

## **A Mentoring Church Offers Students a Variety of Opportunities to Serve**

Creative mentoring offers students the opportunity to *see the world of ministry from a variety of angles and perspectives*. One of the great misconceptions about young adults is that they are unwilling or unable to help with the things that need to be done around the church; in ministry or anywhere else the opportunity arises. Granted they do not often appear to step up and volunteer, but the irony is that when asked, given an invitation and offered instruction of how to carry it out, they are usually more than willing to help.

Our assumptions and demeanor when we ask for help is that it will often lead to a standoff. We assume that they do not want to help and we are frustrated before we ask because our experience has been that a young person will walk by something that needs to be done and completely miss the opportunity. My experience is that if you offer a young adult the chance to learn something and be in relationship with you while it is being done, they are more than willing to help.

After dinner on Wednesday nights, when everyone is folding up chairs and the youth and students are standing around talking, invite them to help. Don't sound exasperated or roll your eyes. Just simply say, "would you mind helping to fold the chairs and put them over there?" Usually they will look startled that you spoke to them and occasionally they will move on rather than do it, but more times than not they will gladly help and feel included in what is going on. It doesn't take many weeks, before they will get up and start folding the chairs along with everyone else.

Students are like most of us, in that they will live up to our expectations of them. If we expect them to be unwilling to help, the average student will do just that. On the other hand, if included, instructed and empowered, most of them want to learn new things and be part of the ministries of the church. In fact that is how they become more than visitors.

Too often our ministry is "to" and "for" students and not "with" students. I was talking to a young person who is a new staff member at an NC church and she told me about her college years church experience. She said that she and a group of her friends attended a church close to her college for two and a half years. The preaching was good, the style of worship was comfortable and it was convenient to where they lived, but the church saw them as a group of students and not as individuals who made the effort to come to worship each Sunday. She had repeatedly offered to help and had been told that would be great, but no one ever asked her to help. She said one Sunday in the fall of her junior year, someone that she had seen Sunday after Sunday, politely asked, "Are you all visiting with us this morning?" She said that they walked out of that church and never went back. She found a church that was looking for an intern, who invested in her, allowed her to use her gifts and offered her the opportunity to grow into a call that she is living out today. Unfortunately many churches miss the opportunity to help a young person grow into their calling simply by neglecting to offer them a place to serve.

To be sure not every student is looking for a place to invest, but more are than you would think. By in large they are a group that values relationship, so the pay off for them is getting to know and learn from someone who they think is

interested in them. So I am not simply suggesting that we use them to do the work, while we stand around and talk, but I am strongly encourage us to invite them into working along side of us when we have something that needs doing.

Be courageous. Once you have offered hospitality and developed a relationship, then invite them into opportunities to serve. If you are baking cookies for a group, make a party and ask them to your home to help. If you have a group that mows the yard, offer them the chance to push a mower. If we want them to learn how to serve, we must offer them the opportunity and then teach them what that looks like. It is counter productive to assume that young people do not want to help, when we have not invited them to join us. Look for opportunities to enter the life of a young person and then offer them opportunities to serve along side of us.