

MENNONITE BROTHERS BIBLICAL SEMINARY
IS-750, Ministry Discernment
Coordinator – Valerie Rempel

MINISTRY DISCERNMENT PROCEDURE

Background and Purpose

Discernment, affirmation, and counsel - all are helpful in persons reaching their potential. MBBS is committed to walk with students through their Seminary career and to provide these supports. Ministry Discernment is the last of the formal sessions and is designed to integrate a student's development and to assess readiness for ministry.

Discernment Process

The senior student, in consultation with the advisor appoints the discernment group. It is composed of:

- the advisor,
- one other faculty member,
- spouse (if married),
- practicum supervisor or pastor if not in supervised ministry experience,
- two students,
- one person from the church currently attending, and
- one other person of the student's choice (a total of eight people).

We encourage each student to choose people that are not only friends who will "say nice things." Our concern is that each student receives a balanced perspective of how he or she is perceived by others.

The student and advisor should agree on a time (1.5 hour block) and place of meeting. The discernment group will discuss the student's gifts, seminary experience, and goals for ministry. The student's advisor chairs the meeting.

Preparation for the session should include the following:

1. Choosing a Group

Submit a list of proposed discernment group members to the advisor prior to contacting them and a minimum to two (2) weeks prior to the scheduled meeting. Given the advisor's approval, the student may proceed with making the contacts and arrangements.

2. Making Physical Arrangements

Reserve a meeting room with the receptionist, Nancy Williams. Often groups have light refreshments as part of their group time.

3. Preparing for the Group Time

Write a reflection piece working from the questions supplied in the attached participant guide. If applicable, the spouse should also prepare a brief written statement. Prepare a 15-20 minute oral presentation offering a brief autobiographical sketch.

Distribute the reflection piece and the Participant's Guide to all members of the discernment group no later than ONE WEEK PRIOR TO THE MEETING. The student is responsible to make and distribute the copies.

4. Follow-up Report

We ask that the student arrange to have a discernment group member (not the student's spouse) serve as a reporter for the meeting. A guide for writing a discernment report is attached. The reporter should return a written report to be reviewed and approved by both the student and the advisor and then forwarded to **Valerie Rempel. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the report gets to the advisor.** We suggest you give the faculty advisor a day or two to approve it (get their initials on it), then pick it up and hand it in.

GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANTS IN MINISTRY DISCERNMENT

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary

We are very appreciative of your willingness to be involved in a ministry discernment for one of our students. We are convinced that a vital part of our ministry is to help students understand themselves and gain insights to guide them in planning for the future.

More specifically, we desire that it be an opportunity for:

- the discernment and affirmation of gifts,
- the identification of strengths and growth areas in the domains of interpersonal styles and skills, work management, life management, etc.
- processing the fit between vocational direction and gifts/strengths,
- offering counsel regarding particular questions which the student may have or the group considers important, and
- the assessment of one's readiness for ministry.

The actual discernment sessions will involve approximately 1.5 hours of time, most often on the Seminary campus. It is a fairly informal session led by the student's faculty advisor. The group consists of 8 people (two faculty members, the student and spouse if married, SME supervisor or pastor, two students, one person from the student's local church, and one other person of the student's choice).

The flow of a session is often as follows:

- Introductions of discernment group,
- Brief "life story" by the person(s) being discerned,
- Dialogue around the self-reflections prepared by the student (and spouse if applicable),
- Focusing on counsel for vocational direction and any other areas for which counsel is requested, and
- Prayer for the person or couple.

The following are questions we pose to the student (and spouse). We encourage you to jot down some reflections along similar lines and to be prepared to offer them during the session.

PERSONAL QUALITIES AND GROWTH

- What are your personal strengths and weaknesses?
- What insights about yourself have you gained from the personality inventories, Interpersonal Communications class, or feedback from others?
- How would you assess your spiritual "self-care" skills and routines (i.e. prayer, Scripture reading)?
- How well do you manage your life (e.g., schedule, finances)?
- In what ways have you grown personally while at seminary?

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

- If married, what are strengths and growth areas of your relationship?
- What is the nature of your relationship with your extended family? Do you have their blessing for ministry?
- If a parent, how do you assess your parenting effectiveness?

MINISTRY SKILLS

How do you see the adequacy of your ministry knowledge and skills in the areas of:

- vision building,
- preaching,
- teaching,
- evangelizing,
- conflict resolution,
- group leadership,
- counseling,
- equipping,
- administration,
- pastoral care and visitation

Rate on a scale from 1 (Low or undeveloped) to 10 High or well-developed)

VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Your spiritual gifts, as you see them are...
- what are your vocational plans?
- In what areas do you feel most, and least, ready for ministry?
- What insights about your vocational direction have you gained from your field education's experience?

AREAS FOR GROUP COUNSEL

- Are there any issues/questions about which you want the input and counsel of the group?

ASSESSMENT OF SEMINARY

- Comments regarding the ways in which the program/experience has been helpful, as well as suggestions for further development.

SHARING BY STUDENT'S SPOUSE

We look forward to hearing from the student's spouse on items like:

- What do you see as your gifts, interests, and goals?
- How do you see your spouse's strengths and vocational goals?

REPORT-WRITING GUIDE FOR MINISTRY DISCERNMENT

We appreciate your willingness to participate in this process of affirmation and discernment for one of our senior students. This is the last of our “way-stations” in which we intentionally sit with each student to listen to their self-understanding, give them feedback, think with them about vocational directions and options, express our affirmation and support, and offer any counsel seeming important for their continued development both personally and vocationally.

The task of writing a report on this event is also a special challenge and we appreciate the extra effort required on your part. To help you with the task, we offer the following guidelines and suggestions.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The basic purposes of the report are twofold.

1. To provide a record of the discernment so any needed follow-up prior to graduation (e.g. courses to follow a new direction, counseling, a seminar on personal development area, etc.) is noted. This report helps the advisor and small groups coordinator in making sure that whatever follow-up is necessary will not fall through the cracks.
2. To serve as a resource for our placement team as they counsel with churches, agencies and candidates regarding service options that will “fit” their goals and style.

FORMAT OF THE REPORT

- Work toward a maximum of two (2) pages for any writing you do (the student’s self-reflection piece which should be attached is above the two pages).
- An outline of the reporting format is provided on the back of this page.
- Again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this process.

MINISTRY DISCERNMENT REPORT

FOR: (student's/spouse's name)

DATE: (date of discernment meeting)

DISCERNMENT GROUP: (list names of the persons involved in the group. Identify the faculty advisor).

REPORTER: (your name as report writer)

1. STUDENT (SPOUSE) REFLECTIONS

Summarize the major points in the student's self-reflection. If a summary sheet has been prepared for the group, you might want to attach a copy with any handwritten notes you have made. If there is no prepared sheet, please use the major captions and key questions which were given as a reflection guide. They are included below. **Please keep the report concise, noting the key items.**

2. GROUP FEEDBACK & COUNSEL

List the key points given by the group regarding the following areas. If the group makes a consensus recommendation regarding something, please note this as a "Recommendation".

2.1 Strengths

- What are the individual's strengths as a person?
- What are the person's ministry gifts?
- What are the person's vocational/skill strengths?

2.2 Areas for further development

E.g., relations skills? spiritual self-care? family life? time management?

2.3 Vocational counsel

What kinds of ministries, settings, posts did the group suggest the person pursue on a short range basis? Long range?