

A COMMITMENT TO EQUIPPING

Learn from one another

Disciple-making congregations are communities where people learn from one another. Colossians 3:16 admonishes those who make up the whole Church to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom.” This chapter paints a portrait of churches filled with a spirit of joy and love, compassion and gentleness, and a sense of mutuality or partnership in the Spirit.

In a true community, people are not threatened by what others know and think. They are willing to hear different opinions and interpretations of Scripture and ideas about what God wants for us all. They respect and trust one another and eagerly teach and learn from one another, even admonishing one another as it seems appropriate.

Disciple-making congregations, experienced as this kind of community, are not hierarchical. Their members do not expect someone at the top to tell them what to do, nor do they wait for a pastor or leader to teach them. Rather, disciples study and pray, read and discuss, and listen together as the Spirit guides them into all truth (*John 16:13*).

Teach others what you know

Not everyone is at the same place, however, in his or her knowledge of Scripture, Christian maturity, or experience in ministry. Teaching others what we have learned from our years of study, experience or service to God and with others is important to the life of every congregation. Pastors and those who are formally trained are not the only ones with this responsibility or with valuable experience. Indeed some pastors and church leaders may be young and new to ministry and need to learn from experienced, mature disciples in the church.



Besides “teaching and admonishing” from “the word of Christ,” we have much more to learn from one another. All of us have our own specific knowledge, experience, and maturity in different areas of the church’s ministry. If we want to begin new groups, classes, or other forms of ministry, we will need effective new leaders. Disciple-making congregations develop new leaders through mentoring, coaching, and training people for the different ministries.

Mentors are generally more experienced than the persons with whom they work. A mentoring relationship often lasts longer than a coaching or training relationship. Training through a coaching relationship is generally short-term and usually focuses on encouragement and guidance of someone who wants to gain skills and supervised experience for specific ministries, such as teaching Sunday school, youth leadership or serving as a deacon or trustee. For example, a coach may be a small group leader who has a new leader serving along with him or her in an apprentice/assistant role.



Train every leader

Training, coaching, and mentoring all have a place in a disciple-making congregation. The desires and needs of the person who is learning will help determine the necessary level or type of preparation. Whichever model is used, the preparation for full leadership is vital. Far too often in our churches, we ask people to accept positions of responsibility for which they are not prepared. We sometimes even tap new Christians who have little knowledge or experience of the Christian life, let alone the spiritual maturity needed for leadership. Some respond enthusiastically without knowing what is required, while others accept out of a sense of duty or commitment, but with no sense of giftedness or calling for that particular work. In situations such as these, people often become discouraged, are ineffective or have a negative effect on others.

People engaged in ministry, who have the knowledge, experience, and maturity for the work they’re doing also need continuing education. Pastors and ministerial leaders

often do not have the time or the money to participate in desired continuing education experiences.

F O C U S
How can your church provide continuing education for all its leaders?

Every congregation who is serious about making disciples and being a missional church needs to budget for annual training, coaching, or mentoring for ministerial staff or find other ways to support their efforts to be the lifelong learners all leaders need to be. Along with funds, ministerial staff need the permission and encouragement of the congregation to take the time away from the needs of the church and community to continue their education.

Most churches have yet to discover the importance of also providing continuing education opportunities for members who have ongoing leadership and ministry responsibilities. While much leader preparation is done through training, coaching, and mentoring within the congregation, as described above, opportunities for training seminars, workshops, and retreats outside the congregation are available and desirable. Disciple-making congregations are those who find ways to help their members gain the needed knowledge from outside training events – and who are, in turn, enriched by that commitment.

Prepare the next generation

Moses urged the people to teach the next generation about God and faith. The Psalms often speak of the importance of telling the next generation all that God had done and spoken in the past. The apostle Paul mentored the younger Timothy and then urged him to find other leaders to mentor so they could, in turn, teach other people in the churches. Preparing the next generation for discipleship and leadership in the church is an ongoing responsibility.

How many churches are “graying,” with a high percentage of active members already in their retirement years? How many churches seldom have children or teens in their worship services, combine children’s classes in order to have an educational program or have no youth group at all? How many churches wonder where all the young adults have gone?

The polls and research indicate that teens and young adults have a high interest in spirituality, yet limited interest in organized religion. We so often see people leave the church in their teen years and return (if at all), only when they have children of their own. Why is this? Is it because church is not exciting or fun? Is it because people just aren’t interested in God and faith at that age? Or is it, perhaps, because we have yet to learn how to effectively disciple our children and youth? “Equipping disciples” is not just for adults. Training, coaching, and mentoring for ministry and leadership begins with children and youth at a level that matches their readiness. Every generation has the responsibility to nurture in their children and teens the knowledge, experience, and maturity needed to move into adulthood as committed disciples and active church members.



UN COMPROMISO PARA CAPACITAR

El ministerio demanda excelencia. Los dones y el llamado requieren de destrezas y conocimiento para el ministerio fiel y efectivo. Una iglesia discipuladora moviliza sus recursos para asegurarse de que la preparación ocurre. La iglesia apoya y anima a todas las personas que desean prepararse. Provee oportunidades para el aprendizaje de la fe, así como el desarrollo de destrezas necesarias para el ministerio tanto a través de la iglesia como en cualquier otro lugar.

ENFOCAR
¿Cómo podemos desarrollar nuevo liderazgo para la congregación?

Todo discípulo(a) debe conocer a la persona que sigue—su vida y enseñanzas, su papel en la misión de Dios, la comisión para aquellos(as) que le siguen. Cada discípulo(a) necesita adiestramiento en estudios bíblicos, disciplinas espirituales, al trabajar con otras personas o al compartir la fe. La iglesia provee entrenamiento en estas áreas generales de manera que todos(as) desarrollan continuamente sus destrezas y conocimiento en esta búsqueda de toda una vida que a la misma vez la iglesia apoya y anima.

Un ministerio específico requiere de entrenamiento y conocimiento específicos. Trabajar con jóvenes de alto

riesgo requiere de ciertos conocimientos y destrezas; construir casas con Hábitat para la Humanidad requiere de otros. Muchas veces asumimos que las personas que tienen algún interés, tienen las habilidades para ello. Otras veces les dejamos por su propia cuenta para que busquen preparación. La iglesia discipuladora se responsabiliza de equipar a sus miembros para el ministerio.

ENFOCAR
¿Cómo su iglesia puede proporcionar educación continuada a todos sus líderes?

Con esto en mente, la manera en que se usa el presupuesto para la educación continuada toma otro rumbo. El cuerpo pastoral es el que a veces tiene la prioridad en el uso de estos fondos. Los fondos disponibles para el laicado a veces son dirigidos a conferencias relacionadas con la iglesia donde los participantes aprenden destrezas necesarias para que el trabajo de la iglesia sea más efectivo. En la iglesia discipuladora, los fondos para la educación continuada para laicos, los equipa para el ministerio que han recibido de Dios. La congregación activamente busca educación y destrezas de todas partes —una conferencia en otra iglesia o un curso en una universidad o seminario.

