

Mentoring . . . A Biblical Basis

“His name was John, and I began working on his staff while I was still in seminary. There was no official role called “candidacy mentor” at that time, but there was a mentoring relationship that existed between us. John prayed for me and our ministry together in that local church, and he spoke to me of the spiritual disciplines of daily, devotional Bible reading, writing, praying, listening for God’s direction, and following the call to ministry. As I asked John questions about the meaning of ministry, how I could use my gifts to serve the church, how my relationship with my family would be affected, he guided me in specific ways of writing, assessment, and feedback from the church members. John confronted me when he could see I was moving in a direction that was not good for the ministry of Jesus Christ and persisted in his guidance of me, without discounting my own unique gifts for ministry. To this day, I am grateful for his willingness to guide and coach me during those early days.” — Martha B. Wagley

John is an example of a mentor in the church today. However, mentors have been part of the biblical story since the beginning of the faith.

Elijah found Elisha and threw his mantle over him. Elisha followed Elijah. (1 Kings 19:19-21) Elisha learned of the ways of God, he succeeded Elijah and followed God’s guidance as he worked among the people of that day.

In the book of Esther, we read of how Mordecai coaches Esther in her role in helping the Jews, calling her forth to act on behalf of the nation. These words to her have become well known, “Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.” (Esther 4:14)

“Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’”

(1 Samuel 3:9)

Mary and Elizabeth have a mentoring relationship, as we discover in the story of the birth of John the Baptist and in the birth of Jesus. Luke 1:5-56 tells of the encounter between these cousins and how Elizabeth’s affirmation of the call of God on Mary led her into the future.

Barnabas speaks on behalf of Paul when Paul comes to Jerusalem and attempts to join the disciples but meets with resistance. Barnabas actually took Paul to the apostles and explained to them how Paul had been called and had already witnessed about Jesus. (Acts 9:27)

There are other examples of mentoring relationships in the story of the Christian faith. Justo L. González in his book, *Mentors As Instruments of God’s Call*, gives a good account of some of these situations. It is helpful information for understanding the biblical foundation of mentoring.

In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul speaks of the variety of gifts that are given and why those gifts are given, A. . . to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”(verses 12-13) And then in verse 25, he reminds us, “. . . **for we are members of one another.**”

This addresses the heart of the meaning of mentoring from the biblical perspective. It is in and through that relationship that people are equipped for the work of ministry, for the full development and growth in grace in Jesus Christ. Because we are members of one another, we are responsive to each other in this relationship.

It is in response to this biblical truth that the candidacy mentoring relationship is affirmed in the process of candidacy for those who are seeking to become licensed and ordained ministers in The United Methodist Church.

Who has provided the mentoring role for you in your ministry? Who has been the John or Mary that guided, coached, or helped you discern God's call in your life?