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How can Adventist churches and schools cooperate to induct young people into the life of the church? Shenandoah Valley Academy, in conjunction with the nearby New Market Seventh-day Adventist Church in Virginia, has implemented an innovative new program to mentor young people and develop their leadership gifts, thereby integrating them into church fellowship.

Their goals are as follows:

1. To bond the youth to the church.
2. To equip and involve youth actively in church life.
3. To equip church officers to be youth mentors.

Church officers were asked to volunteer as mentors. After receiving brief training, they were matched, by their spiritual gifts, with academy students. Mentors and students then worked together as buddies for nine weeks of the semester. The academy students received academic credit for the combined academic and practical components of their training.

How Did It Work?

Mentorship was an honors class. Only students who wanted to train for leadership signed

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One of the mentor-mentee pairs mentioned in the article, Edith Burkey (left) and Andrea Kuntaruph.

Hand in Hand

Partnership Program Mentors Students in Church Life

BY SALLY DILLON AND BECCA JACKSON

up. By not making it mandatory, we eliminated those who didn't really want to participate.

The first portion of the class was classroom-based. Students studied passages from 1st and 2nd Timothy on young people's leadership. They took a spiritual gifts analysis to identify their own areas of giftedness. Then they were matched with mentors from the church who had similar spiritual gifts.

Students were allowed two class periods per week to meet with their mentors. Scheduling varied, and most of the mentors were not able to meet during the school day. This gave students free time out of the classroom in exchange for personal time that they spent with their mentors.

Program Goals

The planners set out to pilot a youth internship mentorship program that could be adapted for use in any church throughout the world field. It does not have to be limited to churches attached to academies, though the young people would not then receive academic credit for the class. It could also be used to socialize new members, to give them an overview of ministry within the church, and to help them find their niche.

Program Objectives

1. Church officers need to know and understand their office and job description before they can adequately mentor students. If church officers do nothing, they don't teach the young people anything. This motivated many of our church officers to become more active and to look more closely at their job descriptions.

2. Church officers need to demonstrate appropriate attitudes, knowledge, and skills in order to serve as role models.

3. Church officers must socialize the students into the church structure. By the end of the program, the students were good friends not only with their mentors, but also with the mentors' social circle within the church and felt much more comfortable making friends across generational lines.

4. Church officers must function as educators, providing hands-on learning

experiences for the students.

5. Students will gain a broad overview of the church organization and identify their potential for church leadership.

Getting Started

The church threw a pizza party to kick off the mentorship program. At this time, the mentors were introduced to the students. They set times that were mutually convenient to get together, as well as goals for the types of ministry they would do.

The mentors explained the principles of mentoring to the students:

1. Each mentor would tell the student what he or she planned to do.

2. The mentor would demonstrate the skill and let the student watch.

3. The mentor would have the student participate in the activity as well as lead it.

Mentors and students worked together as buddies for nine weeks of the semester.

4. The mentor would always include a debriefing, when both the mentor and the student would evaluate what happened.

Kinds of Activities

Just as God asked Moses, "What is in your hand?" when He called him to ministry, so the mentors were challenged by this query. They included their students in whatever ministries

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Students celebrate success in the mentoring program with Pastor Rick Greve.

they were involved in at the time.

Some Examples

1. Jonathan participated with his mentor in giving Bible studies to several SVA students who were preparing for baptism. They also visited a person with terminal cancer in the hospital. Jonathan sat in on church board and school board meetings.

Highlights of his experience: "I learned how the church is organized and how its meetings work. And I was really inspired by the guy's positive attitude despite his situation."

2. Katherine was paired with another church member. After making craft items, she and her mentor visited shut-ins, had worship with them, and gave them the gifts.

"I was really blessed to see how happy it made them. And I learned to lead out in worship," Katherine said.

3. Andrea also was involved in visitation ministry. She and her mentor, Edith, visited and prayed with several shut-ins. In addition, her mentor shared her own personal testimony with Andrea and taught her how to share hers with others.

Andrea said, "What I enjoyed the most was praying with Edith, who opened up so much. It was neat being able to worship God so comfortably even though we were at such different levels in life."

4. Alice was also paired with an elder who was active in the visitation ministry. They contacted members in nursing homes and had worship with them. Alice also received lessons from her mentor in public speaking, music ministry, and sharing practical health tips with other people.

Alice said, "I really respected my mentor. She was so dedicated—always very positive—and really enjoyed life. I learned so much from her."

5. Becca was paired up with a disabled church member who was homebound at the time. After sitting in on a Sabbath school class for shut-ins taught on a CompuServe forum, Becca taught the class for the next four weeks. She was surprised at how many people logged on for the class. There was a core group of shut-ins, as well as insomniacs in Australia and New Zealand and homesick soldiers in Germany, Saudi Arabia, and other places. Physi-

The academy students received academic credit for the combined academic and practical components of their training.

cians and anesthesiologists on call at hospitals also logged on from doctors' lounges all over the country. It was a very active class.

Becca also participated in (a) a "Barnabas" ministry (exhortation and encouragement) by sending cards and notes of affirmation and appreciation to friends and fellow students who needed encouragement, as well as (b) a "Hur" ministry (praying for and affirming pastoral staff and office staff—remember Hur and Aaron holding up Moses'

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Mentoring students make a nursing home visit.

hands?), giving them positive feedback and encouragement. In addition, she learned to write and submit articles for publication in denominational journals, since her mentor was an author.

Becca said, “I learned so much—and the neat thing is, these are things I can still use. I have had two articles published since my mentorship experience, and I still send cards to people all the time. I was amazed at all the things we were able to do, even though my mentor was sick and stuck at home. What I really enjoyed the most about my mentorship experience was that we didn’t just work together. We also played together, prayed together, and worshiped together.

“I would come over on Sabbath mornings to teach Sabbath school class, and often I didn’t go back to the dorm until Saturday night. We had a really good time . . . It helps if mentors are willing to open up and share themselves and their life instead of just the work required for the class.”

Evaluation

Not all of our mentorship experiences were positive. There were problems matching up mentors’ and students’ schedules, and some mentors who volunteered for the program never actually met with a student.

To avoid these problems:

1. Screen mentors carefully. Make sure they have enough time (or are willing to make time).

2. Use mentors who are really committed to the program.

The first group of New Market students was mentored by volunteers. The next time, people were hand-picked from the group of volunteers, and only those with active mentorship experiences met with the second group of students.

In evaluating the program, both mentors and students wished they had had time for more activities. They also desired greater accountability. In the second mentorship group, this was stressed to the mentors. The objectives were rewritten to require students to meet at least twice a month with the mentors. Some mentors met more often with their students.

Other Results

1. All of the mentors and students who met and worked together became close friends.

2. The students widened their circles of friendship and acquaintances within the church. Even after the mentoring program was over, they stayed good friends with their mentors and the other people they had met.

3. All of the students developed greater self-confidence and felt more comfortable using their spiritual gifts.

4. All of the mentored students continued to engage in the activities in which they had participated during the mentorship program.

Both mentors and students considered the program a great success.

Setting up a Mentoring Program in Your School

1. Work with your local church pastor. Both the school and the church components are essential to a successful program.

2. Review 1st and 2nd Timothy with your students.

3. Help them identify their spiritual gifts.

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Mentees in the “Barnabas” ministry (commonly known as the “stamp lickers”).

Students . . . were matched with mentors from the church who had similar spiritual gifts.

4. Match them up with mentors.

We found the program met our goals:

- We equipped future leaders to become present leaders.
- We helped our young members understand how their spiritual gifts could be used in the church now.
- We introduced the students to church structure and helped them develop friendships and bonds across generational lines.
- We bonded the students to the church and to their mentors.

It's a great idea. Don't be afraid to try it! ☞

For more information, contact:

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Sally Dillon and Becca Jackson

are one of the mentee/mentor pairs mentioned in the article.

Becca was attending Shenandoah Valley Academy in New Market, Virginia, at that time. She is now part of the Lead Scholars Program

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Sally Dillon

at University of Central Florida. Becca was active in the SVA band, performing in the U.S.A., Spain, and Morocco, and the drama club at SVA, and directed the play Taming of the Shrew. Sally Dillon is a freelance writer who helped put together the mentorship program at SVA. She is a wife and mother of two teenage boys and their menagerie of parrots, cockatiels, parakeets, finches, and an iguana. Her latest book, The Great Controversy for Children, will soon be published by Pacific Press.

John Kloosterhuis, one of the mentees in the SVA program, practices his exhortation skills.

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Mentees learned that prayer is not preparation for the work—it is the work!