

Cross-Gender Mentoring

In the CRCNA today it may not be possible for a female mentee to have a female mentor. Therefore female and male pastors may work together on ministry growth and development in a mentoring relationship. This type of relationship is increasing as more women are called and ordained to pastoral positions—positions that have traditionally been held by men. Accordingly, it is likely that women will be mentored by men and men mentored by women.

In the context of the CRCNA, it is unwise and inappropriate to disallow these kinds of mentoring relationships. It is also unwise to encourage these cross-gender relationships without a clear discussion of guidelines and boundaries that inform a decision to move in this direction. It must be said that cross-gender mentoring relationships are not prudent for every potential mentor or mentee.

Some Important Guidelines for Cross-Gender Mentoring

- The mentor should have had significant experiences in having his or her own work supervised. Experiences such as clinical pastoral education or parish residencies are examples of the kinds of environment in which this type of supervision can happen.
- The mentor is undergoing supervision or accountability.
- The mentee is advised to develop concurrent same-gender collegial or advisory relationships.

Current demographics could produce a high proportion of situations in which men are mentoring women. Rev. Karl Van Harn, an experienced clinical pastoral education supervisor, identifies three important dynamics to be considered as men are mentoring women in ministry.

Power

- How does the male pastor use power in ministry?
- How does he use power in the relationship with the female pastor?

Knowledge and Perspective

- How does the female pastor view things differently from the male pastor?
- How do pastors learn and come to know what they know? (It is important for the male pastor to imaginatively enter into the female pastor’s experience.)

Identity Development

- How does a female pastor develop a pastoral identity?
- How can the male mentor be an ally to the female mentee and together face the issues of her experiences?

Increasingly, there are numbers of situations in which women mentor men. Pastors recognize that the uniqueness of individuals, relationships, and ministry contexts will

greatly influence the shape of these mentoring relationships. For example, the mentoring relationship that develops in an institutional setting where women have long held positions of authority will be different from those developed in some congregational settings—especially if a congregation has only recently moved from a male dominated leadership climate.

Given these various dynamics, mentees and potential mentors are encouraged to seek counsel from the regional pastor and other colleagues before initiating cross-gender mentoring relationships.

Resources

Belenky, Mary Field, et al. *Women's Ways of Knowing*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.

Culbertson, Philip L. *Counseling Men*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

Doehring, Carrie. *Taking Care*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Glaz, Maxine, and Jeanne Stevenson Moessner. *Women in Travail and Transition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.