



## **Mutual Mentoring**

**By Ann A. Michel**

In a traditional mentoring relationship, an older, wiser colleague provides wisdom, counsel, and advice to a younger, less-skilled aspirant. Today, however, the notion of *reverse mentoring* is gaining traction as a way for established leaders to stay attuned to contemporary cultural trends. Few things could be more needed in the church today, given the importance of connecting with younger generations.

The concept of reverse mentoring invites us to think about mentoring in a different new way, reassessing our unilateral assumptions that:

- one partner in the relationship has all the answers
- one person gives wisdom and advice while the other takes it
- only one partner is the beneficiary of the mentoring relationship

What if we acknowledged that all good mentoring relationships are *mutual*? What if we sought a paradigm of mentoring in which:

- information and knowledge flow both ways
- there is give and take
- both partners learn from each other

In *A Work of Heart* (Jossey-Bass, 2000), Reggie McNeal suggests that the model for this type of mentoring is found in the way that Jesus and his disciples functioned as a mutual learning community. When we read the Gospels through this lens, we see how the very disciples whom Jesus teaches and mentors also teach and mentor him, serving as his sounding board and feedback loop.

Cross-generational mentoring relationships at their best permit young and old to *serve each other* in a spirit of humility and openness (Crepes, *Reverse Mentoring*, 2009) with the goal of mutual growth and ministry development. And the focus must always be outward – not enhancing a leader’s effectiveness for its own sake, but for the sake of the church and the world. The goal of mutual mentoring must be to equip leaders – young and old – to engage emerging generations more effectively.

What might it look like in your congregation to invite younger persons and established church leaders to participate in conversations with the primary focus being on listening and learning by the leaders? Always keep in mind that the goal is to learn, not for the sake of keeping things as they are, but for the sake of understanding new realities so that the church can be as responsive to new generations as we experienced the church earlier in our lives.

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