Northern Synod

TASK TEAM MENTORSHIP 2

Report

1. Assignment

In the previous SSC term (2016-2022) the task team instructed to organise mentorate reported that mentorate is important but should not be organised. It is a spontaneous process where people become aware for themselves which people they find an affinity with. Each person then approaches the person in question to ask him/her to act as mentor.

The SSC for this term judged that it would be good to test the issue again and therefore phrased the instruction as follows: **To investigate the need for a task team for mentorate.**

At the SSC meeting of 13 November 2024, the task team gave feedback regarding on the instruction above. At the SSC meeting 12 March 2025 there was a request that the task team should test anew the opinion of the rural areas.

2. Task team leader and discussion partners

Fay van Eeden (task team leader), Peet Venter, Louis Pretorius, Bernard van Wyk, Jan Pretorius, Nicky Hattingh, Tjaart Meyer, Ewald Schmidt and Riaan Odendaal.

3. Execution of the assignment

The discussion partners, as said above, were asked to respond to the same two questions that were asked in the first round:

1. The Northern Synod believes that mentors can play an important role in minister's lives. The Synod also thinks that mentorship cannot be organised, but that ministers should choose for themselves the mentors with whom theyfeel an affinity. What is your opinion on this?
2. In what way do you think the Synod can play a role in this matter, or is it something that the presbyteries should handle?

For the sake of transparency, the respondents' answers are quoted verbatim here:

My experience of the time on the task team for mentorship with Derick was that mentors indeed play an important role, but that ministers want to determine for themselves who their mentors should be and do not want mentors appointed to them. This might work well in an urban context because there are a reasonable number of ministers who are available and can act as mentors, but not so in the rural areas because it is, after all, an important matter, I think it can happen through the presbytery's task team for care of ministers. They could, for instance:

a. Make a list of available (trained?)mentors —including those available in the city.
b. Ministers choose for themselves —if they want to drive far, that is their decision.
c. During the annual session of the presbytery the task team for care of ministers can briefly state that ministers have access, ad can make use of it or not.
d. Ministers can be regularly motivated by the task team to have a mentor.
e. If there is a minister somewhere who needs support, the task team can make sure that a mentor is available, that a good mentor-mentee relationship is establish, and that it is a good 'match'.
f. The confidential nature of the mentoring relationship requires that this is the "most" that can be done.

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FINDING A MENTOR FOR YOURSELF. I agree. The only problem is whether this will then really happen? The other argument: Birds of a feather … Which can be advantageous or harmful. Would it not also be important for someone to be mentored by someone outside their comfort zone, and so receive mentorship from another perspective? But I must confess, my

colleague and I are definitely mentors for one another and we think the same, AND my experience is unbelievably positive. I am thinking about the bigger picture, though. Another question: How does one allocate a mentor? In other words, does someone in the first five years of ministry need a mentor on another level than one who has been in the ministry for much longer? Ministers early in their ministry are perhaps not inclined to go look for mentors? In my own presbytery I found much value in mentorship (from someone whom I needed in my life at that stage) BUT I could see how mentorship could have made a difference to some of my colleagues then, in their experience of their congregational context; yet unfortunately they were not open to the idea. I think therefore that different phases of the ministry require different types of mentorship.

ROLE OF THE SYNOD: I think the past teaches us that the majority of presbyteries do not facilitate this thing correctly. If the synod wants to consider another possibility rather than finding a mentor by oneself, I think it should begin with personal conversations in every presbytery, training for mentorate, and allocating available mentors within specific age groups with the request to new ministers to advise it strongly.

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Mentors have an important place to fill. I do see the need for a mentor, but I am afraid it will be a problem in practice.

I foresee that the synod is going to struggle to organise it, but it will not happen either if ministers are left alone to organise it for themselves. So, I do not know how mentorships can/will work.

It may be possible to do mentoring at the synod's annual mini-breakaway events, and then minister and mentor can take it further, if necessary, until the next year's event. In the context of the presbytery it will not easily function here in the rural region, and I suspect not in urban areas either, due to too much church politics.

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I think ministers should first indicate whether they are available to mentor other ministers. Then names can be made available and ministers can make their choice. I think both the synod and the presbytery must be involved here.

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I agree that ministers should have mentors. I do think, however, that mentorship is a very difficult subject, because although the majority of ministers realise how important it is, it is not really something that can be organised or enforced. It is something that has to develop organically. .

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I think the Synod can play a role in the matter by encouraging ministers to get mentors there where they serve in different contexts. Perhaps the synod can explain about the value of mentors in ministers' lives. Just to make them aware that mentors are important. .

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I agree that mentorship should happen organically. My feeling is that mentorship belongs with the presbyteries. .

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Do not leave the synod out of it completely. The Synod is always welcome to pass on thoughts or ideas. Or perhaps it can simply be a sounding board if a mentor gets a bit stuck. .

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I prefer to find a mentor for myself depending on my needs at a given stage. I agree with the synod's view. . .

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4. Recommendations (as before)

4.1 The Northern Synod confirms the important role that mentorship can play in the development, guidance, and support of ministers.

4.2 The Synod encourages ministers to find mentors for themselves. Minister breakaways and synod sessions can be used to affirm the value of mentorship

4.3 The Synod encourages presbyteries to utilise visitation and other presbyterial events to conduct conversations about the importance of mentorship.

4.4 The Synod reminds church councils and ERCs to see to the ministers' wellbeing and care.