

Mentorship

The Universal Ministry

We do know that we are truly able to receive Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar...he told us so. We also know, through His own words, that there is another way. Our Blessed Saviour said to his disciples and to us, "Whoever receives one of the little children in My name, receives Me..." Mark 9: 37, Matthew 18: 5. There...you can't get much clearer than that! What does "receive" really mean? Webster's Dictionary says: to take possession. But consider some other possibilities. Possibly Jesus had in mind a broad range of actions that paint a picture of God's kindness, and that he wanted all of us to follow. So may we suggest that to receive is to accept, love, embrace, encourage, teach, inspire, nourish, comfort, console, protect, empower, forgive, praise, and occasionally correct and discipline.

Jesus did not say, "Receive only your own children," or "Receive only the children you like or choose." So we must believe that we are to receive ALL children...not ignoring or turning away any.

Our Lord also did not restrict his command to fathers, mothers, and other relatives...and He did not direct his command only to adults, teachers, clergy, or acolyte wardens. He was talking to every one of us.

When Jesus said, "children," He did not qualify their age, but did say "little." Indeed, we are all repeatedly called His children throughout Scripture. So couldn't He have been referring to all of mankind within our reach and influence? So shouldn't we all accept, love, embrace, encourage, teach,

inspire, nourish, comfort, protect, praise, forgive, elevate (and appropriately correct and discipline) everyone who could benefit from our charity, knowledge, and other attributes given to us by our Father in heaven?

If you thought that mentorship was about adults (usually someone other than yourself) controlling and otherwise exerting power over youngsters, you are wrong. Mentorship is:

(a) for each of us, (b) to share our love, skills, and knowledge (c) with all who could benefit (d) in any way possible.

Does this sound like an invitation to pass our responsibility off to someone else? To the contrary...it's a call from our Father to follow the way of Christ as the Mentor of all mentors.

Our Christian duties do not end at the church doors...that's where they begin. Being a mentor does not just mean teaching in the church school or being an acolyte trainer, or taking the parish youth group on a hike, although these might be valuable aspects. It also means being an example, a teacher, a helper, a resource for those who would grow with our help in the world. Mentorship is not just about helping out in church; it's about becoming an active part of our schools, hospitals, civic programs, support for the infirm and elderly, a helping hand to the homeless, a kind word for those in distress, an intercessor of people in need, a comforter to those in pain, and a supporter to all who do the same.

How do you begin mentoring?

1. Recognize the gifts that God has given you that you can share with others for their betterment. Ask yourself: are you artistic, organizational, interested in sports, camping and other outdoor activities, drama and acting out,

reading to others, crafts and practical skills like cooking or sewing, counseling to youngsters? Ask God to show you the talents, capabilities, and inclinations He has given you that can be applied to your role as a mentor. Ask your priest and your friends for advice and guidance.

2. Find or make room in your schedule and in your heart for those who could grow with your help. This might require you to give up something else in your life such as some of your television time, Saturday morning shopping, sleeping in, puttering around the house. You must be prepared to make a commitment that will be honored without fail. You've probably heard a child say, "But you said you'd take me to the ball game." or, "You promised you'd help me fix my wagon!" A mentor **MUST** keep his or her word to be available to youngsters at an appointed time, and to "be there" to support other mentors and youth workers when needed and expected. A broken promise or a failed commitment on your part does immeasurable damage to a youngster's ability to trust in and count on adults.

3. Ask those in authority what help they need, and tell them what you can do or teach. You might not see what needs to be done or how you can help from your own limited personal perspective. Your Clergy Youth Activities Leaders, or Director of Christian Education probably have a very broad scope of experience. They probably have lists of things they'd like to accomplish and specific areas where they need help that could draw upon your knowledge and skills. Say to them and God, "Speak to me...I'm listening."

4. Be an example to others by offering

yourself as God's instrument. Become a living oblation for His glory. Don't wait for the right time. It's already here. Don't wait to be invited...act now by offering yourself to God and mankind as His servant. Lead the way for others to follow as our Lord leads the way for all of us.

Do you remember when you were an adolescent how much easier it was to step onto the dance floor or to join the chorus when someone else had gone before you? Well, it's the same today, and other adults will tend to hold back until they see you "step up to the plate."

5. Be prepared to work in the shadows without recognition. Do not expect praise or ask for credit, but know that God will see your loving kindness to others. Mentoring is not about achieving a title, an award at the end of the year, or even the love and admiration of the youngsters (or adults) in your charge (although these elements certainly make us feel good and give us much energy to continue on). We should understand that what we do for others, we do for God...and that ought to be our only motivation as mentors.

6. Tell your Priest (or other leaders) **that you are anxious** to begin serving God as a mentor. Let your clergy, teachers, youth directors, volunteer organizations and public-service groups know what you think you are called to do, and ask for their advice and guidance. Doing God's work is not restricted to the confines of the church grounds or buildings or the church organization. After all, His Kingdom is everywhere, His sheep include those who have fallen or appear to be outside of His flock, and all are His children. The poor, hungry, grieving, naked, helpless, sick, and desperate are

more often found outside of the church than within. So look everywhere for opportunities to be His instrument.

7. Encourage others to give of themselves, once you have begun to fit into your commitment and mentorship role. Share with everyone your joy and sense of accomplishment in helping others grow "in wisdom and stature." Become an active advocate for the ministry of mentorship, and let them know that they are needed, called, and capable. When you hear someone say, "Oh, I'm not very good (at that, with kids, whatever)," let them know that God will show the way and give them strength, and that they will also grow as they gain experience. Tell them about your journey.

The greatest benefits may flow from and to a mentor when the interface is one-on-one or one-on-group. Each situation and mentoring opportunity is different. But start slow. Observe from the background or a support position to see closehand the activities and techniques of mentorship. Give yourself a chance to evaluate methods and styles that might work best for you. There are scores of small but very important roles that you can try on, which will be combined with others to make enormous differences in peoples lives.

Maybe you'll start by baking cookies or drying tears...but you must start. You can't wait for someone else to do it. Jesus didn't!

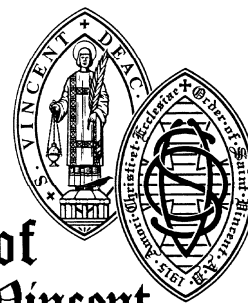


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