

DEVELOPING A MENTORING CULTURE

WITH KIDS AND TEENS

BY REV. TANYA YUEN

“IT TAKES A VILLAGE to raise a child.” This is just as true in a child’s faith development. Years ago, in a conversation with a fellow youth pastor about mentoring youth, he told me that he regularly invited his youth to babysit his young kids. While it seemed like a nice perk to have so many babysitter options in the youth group, his main reason was that he wanted his kids to begin building relationships with these teens so that when they were teenagers they would already have relationships with Christian young adults with whom they could talk and from whom they could learn. Adults that would hopefully be mentors to his kids.

We understand from Scripture that through teaching and passing on the stories of God, parents are the primary spiritual influencers and ideally, the catalysts in their child’s faith formation. But even in an ideal world, parents are not the sole influencers. As children move into adolescence, they attempt to make sense of this faith that has been passed to them. They question, wrestle with doubts and revisit their faith. This is what makes the community of God so essential.

Research has shown that mentoring young people is a key part of their faith development and critical for developing a lifelong faith. (hemorrhagingfaith.com and fulleryouthinstitute.org/stickyfaith). However, we sometimes get stuck on a specific idea of what we think mentoring looks like or what it would require from us to mentor a young person.

Psalm 78:1–8 reminds us that part of every Christian’s mandate is to pass on the truths of God to the next generation. For this reason,

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Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec’s Next Generation Ministries developed the “Sharing Life” concept. The premise is that each adult in a faith community is to somehow be investing into at least one other child or youth outside their own family. This is not about being a Sunday school teacher or youth leader, although some may fill those roles. It is not about a program to implement. Rather, it is a culture that a church embraces. Sharing Life, quite simply, is about sharing life with one another at different intensities or degrees. We use a six-degree scale to detail these different degrees. These degrees are not sequential; in fact, people will move between them depending on their life circumstances.

I am grateful that I had a 6D mentor as a teen, not a common experience I discovered. I am even more grateful that I had a lot of adults in my church as a child whom I could trust and who were models for me of a life following Jesus. Adults that showed me how to take the next steps of my faith journey and led me to seek deeper mentoring relationships. I wonder what it would like if a culture of mentoring kids and teenagers was a common experience in our churches. ①

Tanya works with CBOQ as their associate for children and family ministries. For more conversation and practical ideas for developing a mentoring culture with kids and youth contact Tanya Yuen (tyuen@baptist.ca) or Alvin Lau (alau@baptist.ca).

SHARING LIFE BY DEGREES

FIRST DEGREE (1D)

Consistent Connection with a basic knowledge of the person. Get to know every child by name and parents' names, the school they attend, things they are interested in.

SECOND DEGREE (2D)

Deepening of 1D conversation. Ask questions that can't be answered with only one word or by a yes/no response.

THIRD DEGREE (3D)

This is about entering the world of the child by attending a sports game or recital occasionally.

FOURTH DEGREE (4D)

This is about inviting the child into your world, like inviting the family over for a meal.

FIFTH DEGREE (5D)

This is about serving together, usually through common interests and/or gifts. The focus isn't just the ministry itself, but another opportunity for the adult and mentee to learn and serve together with shared experiences and 2D conversations.

SIXTH DEGREE (6D)

This is more formal mentoring with an intentional focus in uncovering what God may be revealing, whether through Scripture, through everyday circumstances or through in-depth self-reflection.

