Visiting Whitley College and gaining information about courses.

- Understanding Baptist history and beliefs.
 - Such other activities as may be relevant.
6. To raise issues of funding ordination training and the possibility of vocational changes and relocation should the applicant be successful in their application.
 7. To offer ongoing support and pastoral care to the person. This will be particularly essential if the person is not accepted or has acceptance deferred for any reason by the Pastoral Leadership Selection Committee (**PLSC**) and needs to work through disappointment to find new directions.
 8. To provide a confidential final report to: the applicant; the church leadership; and the PLSC via the DoM office. There is a suggested final report format attached. The report must include a statement as to whether the DSG endorses or does not endorse the applicant's calling to Ordained Baptist Ministry.

The Role of the Church Meeting:

In receiving the report of the DSG, the church leadership has two options:

1. Given the DSG was appointed by the church members meeting, the endorsement or lack of endorsement of the proposed candidacy can simply be reported to the members without further discussion. Under this option, the DSG's report would stand alone as the view of the church given to the DOM and the PLSC.
2. The alternative option is for a church members' meeting to vote on the matter of endorsement of the proposal candidacy, having received the recommendation of the DSG. *The full DSG report is not to be disseminated to the church members.* If the matter is put to a members' vote, the minute of that decision is to be forwarded to the PLSC by the DSG Chair to stand alongside the DSG report.

With either option, the process being used must be clearly explained to and decided by the church at the outset. It must also be understood that endorsement by the local church involves a commitment to support the person through training and the further exploration of their call. *It ought to be recognized that the recommendation of the local church and/or DSG, although important, is not the sole determining factor in the PLSC's decision.*

The Role of the Baptist Union:

1. As indicated above, the DoM and the Whitley Principal are available to engage in an exploratory conversation with people considering the Ordained Baptist Ministry vocation. All of the Regional Ministers have undertaken the responsibility of preparing resources to inform churches, discernment groups and individuals about suitable processes

to ascertain a thorough appreciation of a person's call and giftedness for Ordained Baptist Ministry.

2. When the formalising of a DSG for a particular person is imminent, the DoM will appoint a member of the PLSC to be the applicant's PLSC Contact. They will meet with the DSG to outline its role and responsibility, and to serve as a Contact for any questions throughout the process leading up to the interview with the PLSC. The Contact will be the first port of call for the DSG as it carries out its role.
3. The DoM's office provides Ordination Information material to the applicant so they are aware of the various steps in the application process that lead towards the Interview Day with the PLSC.
4. The Role of the PLSC is to determine prayerfully with the applicant whether he/she shows clear evidence of the necessary gifts and calling to the ordained Baptist ministry. To reach its decision, the PLSC interviews the applicant (and spouse) on issues relating to call and gifting for pastoral ministry, personality, relationships, knowledge of Baptist distinctives and denominational life. It also reviews a range of material including personal and professional references, applicant's papers, psychological report, preaching evaluation, DSG report and local church recommendation.

In its decision the PLSC must take into account whether it can confidently commend an applicant to the Union of Churches, recognizing that ordination is the responsibility of the Baptist Assembly, not of the local congregation. For more information regarding the BUV approach to ordination, please refer to the Ministry Review Task Force report, the section entitled Pastoral Leadership in Baptist Theology and Practice.

5. The PLSC will inform the DSG of the outcome of the interview with the applicant, including areas for attention and growth

DSG: Suggested Topics for Discussion

There are many things to consider as part of the discernment process with a person sensing a call to Ordained Baptist Ministry. The following topics and questions cover most of the areas we believe ought to be explored and reported on. However, this material is by no means prescriptive or exhaustive.

A. The applicant's relationship with God

- What evidence is there (from your observation and conversation) that the applicant has a growing relationship with God?
- What are some of the ways the applicant seeks to nurture and sustain his/her faith?
- Does the "sense of call" experienced by the applicant appear to be consistent with the way they live?
- Does the applicant live a "balanced life", i.e. Are there signs of health and growth in all aspects of life – spiritual, physical, social, emotional, intellectual etc?
- Does the applicant have an understanding of the distinctives of "Baptist" ministry?

B. General attitude to work around the church

Some discussion of the following could provide helpful feedback for the applicant. Is the applicant:

- Dependable
- Willing/able to take risks
- Protective of confidentiality
- Teachable
- Good at relating with people
- Able to receive criticism and positive affirmation.
- Able to work with others
- Willing to assume a servant role
- Willing/able to resolve conflict in a constructive way
- Displaying evidence of growth and maturity

C. Gifts

What are the most apparent gifts in the applicant that will help him/her to be an effective pastoral leader? Some examples are listed below but the group may wish to list others as well. The group is asked to explore at least some of these in more detail.

- Preaching
- Leading of worship
- Pastoral care
- Evangelistic
- Administration and organisation
- Leadership
- Discipling others
- Small groups

D. Pastoral Skills

Does the applicant:

- Display approachability
- Invite the confidence of people
- Show sensitivity to people's needs
- Listen well to people
- Take the initiative with people
- Relate well with leaders and any other pastoral staff
- Relate well with children
- Relate well with young people
- Relate well with peers
- Relate well with older people
- Show discretion working with people of the opposite sex

E. Leadership

The DSG members will have had opportunity to observe the applicant at work in the church. The following topics are meant to be discussion starters for a range of matters related to the leadership qualities the applicant may possess. Does the applicant:

- Encourage visionary thinking
- Plan well ahead
- Manage his/her time well
- Delegate well
- Empower and motivate other people
- Work well with other people's ideas
- Reflect upon and articulate his/her ideas and understanding of the Christian faith
- Take initiative
- Accept responsibility
- Deliver what they promise
- Display accountability to others
- Display loyalty to the church and the people s/he works with
- Follow things through

F. Mission

To what degree:

- Has the applicant been involved with people who are not a part of the church life? How does s/he relate with them?
- Does the applicant have a welcoming/inviting approach to new people?
- Would you say the applicant is a gifted evangelist?
- Is the applicant aware of issues (local, national and global) which impact upon peoples' lives?

G. Other matters to be addressed

- If the applicant is married (or planning to marry), to what extent is the spouse supportive of the application? How will they work together in ministry?
- Are there issues (health, financial etc) that may impact upon the applicant's ability to complete the requirements for ordination and/or exercise a fruitful ministry?
- Understanding of the application process and possible outcomes.

DSG: Final Report Guidelines

Recipients:

- Applicant
- Church Leadership (Elders or diaconate or equivalent)
- BUV Pastoral Leadership Selection Committee (PLSC) through the DOM,
Alan Marr, at mel.price@baptistvic.asn.au, or postal address:

PO Box 377

HAWTHORN VIC 3122

Purpose and Reasoning:

The purpose of the final report is to present a 'total picture' of the applicant and their ministry, and give clear insights into what the DSG have identified as areas to be worked on and developed should the applicant be accepted as an ordination candidate.

The DSG is expected to have a fairly comprehensive understanding of the applicant after having spent months meeting regularly and intentionally observing and interacting with the applicant. This intensive time should put the DSG members in an ideal position to have a thorough understanding of the applicant. As such, they are expected to be aware of the applicants areas of strengths and weaknesses, what their gifts may be, and if they have a particular focus to their ministry that is worth developing.

The final report is to:

- Provide a fair, thoughtful, thorough, detailed and honest assessment of the applicant's suitability for pastoral ministry.
- Highlight where more experience or training are required.
- Indicate the strongest gifts and how they can be further developed.
- Outline potential pitfalls that the applicant needs to learn how to handle.
- Be specific – provide details for clarification.
- Be a helpful point of reference for the applicant and the PLSC members when it comes to seeking to discern the next step in ministry, training, and development for the applicant. If the applicant is successful, this is the launching pad for the ordination process and how it is to be tailored to them over the next three years.

Traps to avoid:

Sometimes groups are so excited about having a candidate for ordination from their congregation they only focus on the positive, which results in a glowing report of pastoral perfection. The PLSC members, being fully human, recognise that everyone has room for improvement, or areas that need attention. To make mention of such areas will assist the PLSC in the process of determining appropriate goals and experiences for the applicant should he/she be accepted as an ordination candidate.

At the other end of the spectrum, it is possible for some groups to have such high expectations for pastoral leaders that no mere mortal would ever be deemed remotely adequate for the position. Thankfully God

regularly chooses to use average people powerfully in Ordained Baptist Ministry despite their imperfection or lack of greatness. The PLSC needs to know if the applicant has the potential to become a pastoral leader through guidance, teaching and experience. Or, whether the applicant is simply unsuitable to Ordained Baptist Ministry.

Finally:

Whether the DSG supports the application for ordination or does not support it, the reasons for reaching their conclusion should be clear.

DSG Final Report – Sample Format

The following is an example of the *minimum* information required. Please feel free to add in whatever you think is relevant. Please provide a typed copy of the report for ease of reading.

Applicant: _____
Length of time at church: _____

Date DSG First Met: _____ **# of**
times DSG met with Applicant: _____

1. How well do the DSG members feel they have been able to fulfil their role as outlined in the "Discernment and Support Group Guideline" document?
2. Assessment of applicant.
The "DSG: Suggested Topics for Discussion" main topic areas (listed below) should provide a helpful focus to your report. You are not limited to these specific topics, nor to the questions that were listed as prompts. Include anything you think may be relevant.
 - A. The applicant's relationship with God
 - B. General attitude to work around the church
 - C. Gifts
 - D. Pastoral Skills
 - E. Leadership
 - F. Mission
 - G. Other

A concise but thorough answer including the applicant's strengths and weaknesses, plus suggestions for development and improvements would be ideal. Please remember it need not be a united answer – different viewpoints can be expressed, and should be expressed if there are definite differences.

3. Does the DSG support the application for ordination? Why or why not?
4. Was the recommendation of the DSG brought to the church for endorsement? If yes, what was the church meeting's response to the DSG recommendation (simply include the church meeting minute on this item).
5. List each member of the Discernment and Support Group, as per the following.
 - Name:
 - Address:
 - Business Hours Phone:
 - After Hours Phone:
 - Email:
 - Relationship:
(‘Relationship’ is the main way(s) by which a DSG member knows the applicant, e.g. co-lead small group with applicant; parent of child in applicant’s youth group, etc.)

Note: Please clearly indicate which person is the DSG Chair.

6. The applicant is to have viewed the Discernment and Support Group Final Report that is being submitted. The applicant does not have to agree with everything that is written in the report, but they are to be aware of what it says before it is submitted.

It is essential that the DSG Final Report is submitted by August 31st.

Late submissions will not be accepted and the applicant will be required to apply in the following year.