



## Mentoring College Students In Your Congregation

This is the third in a series about characteristic of a mentoring church. The articles offer suggestions about how a church might engage young adults in general and specifically college students. The first two articles talked about **Hospitality** and **Networking**. This one invites a congregation to **expose students to ministry**:

**Exposure: *Expose them to ministry.*** Before you throw them in, let them observe and get comfortable with the rhythm and flow of ministry.

Many of us learned ministry by osmosis. We were part of families and churches where we knew the underside of ministry. That is rare for a young adult today. They have often been sequestered from any life within the church, except for their life with their peers.

They have often had separate worship time as children, very structured youth programs and mission trips that were focused around their age groups. There may have been a faith group of adults who have nurtured them, but very often we have isolated them from the larger ministries of the church. In so doing, we have narrowed their exposure to the larger picture of ministry in which the church is engaged.

Internships are a good way to open opportunities for students to learn about the church and its ministry. They can shadow a staff member for a semester or a summer. When you offer them the chance to work in specific ministry, it is important that they not be seen right off as a person that can reduce the load of the staff person. When any one is given too much responsibility, with little support or training, the overwhelming sense of failure is often crushing to them.

Unmet and unspoken expectations are the source of most conflicts. When you ask a young adult to help within the ministry of the church, know what you are asking and then articulate that to them. The way to discourage a college student from engaging in ministry is to give them too much to do or give them too little.

Be realistic and then follow through. Ask them first to help in the nursery, but not be in charge of the nursery. Invite them to chaperone a youth event or lead a program for one night, not to be the youth minister, if they have never done that before. Invite them to go along on a senior adult trip, to help in the kitchen, pass out bulletin, sing in the choir or a myriad of other entry level engagements in the church.

Then when you have asked them to help, TALK TO THEM. Ask them if they have questions about what you have asked them to do, ask them about their lives, about their experiences. Don't be surprised if they are not very talkative at first, but if they keep showing up, you have made a connection and you need to build on it.

This summer CBF placed 95 students in churches across the country. In their ten weeks in these churches, they did everything from help with worship to go on a hundred camps and mission trips. Without exception, they said that this summer opened their eyes to the broader scope of ministry. Not all are going to be ministers by profession, though some did feel that call, but all will be better ministers, because a group of Christians invested in their lives. Start small, but start to expose students to ministry with our churches and they will invest in the ongoing of Christ's church.