What Is a Mentoring Team and What Does it Do?

Resources for Supervised Ministry

Description

A mentoring team, sometimes called a lay team, is a group of laypeople/staff/clients (depending on the type of supervised ministry site) who covenant with an intern to support his or her formation as a professional. Mentoring teams represent the site and their primary focus is educational, i.e., giving constructive feedback and helping to identify the intern's particular competencies in ministry. (Some sites might select an individual companion for this role rather than a team.) The team typically gathers on a regular basis, usually monthly, to meet with the intern.

In congregational ministry, laypeople contribute to the formation and education of future ministers because, by biblical definition, the church is laos, the whole people of God, including both clergy and laity. Laypeople offer an invaluable perspective – the perspective from the pew – that the pastor cannot offer. Through dialogue with the mentoring team, the intern learns how better to serve that particular congregation and future congregations as well.

In other settings, staff members, board members, and/or clients can make an important contribution. They can shed a perspective on the agency or organization that the director may not have. They can teach the intern the organization’s mission and history and explain what drives its work. They can serve as “reality checkers” on the intern’s work within the organization.

Functions

Thus the functions of mentoring teams may include:

Welcome

Mentoring teams serve as supportive bodies by officially welcoming interns into the life of their sites. They might publicize the intern’s arrival with a newsletter article or through some other means. Some churches formally install their interns with a covenan ting service during Sunday worship near the beginning of the year.

Opening the life of the site to the intern

Within the necessary time constraints of the part-time internship, interns should participate in as wide an area of institutional life as possible. To do so, they should become acquainted with a wide array of people and their projects and interests. Mentoring teams can facilitate these connections and introductions. They can also acquaint interns with the history, theology, politics, and culture of the site, familiarize them with the issues and concerns of the wider community, and inform them of special events going on. Sometimes mentoring teams coordinate invitations for shared meals.

Feedback and support

Mentoring teams serve as channels of feedback and reflection for interns. It is important for team members to have read the intern’s Learning Agreement in order to familiarize themselves with the specific expectations and responsibilities of the internship as well as the intern’s learning goals for the year. Meetings of the mentoring team provide a chance to share reactions and impressions with the intern in a group setting as well as through individual comments. It is important that any feedback be timely, specific, accurate, constructive, and behavioral rather than personal. Effective feedback is neither indiscriminate praise nor criticism. Rather, it is based on thoughtful analysis of the student’s work. For example, in assessing an intern’s sermon, the team might first ask themselves the following sorts of questions: What message did I take away from the sermon?
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Did I understand the sermon? Was it helpful or challenging to my life and faith? Different team members will probably have different answers; this variety is itself educational for the intern.

When offering feedback, mentoring teams should bear in mind that interns are students preparing for ministry. Expectations and standards held for someone already ordained do not necessarily apply. Comments should be specific enough that the intern can reasonably undertake areas of improvement. At the same time, mentoring teams should not hesitate to offer constructive criticism. As mutual trust grows within the group, any negative feedback should become easier to share. Ultimately, mentoring teams can become an opportunity for shared ministry between laypeople and those preparing for professional ministry, as genuine dialogue about the nature of ministry and the work of the site takes place.

Team members who serve for more than one year should bear in mind that new interns will be different. This year’s student may be quite unlike last year’s. The team’s role is to enable the intern to become the kind of minister he or she is best equipped to be.

Reporting
The part-time internship program involves two formal reports: a Mid-year Report and a Final Report. Mentoring team members provide input to the supervisor who prepares these reports.

Interpretation
Mentoring teams function as interpreters to others in the site. Sometimes, when students fumble in their work, complaints arise from those who do not fully understand their role as members of a teaching site. The mentoring team serves to remind everyone that the intern is not an employee but a student learning in their midst.

Confidentiality:
Mentoring teams function best if their discussions are understood to be confidential, including the supervisor in the circle of confidentiality whether or not he or she attends mentoring team meetings. Team members should agree not to share specific information with other site members or staff.

Sample:

| Names of Mentoring Team Members: |
| Approximate number of times you met with the intern: _________ |

1. What did the intern learn in this internship? What further reflection is needed?

2. How well does the intern practice ministry? What practices are worth particular notice?

3. What sort of minister is the intern becoming, i.e., what ministerial qualities do you see in his/her development?

__________________________________________

Convener

______________________

Date