

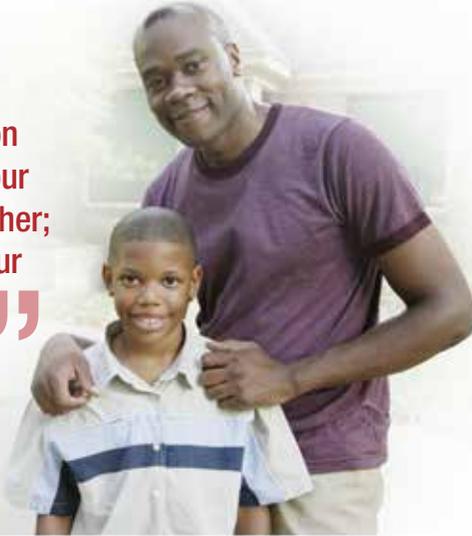
MENTORING: 21st Century Discipleship

BY PASTOR AMOS OLIVER GRAY IV



“ One generation
commands your
works to another;
they tell of your
mighty acts ”

PS. 145:4



"What is a mentor?"

When I deliver a presentation about our mentoring program and speak to dedicated volunteers about impacting the lives of young people, many people still have a hard time answering that question.

From my own experience, my mother was my biggest and most consistent mentor. She was a devoted believer who prayed all the time. I didn't know Christ as a boy, but she did. The faithful prayers of my mother were integral to my receiving the gift of salvation as a young man.

MY OTHER MENTORS:

- **My older brother**, Vernon, took me on jobs while I was in high school and taught me the meaning of hard work, saying that a man who works hard always has what he needs.
- **My high school track and field coach**, Jim Brady, ran drills but also talked to me and encouraged me to endure, because those who finish the race will get the prize.
- **My pastor**, the Rev. Ben Meston, has taught me that, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we study God's Word daily and are on our knees in prayer at all times. Pastor Meston helped me to understand my call to serve others in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Because of my mentoring models, I have a passion and drive to mentor young men and women in my community. Through the power of God, we have developed a mentoring program, Lifehouse, at First Lutheran Church, Hot Springs, Ark., reaching youth in the local schools and church. Our aim is to equip the next generation to live out the call of Jesus Christ in their lives. We want to support and guide them in a growing faith, guided by the power of the Holy Spirit, to impact the world with the Gospel. We look to our Savior, Jesus Christ, who "mentored" his 12 disciples to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20).

What is a mentor?

A mentor is a wise and trusted friend with a commitment to guide and support his/her "mentee." Mentors should be flexible, genuine, have a sense of humor, accessible, and willing to accept different points of view. Mentors are NOT their mentee's parents, social workers, probation officers, playmates, professional counselors, financiers, or law enforcement officers. As a mentor, you are a friend, coach, motivator, sponsor, supporter, tutor, teacher, and advocate.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a one-to-one caring, supportive relationship between a mentor and a mentee, solidly based on trust. The mentor focuses on the needs of the mentee and encourages him/her to reach his/her God-given potential with a Christ-centered vision for the future. Mentors convey basic values by suggesting positive behaviors, interacting one-on-one, and sharing insights and a vision for the student's future.

A MENTORING PROGRAM WILL:

- Encourage academic excellence
- Prepare for employment and career
- Offer positive social and behavior modification
- Teach cultural and social responsibilities
- Share family and parenting skills
- Help youth set a positive direction for their life and a path to reach it.

Lifehouse After School and Mentoring Program “Keys”

SIX KEYS TO THE LIFEHOUSE MENTORING PROGRAM

- 1 Go get them
- 2 Anywhere, anytime: be with them
- 3 Relationships take time; they don't happen overnight
- 4 Train them up
- 5 Feed my sheep
- 6 No quick fixes

The Sad State of Today's Youth

- 3,000,000 teenagers will become infected each year with a sexually transmitted disease.
- 240,000 children were born to girls under the age of 18 in a single year, and nearly all of those girls were unmarried.
- More than one-third of all teenage pregnancies in the U.S. end in abortion.
- 90 percent of 8 to 16-year olds have viewed online pornography.
- 63 percent don't believe that Jesus is the Son of the one true God.
- 81 percent believe truth is relative to the individual's circumstances.
- 51 percent don't believe that Jesus rose from the dead.
- 68 percent don't believe that the Holy Spirit is real.
- 65 percent don't believe that Satan is real.



1 Go Get Them

Don't wait for them to find you . . . find them!

When we began, our church youth group was small, so we reached out to the local public schools. We found them filled with students who wanted to be loved and accepted, who yearned for a place to go where they could be heard and feel safe.

Lifehouse Student Ministries is designed to bring youth, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to a place where they feel comfortable, accepted, heard, and loved.

Many youth want to be mentored by men and women who will support, guide, and direct them to positive growth and their God-given potential.

We identified men and women in our church who worked in the schools and encouraged them to share their lives with young people. We opened a dialogue about mentoring and, as a result, we were invited into the school to read to young people, to play basketball, and to talk with students.

The public schools are looking for people who will come and mentor and support young people, not only in their education, but also in their daily lives.

Over the past five years, our youth ministry has grown from 35 students to more than 150 students. We believe it is a result of connecting with hundreds of young people in the public schools in Hot Springs. It took time, energy, and a vision to find ways to "Go and Get Them."

2 Anywhere, Anytime: The “Be With” Factor

Some years ago, my good friend, Bo Boshers, asked me if I would write a chapter for his new book titled, *The Be-With Factor*. What is it?

It's not a new program or a new approach to youth work. As a youth pastor or volunteer, you don't have to go to another conference, get a new strategic plan, or become more "relevant." It's simply a way of life modeled by Jesus.

Now, when we look at the "statistics" for our youth, we see bad news. But . . . we won't give up, because we have the hope and promise to turn this around!

In Mark 3:14, Jesus chose the 12 apostles "to be with" him. In their years together, Jesus trained them in the Good News. He prepared these 12 men to change the world based on a shockingly simple premise that if they spent time with Him, prayed, heard the Word, saw His ministry, shared the Sacrament, they would be transformed. Clearly it worked: Filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles shared the Good News and "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

Likewise, a key principle for mentoring is "Be With." You simply need to be with the youth. Take a student or two along with you when you run errands, go to meetings, or work around your house. Have others do the same. Let students see Jesus in you in everyday situations, and then watch God work. The conversations you'll have and real-life modeling will demonstrate that you care and will have a powerful impact on those youth—and on you!

3 Relationships Don't Happen Overnight

Over the last five years, I've been privileged to mentor many young men and women in my community. My first—and most cherished—relationships are with five youth who I met when they were in the fifth and sixth grades. They were some of the most challenging boys in school, always getting in trouble and often in the principal's office. Their fathers were not in their lives and their mothers worked outside of the home.

The only way I knew to impact their lives was to get to know them and build a relationship of trust. This relationship has been built over the last five years. It has not been easy. You have to understand where you are in your life and where they are in their lives.

Relationships do not happen overnight. You have to stay the course.

As a mentor, you can build key relationships with young people in your church, your city, and in the schools around you. You can build a relationship that will last a long time. Because I stayed the course, understood my role as mentor, and accepted the boys for who they were, I still have relationships with these young men that are continuing to grow.



4 Train Them Up

Our youth are not just the "future" of the church, they ARE the church! Our youth are recognizing their place as co-equals in the Church and are responding to their rightful positions as leaders in sharing the Gospel of Christ.

These young people are looking for godly men and women to lead, train, and equip them as they prepare to lead the next generation.

My friend, Tim Eldred, executive director of Christian Endeavor, says "in order to train students to become the men and women of God they should be, we have to stop doing things for them that they can do for themselves." We train them to follow their passions and release them with guidance to impact their world.

Mentoring Youth to be Leaders

- **Safe community:** Cultivate a safe community and create an environment of acceptance. Most psychologists agree that one of man's most basic needs is to feel safe. Pastors and youth leaders should work to create a safe place for all students through every activity and every word.
- **Peer mentoring:** Peers have a huge influence on the choices that young people make. Only parents have a greater influence. It's essential to create a youth ministry that provides positive reinforcement for good choices and encourages young people toward mature faith development.
- **Student leadership:** According to Ray Johnson, author of *Developing Students Leaders*, "Developing student leaders is a deeper level of care and nurture through training and involvement in ministry to others. This deeper level of care and nurture often works to deepen the sense of community."
- **Small groups:** Small groups provide a comfortable atmosphere where students can discuss their Christian faith and values in close relationships with peers and adults. Small groups also provide an opportunity for positive community and reinforcement.
- **Job ride along:** Ask adults to invite young people to spend time with them at work. Set this up for one or two days a year when young people can spend the day with them.
- **Music in worship:** Encourage musically gifted students to serve in worship by singing in a choir or playing an instrument.
- **Drama:** If your church has a drama team, involve teenagers.
- **Rites of passage:** Develop a series of "rites of passage" to signal that your youth will be taking on greater responsibility in the church leadership as they mature. As Lutherans, we have one of the greatest rites of passage programs in the church: Confirmation. At First Lutheran, our Rites of Passage/Confirmation program is held every Sunday from 9:45-10:45am, as youth and parents gather for prayer and the study of God's Word and the Small Catechism.

5 Feed My Sheep

[Jesus] said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:17 ESV)

This is an amazing verse in the Word of God—Jesus comes to Peter and shows him grace and yet encourages him to get back up and get to work. Our Lord tells Peter to "feed my sheep."

As mentors, we too are called to "feed the sheep." If we are going to see spiritual, social, and relational growth, it's going to come through sharing the Word of God with the mentee. We cannot be ashamed of the Gospel.

Jesus shared everything He received from His Father with His mentees (disciples). This is why we saw them later doing the things that Jesus did. I believe that if we are going to see growth in our mentees, we cannot miss the important step to "feed my sheep." It is a must in order to develop healthy relationships that last a lifetime.

6 No Quick Fixes

There are no "quick fixes" to developing spiritually strong, academically excellent youth in your church or community.

Start slowly. Build teams and make connections between adults and youth. Solicit advice and counsel from the senior pastoral staff, as well as other church leaders. By talking with leaders, you'll gain perspective on setting up a new program or changing an existing one. You'll also be paving the way for the support and encouragement you'll need when you initiate your mentoring program.

Be sure to consider resources such as finances, facilities, and skilled leadership. You will need to train mentors for your program. Every mentoring program may look different, depending on the church or para-church organization sponsoring it and the needs of the students it serves.



Lifehouse Student Ministries

First Lutheran Church's Lifehouse Student Ministries has three formal mentoring programs:

SCHOOL-BASED MENTORING

This mentoring program was the easiest to implement. I went to the local elementary school and talked with the counselors and intervention specialists. I simply asked how I could serve. You will be surprised at how welcome you are in the school if you have the attitude of Christ and live it out in service to your community.

I started small—I met with my five young men one day a week for 35 minutes during lunch and recess. We also mentored students in our schools by participating in a reading program. A large percentage of our students have trouble reading. Members of our church went into the school and read to students. This was another part of our school-based mentoring program.

Any church can do this program. The only cost is a little time. It can be as little as one day a week with one to five students for 30 minutes to an hour.

Lifehouse After-School Tutoring & Mentoring Schedule

3:00	Pick up students from schools
3:15	Rec/Open
3:45	Homework and Tutoring
4:15	Transition to Mentoring
4:25	Mentoring
5:15	Transition to Dinner
5:20	Dinner
6:00	Transition to Lifehouse Live Program



LIFEHOUSE AFTER-SCHOOL

We mentor teenagers through our Lifehouse After-School and Mentoring program. Students are picked up after school by church vans and buses and brought to the church. We serve students a nutritious snack, tutor them, and then mentor them. After mentoring, they are served a nutritious dinner, because our kids are hungry!

Our mentoring and tutoring program is split into two parts:

- Academic tutors focus specifically on homework and class work during their 45-minute tutoring session.
- We then transition to our 45-minute mentoring session with other volunteers. Our mentors make great tutors, however we want our mentors to focus on mentoring students in life skills.

If you choose to develop this program, you will need to choose a curriculum to use to mentor your teenagers.

Lifehouse Student Ministries and our after-school tutoring and mentoring program use the "Talks" mentoring curriculum. Fifth through 12th grade students need to have concrete information to help as you mentor them. This curriculum was developed by Dr. Harold Davis in Champaign, Ill.: *Talks My Father Never Had With Me, Talks My Mother Never Had With Me*. We use these resources with our students to guide them in their social, personal, and religious journey. It also gives the mentor concrete information with guidelines to direct them. We only have 45 minutes after school to mentor our young people and we want to be very focused with that time. This curriculum helps us to do just that.

YOUTH MINISTRY MENTORING

The third piece of our mentoring program was developed through Lifehouse Student Ministries. Our youth ministry on Wednesday night is divided into three smaller programs and we have implemented mentoring in each of these programs.

- Our fifth and sixth grade program is led by adults who focus on a study of the Word of God.
- Our seventh and eighth grade students are led by our senior pastor to study the Word of God with our confirmation students and their parents.
- Our ninth through twelfth grade students are led by mentors studying the Word of God to help them to understand their purpose and place in the church.

Lifehouse Live: Youth Mentoring Program

- 5:30 Lifehouse Live Staff & Mentors check in
- 6:00 Lifehouse Live Doors Open
- 6:05 Lifehouse Live
- 6:55 Lifehouse Small Groups (Mentoring)
- 7:30 Lifehouse Live Closing



We believe that all students have a place in the church NOW and we have developed a ministry that is student-led and adult-guided. This helps us continue mentoring students to help them discover their gifts and talents and use them in youth ministry. We mentor students in the following areas of our youth ministry:

- Youth Ministry Leadership Team
- Operation Team
- Worship/Drama Team
- Missions Team
- Care Team
- Activities Team
- Outreach Team

Each of these teams was developed with one adult mentor and one student mentee. The adult mentors the student who then helps lead the team. Whether you have five students or 105 students, you can have a vibrant mentoring program that will cause your ministry and church to grow, both spiritually and numerically. We recognize that there are many other mentoring programs in our society that are effective for both our churches and communities. We believe that the programs we have can be implemented in any size church.

Guidelines for Selecting and Training Mentors

There are several issues to consider when selecting mentors and preparing them for a one-to-one, one-to-two, or one-to-five relationship with teenagers. It is essential to screen the adults before any match is made. Meetings and activities between mentors and teenagers are usually unsupervised; therefore you must provide adequate matching, training, and support.

This step-by-step process will help you to effectively implement a program:

HOW TO SELECT MENTORS

Step 1 - Interviews

Both mentors and teenage "mentees" go through an application and interview process. This helps you make good matches and identify unrealistic expectations. Since mentors come from all walks of life and occupations, it is important to interview each one in order to know more about them and to make the best match with a mentee.

We believe that any adult can be matched with a student if that adult has a caring and willing heart to be used by God to impact the lives of students. We have stay-at-home moms, police officers, school teachers and administrators, construction workers, businessmen, and church workers serving as mentors at First Lutheran.



Step 2 - Background Checks

You must complete a background check of every prospective mentor. Your local authorities can direct you to the appropriate agency for your community. There is usually a small charge for criminal background checks.

Step 3 - Training

Each mentor will need to complete the training. If at any point concerns or red flags appear, address them immediately. You shouldn't expect perfection, but you'll experience more success in your program if you address possible problems up front.

For example, many mentors have unrealistic expectations about helping teenagers. They want to fix the problems they encounter immediately. This is not realistic. If you're aware of these expectations up front and address them with the mentor, you'll help the mentor avoid problems and frustrations in the relationship.

Here is a training schedule for your mentors:

Initial Mentor Training

- Education about today's youth culture
- Listening and communication skills
 - Ways to improve listening skills
 - How to have a conversation
 - Good Answers to Good Questions
- Roles of Mentors
 - What is a mentor?
 - What isn't a mentor?
 - What are young people looking for in mentors?
- Cultural Competency
- Problem solving
- What's appropriate in mentoring
 - Meeting Times
 - Meeting places
 - Good and Bad Touch
 - Conversation topics

Step 4 - Matching mentors and teenagers

Spend time matching your mentors with youth. Use the information from the application. Look for similar interests or other connections. Match in the same gender. Discuss possible matches with your ministry leaders and pray specifically for God's guidance. You or a member of your leadership team may want to be present at the initial meetings between mentors and mentees.

Step 5 - Follow-up Training and Evaluation

The most successful matches have been the programs where we followed up with mentors and teenagers. Offer a quarterly

follow-up training session for mentors. Retrain on a specific issue such as problem-solving. This also allows time for mentors to share successes and struggles.

Another benefit of this meeting is receiving encouragement and support from other mentors as they deal with similar issues. During follow-up training, you should also include an evaluation for mentors asking how they think the relationships are going, what they could do better, and what they are doing well. Encourage them to see strengths and weaknesses in their relationships. Allow mentors to evaluate the mentoring ministry. Ask them how you can help them in their ministry to teenagers. Be open to hear what they have to say.

Follow up with the teenagers as well. When you see young people at meetings and activities, take the opportunity to ask them how their mentoring relationships are going. You can get a group of teenagers together quarterly and ask them to share information about their relationships with their mentors.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable (1 Cor. 9: 24-25).

FINALLY . . .

Establishing a mentoring program may seem like an overwhelming task. But with God's help and your church leadership behind you, you can do it! Break it down into manageable pieces. Be sure to spend plenty of time planning and soliciting support, praying for each mentor who will be part of your program and for each teenager who will be mentored.

Develop guidelines for your mentoring ministry and start recruiting adults. You may even want to recruit an adult leader to oversee the mentoring program.

Start small, with four to six mentoring matches. Grow your ministry gradually. You will be amazed at the eagerness of teenagers to participate. Today's young people are starving for guidance and commitment from adult mentors.

As we have developed our mentoring program, we have seen our young people grow tremendously, both spiritually and emotionally. Even though many of our students are not members of our church, their relationships with adults in our church have grown.

I believe that every church, no matter how large or small, can have a thriving mentoring program. All it takes is one person stepping up and out of the shadows, saying, "I care about the next generation."

Endnotes:

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