

Learning from experience: an evaluation of Christian young adult mentoring

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Abstract

What can be learnt from the experiences of those involved in mentoring Christian young adults in Australia? This article reports on research seeking to answer this question. Qualitative methods were employed to identify the type of mentoring that is most effective at developing a mature character, identity and increased intimacy with God. The approach taken was to interview both Christian young adult mentorees and highly experienced mentors to learn from the lived experience on both sides of the mentoring relationship. Both provided insights into the impact mentoring is having on Christian young adults and suggested ways to increase its efficacy.

The data showed that a frequent and formal mentoring type was the most preferred by both young adults and experienced mentors. Program-based mentoring was shown to have significant advantages and disadvantages, the latter of which require careful attention. Benefits of mentoring that were identified include character development,

intimacy with God, growth in faith and skill development. Finally, a broad series of contemporary ministry recommendations to further improve the effect of mentoring is detailed.

Key words

Mentoring, young adults, spiritual formation, Christian

Introduction

The mentoring of young people has a long history (Chiroma, 2015) and a seemingly ubiquitous current practice. With a rising secularism amongst Australian young adults (Powell et al., 2017), mentoring is often suggested as a way of helping Christian young adults maintain their faith. For example, Powell, Pepper and Kerr (2018) note that “Some churches are responding to changing social dynamics by encouraging intergenerational connection, with activities such as grandparents’ and grandchildren’s playgroups, or via mentoring programs in local schools.”

Although such mentoring has been occurring, it has mostly been done in an ad-hoc fashion with little evaluation or academic review for Christian young adult mentoring in Australia, and the practices, terminology and effect of this tool varies widely. The researchers of this article have been involved in such mentoring through multiple environments, as mentor and mentoree, and as part of mentoring programs and informally. The hope of testing the assumptions and validity of this mentoring, and improve future practice, led to the development of this project. This research attempts to analyse the lived mentoring experience of people on both sides of mentoring relationships: those who have been mentored and mentors with extensive experience. Both groups shared strengths, weaknesses and potential improvements for mentoring programs. Analysis of this data unveils insights about mentoring preferences and recommendations for more effective approaches for contemporary ministry today.

The study itself is small in scale and focus. It looks at mentoring within the Christian faith tradition, at young people aged 18-24, who are mostly based in north-west Sydney, Australia. However, the inferences drawn through this evaluation might be applicable to an extent for mentoring people of other faith traditions, age-brackets and geographical areas.

Although mentoring has been defined in a broad variety of fashions, for the purposes of this research we assume that:

Christian mentoring usually involves two people participating in an intentional, God-seeking and transparent friendship, where the mentor is usually older and always more mature than the mentoree. The intentional friendship fosters conversations about life stories, God moments, skill development and everyday issues that lead the mentoree to grow closer to the Triune God and receive a God-given identity in His Kingdom. Mentoring promotes a safe yet challenging spiritual friendship to identify experiences and environments that will grow, guide, encourage, support and challenge the mentoree to become more Christlike in all areas of their life and character (Brailey and Parker, 2020, 112).

Situating the Research

Although mentoring can occur between peers, or in a group setting with an experienced mentor guiding multiple mentorees, it is typically a one-on-one relationship with one older mentor guiding, developing and supporting a younger believer who is known as the mentoree or mentee. Such mentoring is widely understood, inside and outside of Christian settings, to have significant merit. A recent survey by Olivet Nazarene University (2019) of 3,000 American workers showed that an overwhelming majority viewed mentors as important: 29% “Very important”, 47% “Important”, 18% “Neutral” and only 6% “Not very important”.

Similarly, the effectiveness of mentoring is well documented (Dubois et al, 2011). Scrine, Reibel and Walker (2012) reviewed the international evidence to show that youth mentoring “can be effective in facilitating a range of positive developments and outcomes for many young people.” More pertinently, for young adults Cramer and Prentice-Dunn (2007) show that effective mentoring can be “a significant factor in healthy development”. For the mentoring explored in this research, that of Christian young adults, Roberto (2012), Powe and Smothers (2015) and Parks (2011) have all established its significance and potential.

The research to date has focused on the outcomes of such mentoring, which have been shown to be positive. This research is not then about the question of efficacy, but attempts to delve within the inner workings of mentoring relationships and discover what aspects are helpful and what can be improved. In particular, examining both

sides of the mentoring relationship should unearth insights that an outcome-focused analysis of the mentorees only would not see.

Methodology

Two types of qualitative research were conducted in this research project to explore the impact of Christian mentoring on young adults: a focus group and a series of in-depth interviews. The focus group targeted young adults that have experienced Christian mentoring and the in-depth interviews were for experienced mentors.

Ethics

The research was conducted after approval was received from the Sydney College of Divinity. All involved signed consent forms and were provided with information sheets. Particular care was given to ensure no harm was caused when covering sensitive topics in the research, for example satisfaction with mentoring, or topics covered in mentoring conversations. No recommendations to seek further support were deemed necessary throughout the field work because no participants showed signs of emotional distress. Similarly, no respondents sought to remove or omit any responses.

Focus Group for Christian Young Adults

A focus group of Christian young adults from Sydney, aged 18-24, that have experienced mentoring was conducted with six participants. The goal was to explore their experiences, perceptions and insights into the impact of mentoring on their Christian faith.

Focus group participants were invited through a range of connections. All participants were informed that participation was voluntary, their responses would be anonymised, and they could review the group transcript from the focus group. Fellow Church attendees and previous or current mentorees of the facilitator were not considered eligible for the focus group to encourage unbiased sharing. Young adult participants in the focus group have been referred to as participants throughout the rest of this article.

In-depth Interviews with Experienced Mentors

A series of five in-depth interviews were also conducted to explore the role and impact of Christian mentoring on young adults. Five interviews, lasting 30-45 minutes, were conducted with mentors who were considered experts in the field of Christian mentoring. All interviewees were volunteers recruited through invitations, again with responses anonymised and interview transcripts made available.

These interviewees all had experience mentoring people aged 18-24 through a range of face to face and digital interactions within Australia and for some internationally. They had all mentored between ten and two hundred people across eight to thirty years, across a wide variety of denominations. Henceforth these will be referred to as interviewees.

Further Research

Many other approaches could have been taken in the research and could fruitfully be done elsewhere. Further research could explore the experiences of mentorees and mentors in other geographic areas, those who have not received mentoring and those who have received mentoring with different, or no, faith traditions. A national study of young adults' experience of mentoring through an online survey could further develop and assess the impact of Christian mentoring on their life and faith. Further research could also assess the benefits of mentoring across character, mission and spirituality indicators. A larger scale assessment of mentoring that utilised an external scale of assessment would provide greater confidence in the qualitative findings revealed in this research.

Data Analysis

Differentiating and Defining Mentoring is Needed to Improve Efficacy

Mentoring overlaps with many of the other empowering processes such as counselling, coaching, supervision, discipleship and pastoral care (Lewis, 33-37, 2009). However, there is a distinct combination of activities that make mentoring unique (Cunningham, 38). Mentoring can include asking questions (Streit, 2002, 805), sharing vulnerably, identifying strengths and, in a Christian setting, promoting the work of God in a person's life (Lewis, 2009, 165).

Mentorees had different expectations of mentoring because of the wide range of activities that they considered part of the mentoring process. Several very different, and sometimes contrasting, activities were discussed. For example, in the research, participants used the word '*mentoring*' for meeting for weekly bible studies with an older, more mature Christian, to describe informal occasional catch-ups with an older family friend and also contractual, yet infrequent 'all of life' discussions. There was confusion because the term '*mentoring*' was used to describe different activities and approaches that can be included in mentoring, which demonstrates the need for a broader agreement on how mentoring is defined.

Discussion Topics

Participants listed the content and topics they most desired to discuss in mentoring. Themes such as Christian growth, relationships, goals, skill development, major life decisions and struggles with sin, including their ability to express healthy sexual desires, were commonly identified. They desired to discuss character growth, career and study choices, mental health issues, processing pain and grief and controversial topics in mentoring. They also sought to discuss pastoral care issues and leadership development.

Interviewees also listed the content and topics that were discussed when mentoring young adults. Themes emerged around relationships, view of God and self, identity, and emotional and inner journey topics such as shame, fear of rejection and perfection. Mentors also discussed the deeper mysteries of faith, exploring vocation, career and decision-making processes with young adults. They also discussed control and faith issues and tried to help people, particularly males, not only to think theologically but also to develop emotionally as Christians.

Comparing these two perspectives on mentoring topics unveils a significant overlap in preferred discussions from both sides of the mentoring relationship. Both wanted to discuss faith issues, decision-making, relationships, vocation and emotional issues. However, whereas the participants stated their interest in skills and leadership, the interviewees wanted to discuss views of God and self, identity and the inner journey. It seems plausible that while the participants sought tangible outcomes, the interviewees focused on the pivotal issues behind the scenes. Nevertheless, the overlap of both lists demonstrates that the intentions of both are quite aligned.

Furthermore, participants' subsequent feedback shows issues from both groups, such as skill development and identity, were successfully explored in the mentoring (Brailey & Parker, 2020).

Mentoring Frequency

When participants thought about their overall satisfaction with receiving Christian mentoring there were a range of satisfaction levels in the group. Many participants were very satisfied with their experiences of mentoring. Two participants were quite unsatisfied with mentoring and explained that they had not experienced intentional or frequent mentoring when they had desired it. They both had felt somewhat let down by their mentors, who had expressed a commitment to mentor them but had not met frequently with them or had time to do any activities with them. The feedback from unsatisfied and satisfied participants highlighted the importance of prioritising and planning well for the mentoring relationships. They both felt that meeting frequently in a committed, formal type of mentoring is the key to influential mentoring with young adults.

The frequency of formal mentoring experienced by participants ranged from weekly for one participant, through to monthly or six-weekly for the rest of the participants. Monthly formal mentoring was the most common frequency that participants experienced, however, the preferred frequency varied between weekly to monthly.

Those who had informal mentors reported that they had been mentored informally over several years. They recounted how they had very infrequent connection with one or two people who still had made a significant impact on their lives. The impact was due to the length of their support and the encouragement, advice and friendship provided over several years.

Initial Experiences

Participants reported that when they first were receiving mentoring, they did not know what was involved in mentoring. Several did not even know that what they were experiencing was called mentoring. They did not understand or know what mentoring types they should pursue to have a satisfying, beneficial relationship. Nor did they understand the processes that are involved to achieve the objectives of mentoring. However, this did not hinder their involvement. Some participants, however, identified

a sense of confusion and felt that the lack of clarity on what is involved in mentoring limited their ability to get the most out of the process. The reason they wanted to get involved in mentoring was because they liked the idea of having someone more mature investing into their life and were open to whatever amorphous benefits might arrive.

Benefits of Mentoring

A range of benefits from receiving mentoring were identified by both participants and interviewees. The benefits included development in social relationships, spiritual formation and skill or spiritual gift development. Given the context of the research was Christian young adults being mentored by Christians, it is unsurprising that the preponderance of feedback was about spiritual formation and similar Christian growth.

The social support received through mentoring was a major benefit regularly mentioned by participants. This reinforced Berinšterová 's conclusion that "for the development of spirituality, connectedness with significant adults is needed" (2019). Support in prayer, accountability, encouragement and independent listening were beneficial to the young adults. The development of the young adults' spiritual formation; their identity, initial experience of spiritual disciplines, growth in faith, and worldview were prominently discussed in a very positive way in the focus group.

Similar benefits of mentoring were also described by interviewees. They identified how the mentoring relationship positively impacted the mentoree in several development areas including faith, gift or skill and identity (Brailey & Parker, 2020). They also noticed benefits such as increased confidence from people believing in them and receiving bigger opportunities.

Participants highlighted the value of non-familiar mentors, affirming Lanker and Issler's (2010) contention that such relationships beyond the immediate family network help adolescents to flourish. An interviewee explained that young people don't need rebuking, but noted how beneficial it was for them to have a chance to share about their poor choices without receiving judgement or condemnation which they perceive that their parents would give them. This aspect of mentoring can help to combat the negative ramifications of what Berinšterová (2019) describes as the "Deidealisation of parental figures".

Evidence for the need of mentors outside the family unit to produce long-term Christian spirituality for adolescents was found through Nuesch-Olver's (2005) analysis of over 500 spiritual biographies from her university students. Nuesch-Olver (2005, 101) reported that 'Without a single exception, students told stories from their own lives that underscored the power of mentoring and accountability in their faith journey'. Biddulph (2013, 31) agrees that such non-familiar mentors were traditionally part of the transition of men into adulthood.

The research behind this article found that mentoring relationships are helping to forge young adult Christians that are sticking with the Christian faith and the church. Participants felt that the experience of being invested into by a passionate, willing mentor helped them grow and develop their own Christian faith. Some indicated that mentoring helped their faith grow because it was a personalised approach to discipleship. Even though sermons and small group discussions had some personal application, participants felt that a unique quality of mentoring was the increased influence of relevant discussion about Christian Scripture and how it could be personally applied to their lives.

One group participant used the sporting metaphor of a coach to describe their approach to receiving mentoring. This mentoree's desire to grow and reach the next level of faith and maturity meant that mentoring was the logical option to receive coaching towards greater maturity and discipleship. Despite not having initiated the relationship, this mentoree had an extremely positive experience of frequent, intentional mentoring that had significantly influenced their Christian growth.

Interviewees indicated that they saw young adults growing in their spiritual formation through mentoring and highlighted the vital importance of mentoring in helping young adults to grow and mature. One interviewee indicated that young adults are still discovering their identity and '*playing dress ups*' and it was confirmed that they require someone to help them throughout this process as their identity becomes solidified (Brailey and Parker, 2020).

Another mentor highlighted that mentoring could provide a key development opportunity for young adults desiring to grow in their faith and in leadership. They noted how some of the traditional pathways into Christian discipleship and leadership, such as camping programs, had declined over the recent decades making it harder for

young adults to be real, to get a chance to experience leadership and experience new contexts where they can grow.

Program-based Mentoring Evaluation

All interviewees and participants had been involved in formal programs that also required mentoring outside such programs. The strengths and weakness of such programs were considered and evaluated with both groups offering a range of insights.

The interviewees noted that programs with compulsory mentoring get young adults motivated for mentoring because it is a requirement of the program. Programs were seen by one interviewee as a strong fit for today's young adults who are used to participating in programs.

The structure of mentoring within a larger course has meant that the mentoring is then taken more seriously than otherwise might be the case. An interviewee felt that having the set time frame also meant that it was easier to commit to mentoring because there was a clearly defined time expectation.

Participants in the focus group identified that mentoring became more intentional, goal oriented and positive because of the higher level of accountability in program-based mentoring. The chance to get advice from mentors through regular meetings with a role model and do comprehensive evaluations of their development were very positive elements of program-based mentoring.

On the other hand, interviewees indicated that running formal mentoring programs in the local church context, where young adults were forced into mentoring matches that did not have healthy rapport, led to ineffective and unsustainable mentoring relationships. Where programs had been implemented in churches the momentum was lost after two to three months. This could be due to the lack of rapport between mentors and mentorees that resulted from lack of understanding about the mentoring process, types of mentoring that are effective and ways to find a good mentoring match. Often participants struggled to find suitable mentors among they connected with who could facilitate the transformative mentoring process. The relational connection is a key quality of mentoring because vulnerable sharing by both parties is required for mentoring to have a positive influence on young adults.

Several interviewees were cautious of using curriculum in mentoring programs and one felt suspicious of how effective curriculum-based mentoring would be for young adults. Adaptability was described as essential to focus on the current work of God in the individual. The ability to tailor each mentoring session to the individual's circumstances was described by several interviewees as a 'must have' in their approach to mentoring, which they didn't feel would align with a mentoring curriculum.

Young adults acknowledged they sometimes felt uncomfortable being forced to participate in mentoring. They particularly noted the need for the mentor to be willing, passionate and enthusiastic. They were concerned, and often emotionally withdrew, when a mentor was just focussed on making up the required hours needed in a training or leadership development program.

The risk of being partnered with a mentor that didn't align with the mentoree, in terms of values, hobbies, passions and gifts was considered a negative of mentoring in programs. Having to cover rigid content, particularly with someone that they found hard to connect with, was also seen as a negative element.

The lack of clarity around mentoring program goals, processes, expectations and outcomes was identified as a key issue in the focus group, and one participant admitted that due to this confusion they had nearly completed their whole course before they started to appreciate the mentoring they were receiving.

Program-based mentoring can be used very well to facilitate and initiate a mentoring relationship for young adults (Campolongo, 69). The interviewees' reservations about curriculum-based programs were somewhat serious and the forcing of mentoring relationships as a requirement of course or program were found to have both a positive and a negative element.

From this research, a key observation is that programs with clear expectations and quality training that facilitate adaptive styles of mentoring which can be tailored to the individual's needs are most likely to be successful for young adults.

Four Factors for Mentoring Efficacy

The research revealed four key factors that determine how effective the relationship will be at producing the objectives of mentoring: frequency, formality, length and the

number of mentorees in a mentoring relationship. The presence or absence of these factors can significantly alter the experience and either enhance or hinder the processes that guide and support mentorees towards maturity.

The range of mentoring experiences that come under the umbrella term of mentoring have been classified by these four key factors during the analysis phase to produce eight segments or types of mentoring. Colloquial labels describing each segment have been developed for ease of discussion in exploring the unique strengths of each mentoring type of relationship.

Frequency Vs Formality

Low frequency to high frequency	<p>Faithful Friends: Willing and sustained support that is generous but unstructured.</p>	<p>Regular Realists: Intentional and regular guidance that maintains strong connection through structured accountability.</p>
	<p>Casual Connectors: Special but sporadic nurturing that provides a short burst of intimacy, insight and understanding.</p>	<p>Stable Saints: Infrequent yet all-encompassing sessions cover relationships, self-regulation and ministry convergence.</p>
	Low formality to high formality	

Table descriptions: frequency vs formality

The above table highlights the strengths of types of mentoring based on their frequency and formality and the words describe the relationship between the mentor and the mentoree. frequency refers to how often participants connect. Low frequency often meant quarterly to yearly. High frequency often referred to monthly, even up to weekly for one participant.

Formality refers to the degree of structure in the relationship, which may even include written contracts that outline the mentoring objectives, approach and content that would be covered. Low formality meant people had not explicitly defined the objectives or content that would be covered and was more common for peer mentoring or family relationships with mentor-type figures. Highly formalised mentoring relationships were often more program or training-based among young adult participants. Several interviewees have private practices offering highly formal mentoring to Christian leaders, missionaries or disciples that are motivated to seek mentoring.

Size of group vs Length of relationship

One on one to a small group size	<p>Temporary Tribes: A shared experience of vulnerability and temporary community often experienced through camps or courses.</p>	<p>Community of Comrades: A strong team of unique individuals is created on shared values and is strengthened by years of authentic fellowship.</p>
	<p>Brief Barnabas: Short but significant friendships that become transformative quickly, yet finish fast.</p>	<p>Legacy Leader: Lifelong influencers build autonomy and accountability into seasoned believers' lives.</p>

Short term relationship to long term relationship

Table description: number of mentorees vs length of relationship

The above table explores the type of mentoring by comparing the number of mentorees and the length of the mentoring relationship. The descriptions highlight the influence, experience and environment the mentor creates in the mentoring relationship for the mentoree.

The group size in mentoring relationships can vary from one-on-one right up to group mentoring experiences with eight to ten mentorees in programs or courses that utilise group mentoring. One on one mentoring was the most commonly described approach, but opportunity exists to develop group mentoring for young adults.

The length of the relationship between mentor and mentoree varies from several sessions of a few months right through to long term mentoring relationships that last longer than a decade. The labels defined above were not used in the focus group or interviews as they were developed through the data analysis stage.

Although participants indicated they prefer a variety of mentoring types, the majority preferred the *Regular Realist* mentoring type. They indicated that frequency and accountability were key qualities of an intentional mentoring relationship that led to the best experience which helped them get the most out of mentoring. A few liked the *Casual Connector* and some participants had had positive experiences of *Faithful Friends* and *Casual Connectors*, but this was preferred by only one participant.

The experience of a few participants with peer mentoring in a *Temporary Tribe* and *Community of Comrades* model was very good and enjoyed by those who had been involved in such groups. Several who had not experienced group mentoring noted that such a communal environment was desirable. The *Community of Comrades* was identified as a key type of mentoring to promote that is resource-efficient for the mentor and socially rich for participants. One experienced trainer runs a 'quad' with four older participants outside the young adult age bracket and noted that group mentoring is having a very positive impact on the participants due to the authentic sharing and deep friendships occurring in the group. Rymarz suggests that such groups can be helpful for young adults to process their religious questions and various trials. (Rymarz, 2009, 254)

Most interviewees described the frequent, formal mentoring labelled *Regular Realist* or *Stable Saints* as their preferred type of mentoring. They expected that young adults would not often desire this type of mentoring initially, but several interviewees acknowledged that they steer their mentorees towards it because they find it is the most effective type of mentoring. However, some interviewees preferred a more informal approach with young adults like the *Casual Connector* or *Faithful Friend*. The interviewees that preferred more informal approaches were often younger and had mentored fewer people, however they did have more current experience with mentoring young adults.

Frequency was discussed with interviewees who preferred monthly or six-weekly sessions with young adult mentorees. The factors that determined how often the mentoring occurred were the mentorees' reasons for seeking mentoring and their

ability to self-regulate. When a mentoree was motivated by a major decision, a life crisis or if they felt out of their depth, then one mentor indicated they would usually meet more frequently with their young adult mentoree to assist during this opportune time.

Many interviewees revealed that, even when young adults ask for mentoring due to a crisis or major decision, they still don't know what they are looking for or what would be the best process. A *Faithful Friend*, or *Casual Connector* would be helpful as a short-term strategy on some occasions but the overwhelming majority of young adults and interviewees felt that formal, frequent mentoring that is encouraging longer-term mentoring relationships should be encouraged. The *Regular Realist* with a *Community of Comrades* or *Legacy Leader* will be the most effective type of mentoring that helps develop and grow young adults.

Almost all participants in the research felt strongly that short term approaches like the *Brief Buddy* were not effective in helping a mentoree grow and reach their full development. This highlights the confusion around mentoring as a process and the lack of understanding about what types of mentoring are suitable for different occasions and most effective overall for young adults. One interviewee was visibly moved when describing the joy of mentoring a young boy aged 12 right through until the age of 24.

The *Legacy Leader* approach of long-term mentoring should be further promoted and celebrated to create awareness of the impact this has for the mentoree and the mentor, according to participants and interviewees.

The use of group mentoring was also discussed positively by several interviewees. Group mentoring where the interviewee had three or four mentorees in a 'quad' was an effective use of time for the mentor. More importantly, though, it had a greater sense of community and social benefit than just one-on-one mentoring. These function as a form of "plausibility structures" (Rymarz, 2009, 251) to legitimise the spiritual journeys of the young adults. *Community Comrades* should also be recommended and further explored by experienced mentors according to many of the interviewees? It is a resource efficient approach for the mentor that is socially rich for all participants. Group mentoring would be better suited for mentors that have experience mentoring at least several individuals before taking the initiative to gather mentorees together in a group mentoring relationship.

Suggestions for improvement

Use Clearly Defined Terms to Explain the Mentoring Process

There is an urgent need to elevate the level of discussion about mentoring in churches and in programs and courses that have a mentoring component. The process of mentoring needs to be demystified through succinct explanations of the processes, preferred types and descriptions of the types of mentoring that have the most impact on young adults. Creative labels like *Regular Realist* and *Community of Comrades* could help to give insight and understanding to the mentoring processes.

It would be very beneficial to help prospective mentors and mentorees in churches new to mentoring to understand what is involved in mentoring before commencing a new relationship. They would need to understand the commitment required and gain clear insights into how the process of mentoring works and what each party is responsible for in the mentoring relationship.

Mentoring Resources Must Provide Clarity

There is an opportunity to develop mentoring resources that clarify the mentoring process for mentoring young adults. Resources could help describe the structure and support provided through mentoring, help people find mentoring matches that work and identify the types of mentoring that are most beneficial and satisfying. Tools for evaluating the impact of mentoring could assist in the assessment of the effectiveness of mentoring and provide feedback to further increase the efficacy of mentoring.

Resources on mentoring for young adults could include short videos or articles to explain expectations, roles, commitments, content, frequency, goals, qualities to maximise effectiveness, evaluation and ways to wrap up a mentoring relationship.

At the start of courses that use mentoring, short videos or articles outlining each of these stages could be beneficial for both mentors and mentorees. The videos would help both parties to see and understand the key descriptions that outline what mentoring entails. Then videos and resources could be refined in an ongoing way to continue to promote awareness of mentoring and address key areas of training such as understanding psychological maturation and spirituality development processes (Berinšterová, 13) for young adults. For less formal mentoring, these resources could still serve as useful tools.

Promote the Benefits of Christian Mentoring

Key messaging needs to champion the cause of mentoring in the local church and in Christian organisations. Mallison (1998, 171) suggested a range of helpful practical ways which would communicate how mentoring is “enriching the church.” The benefits of mentoring could be promoted to motivate and recruit more mentors to the movement of raising up the next generation of Christian believers. Interviewees felt that it was important for prospective mentors to recognise their wealth of life experience, wisdom and knowledge that could be used to support young adults. Then they would realise that this was far more important to the younger generations than their limited understanding of social media and the latest trends in technology. Further advocacy for mentoring in professional development in ministry or Christian business environments could further increase the take up of mentoring by young adults. Similarly, the value of supporting ongoing discipleship through mentoring needs to be strategically incorporated into church culture, leadership and general praxis.

Develop Best Practices for Finding a Mentoring Match

One example of how to improve the match of mentors and mentorees was provided from a mentor. Rather than waiting endlessly for a young adult to initiate a relationship, a potential mentor could ask to meet for coffee to discuss what is happening in their lives. If that works well, then that initial discussion can then lead to a more regular mentoring relationship. Both mentors and mentorees could utilise this approach to finding a good mentoring match.

Deploy Volunteer Mentors in the Church Context

Churches have prospective talent pools of older mature believers, and often have fewer younger generations that may need mentoring. Training mentors and creating a culture of mentoring in churches is an imperative. Lanker (2010) explains that mentoring is a logical consequence of Churches seeing themselves as a family, particular in light of Paul’s instructions in Titus 2:1-8. However, Lewis (2011, 3) wisely warns against mentors having a position of authority over a the mentoree, which should restrict some options for mentors within a congregation. Positive examples of mentoring by volunteers could be shared in a way that create awareness and invoke passion for mentoring among members, rather than just expecting busy ministers to mentor young adults.

Prioritise Relationship over Performance

Interviewees strongly felt that the church has an opportunity to cause a revolution by placing significant emphasis on mentoring as an element of becoming a disciple-making movement. One interviewee felt the church needed to do less in order to do more mentoring of young adults.

The interviewee felt that giving young adults the space to spiritually form was important, rather than them being overburdened during their formative years. Instead of growth becoming stunted or mutated under a performance dominated culture they felt that mentoring in a more nurturing, uplifting church would be a significant improvement.

The shift from viewing young adults as hired hands, to supporting their Christian growth through relational emphasis would be highly valued by young adults. Mentors need to facilitate the mentoree's deeper journey with God, discern their identity (Brailey and Parker, 2020) and strengthen their character growth to guide the young adult towards a lifetime of ministry from a place of maturity and inner security in God.

Prioritise the Mentoree and Build Trust

Mentors need to take initiative and reach out to invite potential mentorees into the mentoring process. They need to build trust early and occasionally spend the relational credit earned slowly, by correcting or challenging the mentoree. Mallison (1998, 137) recognised that "mentoring is for those who are able and prepared to give it the time and effort it requires." Mentors will need to show patience through some slow growth stages but keep mentorees accountable to goals and a high standard of living. They need to listen graciously in a non-judgemental manner and mentor with passion, prioritising the mentoring relationship and keeping a vision of what it can achieve.

Offer Accountability and Vulnerability to Mentorees

Young adults suggested mentors provide them with a regular 'reality check'. Despite not liking accountability and the tension of conflict, participants acknowledged their need for accountability, encouragement and challenge by someone living with integrity and passion. They want honesty from the mentor. For example, they even want to know when the mentor is not feeling God at work in their life. They desire

deep listening that empathises and is gracious with their sins yet is focused on God's work in their lives. They are particularly interested in identifying growth opportunities. Participants largely prefer frequent and formal mentoring that includes prayer support and quality conversations. They also want to do activities with mentors rather than just sitting and talking together.

Experienced Mentors Can Try Group Mentoring

Mentors could consider using group mentoring for young adults like the 'quad' idea mentioned by one experienced trainer. Group mentoring could be more time efficient and require fewer mentors, with the additional benefit of building greater community and commitment (Rymarz, 2009, 255) among participants. The influence could be greater through group mentoring but the risk is also greater. Mentorees may perceive this as a lower level of attention and intentionality and be less vulnerable than with only two people present. However, done well, for those open to this approach, the vulnerability, wisdom and attention of others can help each mentoree to potentially thrive in this environment. This approach should only be attempted after mentors have mentored young adults individually.

Approach Initiating New Mentoring Programs Cautiously

While younger generations may be more program-oriented than ever, starting new mentoring programs should be cautiously considered as the culture required for a successful program is vital. The values, actions and language of a mentoring culture in a church, course or context would be more important to promote than just trying to launch a new program. All too often Christian mentoring programs are established without any clear training or orientation (Yoder, 100). A clearly described program of Christian mentoring that links suitably trained mentors who prioritise, love and value young adults could be commenced as a small pilot. The impact of mentoring, however, does not need to be limited to a program, but needs to be unlocked as a culture in the church and ignited across all the generations to support the development of young adults as Christians.

Conclusion

What, then, does examining the experiences of people on both sides of the mentoring relationship reveal? What are the implications for contemporary ministry? Firstly, these

nurturing, intentional relationships seem to have a positive impact on Christian young adults in Australia, helping them deepen their intimacy with God, discern their God-given identity, and develop Christ-like character.

Secondly, a challenge in mentoring programs was the difficulty of finding a good mentoring match. Interviewees suggested the best practice is to start as a *Casual Connector* and then after a few sessions, shift to *Regular Realist* if both parties want to progress the mentoring relationship. The mentor and the mentoree can both initiate a mentoring relationship and both mentor and mentoree should be encouraged to reach out to start a new mentoring relationship. Some interviewees suggested that the mentor, as the 'mature' one of the relationship, should take the initiative to reach out to the mentoree. However, pragmatically, more mentoring relationships will commence if both parties are seeking to initiate relationships. Crucially, the trial period as *Casual Connectors* should help to avoid dysfunctional mentoring relationships.

Thirdly, the frequent, formal type of mentoring described as *Regular Realists* was the most preferred type of mentoring and seen as the most beneficial by both mentors and young adults alike. The importance of intentional investment into the young adult through regular sessions was emphasised by young adults and led to the most satisfying mentoring relationships for them. Mentoring that is patient, yet holds them accountable, will be the most beneficial through formalised and frequent mentoring sessions. Young adults recognised that this mentoring was beneficial in helping them deepen their love for God, understand their identity and work on their character.

Fourthly, training and resources are crucial. Although passion and enthusiasm are beneficial, without clarification of expectations, patience for the long journey of relationship, awareness of the various styles of mentoring and the development of appropriate skills, well-meaning mentors may do more harm than good. Similarly, clear resources need to outline the expectations involved in different types of mentoring, to highlight the *Regular Realist* and *Community Comrades* as the most beneficial and suitable types of mentoring for young adults. There is an opportunity to showcase the *Legacy Leader*, *Community of Comrades* and *Regular Realist* through positive stories of mentoring. These resources would celebrate the most effective types of mentoring and attract young adults and potential mentors to the type of mentoring that will most benefit their spiritual formation.

Mentoring provides the support, challenge and accountability young adults need to develop their faith, identity and character through a regular connection with a more mature believer. Mentoring brings a sense of hope to the Australian church because it demonstrates an effective approach to developing young believers and this research has provided clear pathways, strategic insights and key recommendations to increase the number of mentoring relationships between Christian young adults and mature believers. Finally, although this research has been focused on young adult Christian mentoring, many of the conclusions would remain pertinent to mentoring people of other ages and faith backgrounds.

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