Northern Synod

TASK TEAM YOUTH: INFORMAL MENTORSHIP

Report

1. Assignment

The task team was instructed to investigate the possible implementation of *informal mentorship*.

2. Task team

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3. Execution

The task team met regularly (in person and online) to discuss the concept of *informal mentorship*. Several online sources were consulted, and there were conversations with other youth leaders. From our conversations it became clear that *informal mentorship* has merit but is a concept that cannot be easily applied in congregations. Below are a few of the task team's thoughts on how we as the church can think about *informal mentorship*, plus a few practical examples of how it can be applied in a congregation.

Informal mentorship is a broad concept with several possible meanings. It generally means that a relationship can develop in an informal manner between a mentor and a mentee. This process is an organic one and is not formally created. What is the difference between formal and informal mentorship?

Formal mentorship has an intentional focus on mentorship, e.g. young people who converse once a month with a mentor. The purpose of the conversation is mentorship, and both parties are aware of it. In informal mentorship the mentor shares valuable life skills with the mentee (in this case the teenager). It is a controlled process with certain outcomes. Catechesis or teen small groups are

examples of this. The catechist can regularly meet on a one-to-one basis with each teenager.

Informal mentorship develops organically and is therefore difficult to apply practically in a church environment. We should rather speak of intentional informal mentorship, which creates opportunities for mentorship to develop informally. An example of this would be that, except for the catechist or small group leader, another person is available to focus on building relationships. The purpose is not Bible knowledge and spiritual guidance but rather conversations about young people's life questions. Informal mentorship does not have structured or purposeful discussions in mind. It aims for an open outcome; in other words, it is about the needs of the mentee. There are therefore no structured questions or formulated answers.

Intentional informal mentorship creates an opportunity for young people to realise that there are people who care about them and support them in the different phases of their lives. Young people are therefore not simply left to their own devices when handling life from day to day. An informal mentor is therefore someone who accompanies the young person on his/her journey, to help to find direction and to share experiences. This type of relationship is of incalculable worth.

Intentional informal mentorship also has the potential to create an intergenerational church environment where different generations mentor one another.

Ideas on informal mentorship in congregations

We realise that there are different DR Churches, each with its own context. The examples below are therefore not applicable to every congregation. The idea is for each congregation to evaluate these examples and to choose which is doable in its own context. The examples may also stimulate new ideas and can be used as guidelines.

1. Games evenings

   Once a month a games evening can be held where, for instance, an adult plays a card game with a group of young people. On this occasion the adult can conduct informal conversations with the young people. The secret to this is that the young people should not feel as if they are being officially monitored or questioned, but that they are experiencing open and honest communication.

2. Hiking tours

   The confession class or any other teen group in the congregation can go on a hiking tour, which creates an ideal opportunity to chat informally with young people. Think of the wonderful conversations around a campfire at night and the conversations that develop *en route*. What a wonderful opportunity to connect with young people and mentor them in this way.

3. Practical opportunities

   These are done together with existent expertise in the congregation. Let the young people, for example, build containers from wood for their cell phones on their bedside tables. Invite them to bring white cloth shoes to church to paint patterns on them. All these are opportunities to connect. Discussion questions can enrich such opportunities even more. For instance, use the opportunity to ask them what their wooden containers, or the painted patterns on their shoes, symbolise in terms of their relationship with God.

4. Incubation

   Start a programme in which young people in the congregation are taught the basic skills of life by older members who have specific gifts or trade skills. Welding, woodwork, knitting, artwork, how to use power tools. These opportunities create an environment for informal mentorships to develop organically.

5. Environmental involvement

Join initiatives where the environment is being cleaned up, then chat informally with a young person and get to know him/her.

6. “Pop-ups”

Do ‘pop-ups’ where young people gather in creative spaces to chat (restaurants, coffee shops, etc.). A good way to work with young people is to talk about “secret kitchens”. The purpose is to make young people eager to eat together and then to chat about life and the Lord.

7. Teams

Establish informal youth mentor teams that attend young people’s sports rallies, meetings, functions, and cultural events. When the young people see them at these functions, it creates conversation points that can later develop into informal mentorships.

Therefore, think creatively, outside the box, and be flexible. Think of opportunities inside and outside the church where youth mentors can connect informally with young people. Remember that informal mentorship is non-confrontational, honest, and sincere, and in the main develops organically.

4. Closing word

After several conversations with youth leaders in congregations, it has become clear that youth ministries are confronted with several challenges after the Covid pandemic. It is important for youth leaders and congregations to think together about the needs of congregations regarding youth ministry after Covid. *Informal mentorship* is a part of wider discussions and a greater challenge.

The task team therefore judges that a new task team must be created to further investigate the abovementioned needs regarding youth ministry after Covid.