

Mentoring in Community of Christ **Adapted from “Mentoring and Priesthood Ministry”**

Introduction

When a priesthood call is received, it presents the member with many new and exciting challenges. One of those challenges is learning what knowledge and skills are necessary to function effectively in the new priesthood office. How does one prepare for expanded ministerial responsibilities? Temple School courses provide a beginning by establishing a knowledge base for the functions of the particular office and an introduction to the scriptures relating to ministry. But perhaps that beginning could be enhanced by allowing the new priesthood member to be paired with a more experienced member to further develop education and mentoring skills. This is called mentoring.

A study was done of priesthood members in the church. The 300 members who responded indicated that those who had mentors generally had a more positive image of the ministry than those who did not. In most cases, having a mentor significantly enhanced the ability of the new priesthood members to function in their offices.

This study also described the functions of the mentor in the life of the new priesthood members. Primarily mentors served as role models who helped the ordinands learn by observing the mentors' skills and understanding of the functions of priesthood offices. Secondly, mentors were information givers who helped ordinands acquire the knowledge necessary to be successful. Finally, mentors help their protégés to develop a personal sense of vision and focus for their ministry.

The qualities of a good minister can be difficult to learn from the written page. Sometimes the subtle skills that are so important in effective ministry are best learned from observation and experience. For many of the priesthood members who participated in this study, the development of those skills was greatly enhanced by the relationship they had with their mentors.

Some of the comments made by participants in the study included:

- “The support and acceptance I received from my mentor was of great help”
- “My mentor allowed me the opportunity to participate in new ways that expanded my capabilities”
- “The mentoring was toward ministry—not just priesthood responsibility—that was of extreme value”
- “I feel all new priesthood would greatly benefit from having a mentor. I’m so grateful I have had someone who has taken so much interest in helping me develop my ministerial abilities and skills.”

The concept of priesthood mentoring is not new to the church. For many years those called to the office of seventy have been mentored as a formal part of their preparation for ordination. Joined with other educational experiences, the Seventy Mentoring Program has provided a more complete preparation for ministry in that office. The mentor assists the ordinand in the required educational courses, acts as a resource person, familiarizes the ordinand with the practices and procedures of their office, assists in developing a support group for the

ordinand and family, helps in the adjustment to the assignment, shares in public ministry, and participates in the ordination of the ordinands after completion of the requirements.

Although there are no other church wide mentoring programs in place, some local jurisdictions (including the Michigan USA/ Canada Mission Center) are using the concept to prepare their new priesthood members for ministry. Such a program would join each new priesthood ordinands with a more experienced priesthood member.

The mentoring program might be organized in the following manner:

1. The initial contact with both mentor and ordinand is made through the pastor. When the ordinand accepts the call, he or she is informed of the mentoring program. The ordinand is given the opportunity to be involved in the selection from a list of priesthood members. Should the ordinand prefer someone not on the list, contact is made with that individual and orientation is provided through the pastor.
2. The mentor and ordinand meet for goal setting. The two individuals involved are responsible for nurturing and directing the relationship so it accomplishes the goals they establish. The goals might include such practical things as how to make a priesthood visit, the procedure for serving Communion, or issues involved in administering to the sick. Some mentoring partners develop goals that relate to more complex areas, such as developing an understanding of their priesthood office in light of scriptural direction or enhancing their skills for providing personal counseling ministry.
3. The partners are responsible for the ongoing evaluation of their relationship and for assessing whether their goals are accomplished. Ideally the mentor relationship should last approximately one year, but this decision can be left to the priesthood partners. The most important thing is that both partners feel their goals and expectations have been met.
4. The progress of the relationship is monitored by the pastor, and any external support needed is provided. An evaluation should be done at the end of the relationship to assess the benefits of the program to those participating,

Mentoring experiences have the potential for teaching, guiding, providing counsel, fostering new understandings, and helping new priesthood members become more able ministers for Jesus Christ,

The relationship between Jesus and his disciples was the first Christian mentoring relationship. The disciples' ministry developed as a result of Jesus' careful teaching and guidance over several years. That Christian ministry still thrives today and continues to be passed from one disciple to another. What better way to teach than through the relationship between a new ordinand and a concerned, involved mentor who lives as a Christ like example.

The Mentor Relationship

The meaning of the mentor relationship is interpreted in various ways among those who try to define it. Some say the mentor is the more experienced professional who extends advice, teaching, sponsorship, guidance and assistance. Another says it involves a one-to-one learning relationship based on modeled behavior. Yet another describes it as a trusted friend and counselor who endorses the apprentice's dream in order to guide the person toward its realization.

The role of mentor varies but nearly always defies a single definition. Mentors can fill many roles in the protégé's development. The mentor might be role model, information giver, career developed, supporter, teacher, or any variety of other things to the protégé.

Characteristics of a Mentor

In one study, the researchers found that protégés learned the following from their mentors:

1. Risk-taking behaviors
2. Communication skills
3. Survival in the organization
4. Skills in their profession (ministry in our case)
5. Respect for people
6. Setting high standards and not compromising them
7. How to be a good listener
8. How to get along with all kinds of people
9. Leadership qualities
10. What it means to be a professional

These can be divided into four categories:

1. Risk-taking behaviors
2. Communication skills
3. Political skills
4. Specific professional skills.

In a more recent study of our priesthood members, the benefits of their mentor relationships were studied. It found these characteristics to be important:

1. The mentor as role model
2. The mentor as information giver
3. The mentor as ministry developer

The majority of those in the study said that their mentor relationship was a significant experience in the development of their priesthood ministry. When considering the development of priesthood ministry in the church, the references cited above can be adapted to the realm of priesthood education. Mentors can be influential in the supporting, involving, developing, guiding, and counseling of their protégé's. Consequently, the ministry given by the new priesthood member is enhanced,

Although profiles of mentoring have many positive aspects, the elements of role model, information giver and career developer consistently stand out as dominant features. There are few empirical or theoretical works that do not include at least one—most probably all three—of these elements. They are important to the development of a viable mentor relationship.

Successful Mentoring Relationships

The right formula is important to a successful mentoring relationship and includes the following ingredients:

1. Selection: A good interpersonal relationship between the partners is based on the initial selection; the partners must be well matched and compatible. The relationship should click. Each must be willing to risk emotional involvement with the other. Respect, role complementarity, and frequent interactions are essential to success.

2. **Belief:** The mentor must have a conviction that his or her protégé can make a worthwhile contribution. As the relationship continues, the mentor will encourage the protégé through the difficult times of discouragement and frustration, ever reminding the ordinand of his or her gifts and calling.
3. **Commitment:** The mentor should attempt to provide the appropriate quantity and quality of mentoring, determining what is good enough and what is most valuable. On the other hand, the protégé must be a good listener, honoring the advice of the mentor, and asking questions to enhance understanding.
4. **Skills:** The mentor must be experienced and skilled to help the protégé develop his or her potential. The mentor must also possess skills to relate information in a helpful way. As pair, each must be open to exploring other resources as needed.
5. **Timing:** Proper timing is important for both partners, for beginnings and endings. Endings can be rifts when there are power issues, transformations into collegial relationships, or they can drift. Letting go is critical to the protégé's development. At this point the ordinand/new priesthood member becomes a peer.

Benefits of Mentoring

The mentoring relationship is not one-sided. While it might appear that the protégé would have the most to gain, the mentor also gains. Here is a partial list of the benefits of mentoring.

To the ordinand:

1. Assistance in fulfilling the Temple School and other pre-ordination requirements
2. Enhancement of spiritual and theological development, in light of the new priesthood office.
3. Training and support in the practical and specific responsibilities of the particular office.
4. Orientation and opportunities for participation in pastoral group experiences through a supportive relationship
5. Ready access to a good role model whose maturity will be a bridge to responsible assumption of priesthood responsibilities.
6. Increased opportunity for public ministry; in other words, increased viability and exposure to the congregation'
7. More rapid development of a network with other priesthood members and resource people. (in and outside the congregation)

To the mentor:

1. Greater accomplishments with the help of another
2. Development of a dependable assistant or associate to relate to in own ministry.
3. Reward in identifying new priesthood members and helping them develop in their ministry.
4. Vicarious achievement through the protégé's successes.
5. Opportunity to invest in the future of the new priesthood member, as well as the ongoing success of congregational life.
6. Opportunity to return assistance that was received when the newly ordained by assisting another beginner.
7. Opportunity to help ordinand become a fully qualified priesthood member.
8. Opportunity to study, review, and share current church materials and publications

There are many more possible benefits to the mentor relationship. Those who have experienced such a relationship would probably have additions to the above list.

Guidelines for the Mentor Team

Listed below are some suggested guidelines for the selection and process of the mentor/ordinand relationship:

For the effective mentor:

1. Select a protégé who holds a similar philosophy of life and religion.
2. Choose someone whose potential, talents, and gifts you genuinely believe in.
3. The priesthood office being accepted by the ordinand should be one you have held and have experience in.
4. Set mutual goals at the beginning of the relationship, and evaluate the progress toward those goals on an ongoing basis.
5. Be committed and available to the ordinand.
6. Look for opportunities to teach and guide the ordinand. Sometimes one doesn't know what is needed because of lack of exposure. It is up to you to help him or her recognize opportunities.

For the ordinand:

1. Ask questions. Don't be afraid to be inquisitive, but try to ask the right questions. Ask your mentor for assistance in knowing what to look for.
2. Decide what degree of excellence you would like to achieve. Be willing to work toward that end.
3. Take a learning position. Accept the role of student in the relationship
4. Respect your mentor, but do not idolize the person who is mentoring you.
5. Put what you have learned into action as soon as possible. Learning happened best when you do what you learn.
6. Set up a regular meeting time with your mentor so your relationship remains active.
7. Show your appreciation to your mentor through the progress you make as well as the words you say.

Watch out!

Whenever there is a personal relationship developed, there is potential for problems. Be aware of these signs:

1. Life drained by excessive time and energy that causes stress in other aspects of the partners' individual responsibilities
2. Unrealistic expectation of the either individual
3. Expectation of failure
4. The protégé's feeling of inferiority or lack of self-confidence
5. Overdependence on the mentor or the protégé.

Summary

The concept of mentoring has been established historically as a viable method of preparing the inexperienced for the activities of life and/or career. Although most documented mentor relationships are informal in nature, the occurrence of such relationships appears to benefit the mentor and the related organizations as well as the protégé. A few organizations have recognized such benefits and established formal mentoring programs.

Those in ministry have long been benefitted from mentor relationships. Because of enduring traditional of exclusively male clergy in many Christian denominations, mentoring generally has been reserved for males. Now, however, females are being accepted as ordained ministers. The issue of mentoring and its relationship to the ministry is gaining renewed interest. Within the church, the concept of mentoring holds special significance. Because the majority of priesthood ministry is volunteer rather than on a full-time employed basis mentoring can provide an enhanced training and nurturing opportunity. Within jurisdictions there are many variations on ministry styles and approaches. Mentor enriches the new priesthood member's understanding and skill in ministry in local and World Church settings.

Adapted from the work of Cathi Cackler-Veazey