
NO BOX?

What to do When the Box Doesn't Fit: A New/Old Way of Training Pastoral Leadership.

An Age-Old Technique, In Context and Designed for the Individual

In 880 BCE, Homer introduced the concept of mentoring. According to Homer, before Odysseus left for Troy, he gave his son to Mentor, whom he charged with the care and education of the boy. Mentor has come to mean one who undertakes the training and care of another and this method has been practiced for millennia as a way to prepare men and women for practice in many different fields, including the ministry.

Jesus called his disciples to follow him. They spent their days observing, listening and then practicing to be the next group of spiritual teachers and mentors. As Presbyterians, we have an army of well-trained Ministers of Word and Sacrament who are capable of leading those who for one reason or another do not fit into the traditional academic model of seminary preparation. For many who are called into the ministry, the age-old model of mentor/mentee makes the most sense as it allows them to stay in their ministry context, meet family and work responsibilities, continuing in a mission oriented environment as they learn from an experienced Minister of Word and Sacrament.

Student, mentor and a representative from the Commission on Ministry (COM) oversee the design of each candidate's development plan. These teams consider 10 essential competencies from pastoral care to polity, missional thinking to character and call. What skills does the student bring to the program and which are felt to need strengthening in order to lead a congregation or other ministry? The candidate and mentor then begin to work toward competence in each of the areas identified for further training.

Commission-long Learning

The Book of Order requires that after commissioning each Commissioned Pastor (CP) continues to work with a mentor regularly. This provides a guaranteed environment for on-going education. As part of a CP cohort, there could also be opportunities to learn from other CPs and their mentors.

A Common Question

The most common question asked about the CP candidate program is "Why do we need this?" The simplest answer is that many small congregations as well as new expressions of the church require indigenous personnel who understand a particular ministry context. They have the expertise to serve under special circumstances but need ministry training to be competent across the many skills required to be in pastoral leadership.

Commissioned Pastor Development Process

COM; revised 9/2021

Many ministry settings require the candidate to be willing to work bi-vocationally or within a limited income from the ministry setting. Having pastoral leadership prepared to work in a secular position or after retirement is a great boon to a small ministry with limited financial resources.

Current candidates have experience with particular people groups, work in specialized ministries or are able to support themselves with a secular job. The common denominator is a call from God to serve the people with joy and competence and each are willing to spend time and energy learning from an experienced woman or man already in ministry.

Since God calls people from many circumstances to be the hands and feet of Jesus, it is our desire as NWC Presbytery to rise to the challenge to follow in the footsteps of our Creator. We commit to provide innovative and exciting ways of preparing people to answer that call.