

in the journey, be it as a disciple or as a leader.

- A good mentor balances encouragement with accountability.
- Healthy mentors are willing to learn alongside
- Effective mentors know their limitations of time and knowledge
- Mentors should have a track record of fruitfulness and faithfulness in life and ministry

It will also be helpful to be clear about what you are hoping to gain from the mentoring relationship. Clarity of expectation will help both you and the mentor discern next faithful steps. It might also point to the need for additional relationships such as a Spiritual Director, Leadership Coach, a Counselor, or Teacher. All of these have shared characteristics, yet some differences. The primary work of a mentor is to help engage in a reflect, learn, try loop. Some might call this a Reflect, Adjust, Do, loop as well. Whereby a

mentor helps to take a critical look at the current actions and behaviors, facilitates learning based on their experience, and holds accountability to taking new actions.

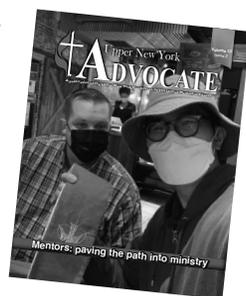
At the core, mentorship is about a relationship be learning and growth. This learning and growth is beyond what can be done on our own, we need people who have walked the path before us. If you are currently trying to grow as a disciple or leader by yourself and would like to find a mentor the best advice is to pray for guidance and discernment, then pick of the phone or the keyboard and seek out a mentor. Waiting for a mentor to fall into place all alone is highly unlikely, Like Ruth, Elisha, and the Disciples we must seek the mentors for our lives, and be willing to invest in the journey with them. It will require effort, and most likely discomfort, yet it is worth it when we consider the growth that is possible.

Looking for more stories and resources on mentoring?

Check out our 2021 Issue II of *the Advocate*—an entire issue dedicated to the importance of mentorship.

Visit: www.unyumc.org/news/advocate.

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“Through a mentoring relationship, leaders become better equipped for the work of their calling.”

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The role of mentoring in increasing a church's vitality



By The Rev. Dr. Aaron Bouwens

It is as clear as day. That first day, in my first appointment and the recognition that I was now responsible for the life of a congregation as their pastor. Hopes and dreams of growth had already been sharded with me through the Staff Parish Committee, and I was eager to jump in and “make it happen.” There was only one major problem; I felt completely clueless as to how to make whatever “it” was happen. It was overwhelming and a touch discouraging. In what can only be a nudge from the Holy Spirit I decided to pick up the phone and call some people I knew who had experience in helping increase the vitality of a local congregation. The invitation was for me to take them to lunch once a month so that I could learn

from them, and bounce ideas off them as I engaged the work in my congregation. Three colleagues agreed to a monthly meeting for the purpose of mentoring me as I started in the ministry of pastoral leadership.

Looking back, the investment of lunch and a couple of hours a month had more value than I ever imagined at the time. By engaging with mentors, I could ask questions, and learn from the mistakes and difficult times others went through. Those six to eight hours a month allowed me to multiply my learning as well as, provide leadership, to the congregation for greater vitality. There are many things I would do in a different way if I went back to my first appointment; one thing that I would certainly not change is seeking and engaging mentors.

A quick survey of Scripture reveals the relationship of mentoring has been around almost as long as there have been people. The Old Testament is rife with examples of mentors, Moses and Joshua, Deborah and Barak, Naomi and Ruth, Elijah and Elisha to name a few. Turning to the New Testament, we find multiple examples as well, Elizabeth and Mary, Paul and Timothy, Jesus and The Twelve. When God has been inviting people to provide leadership to the people of God, there is always the opportunity for a mentor to encourage and support the leader. The mentoring was always guided toward the purpose of helping the people of God to live into their calling to love the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength as well as to love their neighbor as themselves (Deuteronomy 6:4, Matthew 22:34-40). Another way of saying this is God provides opportunities for leaders to have mentors as the leader walks with others to fulfill the work of being and making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

All too often leadership is turned into an act of a solo heroic leadership. Leaders place themselves on an island and feel the resulting isolation. This in turn limits the ability of the leader to lead well and increases the burnout and frustration. By seeking and engaging a mentor, the leader ventures off the isolation island and begins to have a relationship of encouragement and learning.

Through a mentoring relationship, leaders become better equipped for the work of their calling. Leaders in the church become equipped for growing as a follower of Jesus Christ, leading others in deepening their discipleship, and inviting others to join the journey anew.

When leaders of a congregation, remember this is both laity and clergy, enter a mentoring relationship the potential for increasing the vitality of the congregation as it lives into its vision. Effective mentoring engages at two levels, personal spiritual development, and leadership capacity. Having a Spiritual mentor will provide an environment to be encouraged and challenged through loving accountability. A mentor will help us to stretch and grow in ways that might not happen on our own.

Finding a mentor is more than blindly picking someone out of the crowd. Consideration is to be given as to the person invited into a mentoring relationship. There are times in the church when a mentor is assigned, and this can be helpful but there is never a limit to the number of mentors we can seek as long as there is room for putting into practice the learning gained. Here are some items to consider when discerning a mentor:

- Mentors for discipleship should exhibit the behaviors and practices of a disciple of Jesus Christ.
- A mentor should be further along

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