



# Mentoring Program for Beginning Pastors

## Introduction

When beginning pastors venture into their first assignments, they face many new and unfamiliar situations. It is important that they receive every opportunity for growth and learning through these initial experiences in ministry. The regional church/area conference can do much in these early months of pastoring to provide special support and encouragement as beginning pastors test their gifts and further discern their sense of call to ministry.

One such effort is mentoring, in which an intentional relationship is formed between an experienced pastor and a beginning pastor. This is usually the first two years of his/her assignment, during the licensed period. A mentor has knowledge, skills, experiences, and spiritual qualities to which a pastor might well aspire. The mentor serves as a listener, advocate, and resourcing friend for the growth of the pastor being mentored. Giving oneself to a relationship of trust, truth, respect, and prayer can be rewarding to the mentor, inviting him/her to revisit his/her sense of call and pastoral journey as well as bringing the satisfaction and joy of entrusting to others what has been learned through years of ministerial leadership.

## Scriptural Foundation

The mentoring relationship is grounded in scriptural understandings such as the following:

- Growth through personal relationships—Mark 3:14, Luke 6:40
- Modeling as a means of training others—2 Timothy 3:10, 1 Peter 5:3
- Apprenticing others for ministry—2 Timothy 2:1-2, Acts 18:24-26
- Self-disclosure as a means of growth for others—Romans 7:21-25, 2 Corinthians 12:1-10
- Leadership as equipping others for ministry—Ephesians 4:11-12, Matthew 10 B 11:1
- Incarnating the Spirit of Christ with others—Philippians 2:5-7

## Goals

The goals of mentoring are to provide a supportive relationship for the new pastor in which she/he will be:

- assisted in understanding the pastoral role and in forming a healthy pastoral identity.
- provided opportunities for growth through reflection and conversation about experiences in ministry.
- enabled to understand and experience wholesome relationships with the regional church/area conference and denomination.
- helped to reflect on issues which arise within the congregation. This is in effect a coaching relationship in which the mentor is working to enable a successful beginning for this new pastor.

## Activities

The mentoring relationship will usually involve a 60- to 90-minute monthly meeting between the mentor and the new pastor. While this is the typical approach, creative alternatives may be better suited for mentoring relationships that are spread over a large geographical distance. The pastor being mentored will

be invited to bring to the meeting goals, plans, and experiences from his/her personal life and professional ministry for reflection and learning. The pastor being mentored may choose to journal about these items and send them to his/her mentor in advance of the meeting to allow additional time for prayerful discernment before meeting.

### **Topics of Discussion**

In meeting with the pastor, the mentor is encouraged to discuss topics such as:

#### **Self/Pastoral Role:**

- Understanding the pastoral role and forming a healthy pastoral identity.
- Pastor's efforts at personal and professional growth
- Theological assumptions and implicit expectations which seem to shape the pastor's ministry
- All six credentialing competencies grid found in this packet

#### **Congregation:**

- The function of the pastor in various roles and tasks to which she/he has been called.
- Reflections on issues which arise within the congregation that present the new pastor with decisions and needed responses.
- The pastor's relationships with the congregation, deacons/elders, church council, family, etc.

#### **Conference/Denomination:**

- The pastor's relationship to peers, the regional church/area conference and denomination.
- The way the pastor is addressing the various expectations of the regional church/area conference while moving towards ordination.

### **Procedures**

1. *Appointment*—The Ministerial Leadership Committee, along with the regional church/area conference minister, and in conversation with the new pastor, will appoint the mentor.
2. *Meetings*—Normally the meetings will be in person; however, other means of communication may supplement these face to face meetings.
3. *Style*—The relationship between mentor and mentee should be one of honesty and openness. For the new pastor to benefit, there must be a desire to learn and to be taught by an experienced pastor. Honest disclosure of difficult issues will result in the highest level of growth. The mentor will also share openly with the pastor out of his/her own life including personal strengths and limitations, successes and failures, both as a model and as a companion on the journey of faith and ministry.
4. *Initiative*—Normally the mentor will initiate the regular monthly meetings, but the pastor is free to initiate contact as needed with the mentor as special needs arise in his/her personal life or ministry.
5. *Training*—The regional church/area conference minister will offer occasional training opportunities for mentors so that they may experience support and guidance for this particular ministry.
6. *Reporting*—While in general the conversations between the pastor and mentor will be considered confidential, it is important that the two have a clear understanding regarding this matter. At the time of discernment regarding the possibility of the pastor being ordained, the mentor will be expected to provide a reference.
7. *Closure*—Although a friendship between the pastor and mentor may continue for years, it is important to plan a specific time for mutual review, celebration, and closure of the formal relationship.