

The Role of Mentoring in Adolescents' Spiritual Formation

Nathan Hussaini Chiroma

PhD; Research Fellow, Faculty of Theology, Department of Practical Theology

University of Stellenbosch, RSA

nhchiroma@sun.ac.za

Abstract

An integrative approach that emphasises the fundamental role of mentoring is essential in adolescents' spiritual formation. Leading adolescents into spiritual formation necessitates walking alongside them through mentoring rather than simply teaching them to cope with pressures. There is a tremendous hunger among the adolescents of today for spiritual guides and mentors that will come alongside them in their journey of spiritual formation. Much has been written about mentoring; however, this article focuses on the use of mentoring in fostering adolescents' spiritual formation, drawing on recent research. This article shows how youth workers can and should embrace mentoring in order to facilitate adolescents' spiritual formation.

Keywords

mentoring – adolescent – spiritual formation – youth ministry

1 Introduction

Over the past 15 years there has been heightened interest within evangelical circles in the topic of spiritual formation. Many theologians (Dallas Willard, J.I Packer, Gordon R. Lewis and D.A Carson, to mention but a few) have argued that spiritual formation facilitates a truly Christ-like spirituality in the lives of both young and old maturing Christians. Adolescence can be seen as a compelling and crucial time spiritually. Spiritual formation is challenging for young people because they live in an era of choices that give rise to a whole new set

of challenges and opportunities. As such, youth ministry must move away from behavioural adjustment practices and focus on creating environments for genuine spiritual transformation. Adolescents must be guided on how Christ can be formed in them.

This article draws on the findings of research done for a doctoral thesis¹ that focused on the critical evaluation of mentoring programs in three ECWA² seminaries. An empirical investigation was conducted in three ECWA seminaries in Nigeria. A qualitative approach was followed, applying focus groups and individual interviews to obtain data. The research was guided by the interpretive paradigm, where the experiences of people count, and the data was analysed by means of thematic analysis. Braun and Clerk³ describe thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes within data). It minimally organizes and describes a data set in (rich) detail. However, it frequently goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic.” The empirical findings of this research reveal that mentoring plays an important role in adolescents' spiritual formation – especially in the following areas: discipleship, spiritual direction, imitation, modelling and walking alongside adolescents. These areas will therefore get special attention in this article.

The focus of this article is not to enter into the whole argument of spiritual formation, but rather to explore the role that mentoring can play in fostering the spiritual formation of adolescents. First, the article enquires into the various definitions of mentoring, adolescence, and spiritual formation. Second, it explores the various dynamics of adolescents' spiritual formation. Third, it presents how mentoring could be of assistance in the spiritual formation of adolescents. Finally, the article discusses the implications of mentoring as a supportive pedagogy in adolescents' spiritual formation for the practice of youth ministry.

2 Defining the Issues

2.1 *Mentoring*

Several definitions of mentoring have been offered in many different fields and therefore it is important to provide some working definitions of the concept of

1 N.H. Chiroma, “Critical evaluation of mentoring programs in theological seminaries of ECWA” (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2012), 189.

2 Evangelical Church Winning All (formerly Evangelical Church of West Africa) Accessed 15 June 2014. www.ecwa.org.

3 V. Braun and V. Clark, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

mentoring as it relates to this article. Merriam⁴ describes mentoring as a powerful emotional interaction between an older and a younger person, in a relationship in which the older is trusted, loving and experienced in the guidance of the young. Rhodes⁵ echoes the same sentiments and adds that mentoring in the world of the youth is a relationship between an older, more experienced adult and an unrelated, younger protégé – a relationship in which the adult provides ongoing guidance, instruction and support aimed at developing the capability and character of the protégé. The mentor creates a profile of what could be, and this helps to shape the growth and development of the protégé (the young person). Central to youth mentoring is also the aspect of relationship. However, the context of relationship within youth mentoring entails more than just a relationship; it concerns a relationship of trust. Therefore, in this article mentoring is regarded as a relationship of trust between adolescents and adults.

Mentoring has proven to produce positive results in adolescents (consider, for example, the Big Brothers Big Sisters initiative in the USA and Australia⁶ and the Mentor One Reach One initiative in Canada). Underscoring the importance of mentoring in adolescents, DuBois and Silverthorn⁷ found that adolescents who reported having had a mentoring relationship during adolescence displayed significantly improved outcomes in the spheres of education, mental health, problem behaviour and health. Similarly, qualitative research by Fowler⁸ found mentoring to be a process that enhances adolescents' personal development. If mentoring can produce positive results in other fields, what avenues are there for mentoring to help in the spiritual development of adolescents?

Two theological assertions framed the research this article draws on, forming a working definition of mentoring from a theological stand point. First, the Greek term *meno* ('enduring relationship') is found in the New Testament 118 times – 33 times in the Gospel of John alone.⁹ In His valediction, Jesus repeatedly used the word to express the "steadfast relationship" He enjoyed with His

4 S.B. Merriam, *Mentoring and the Academy* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 78.

5 J.E. Rhodes, *Stand by Me: The Risks and Rewards of Mentoring Today's Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 3.

6 Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, accessed June 15, 2014, <http://www.bbbs.org>.

7 D.L. DuBois and N. Silverthorn, "Natural Mentoring Relationships and Adolescent Health: Evidence from a National Study," *American Journal of Public Health* 95 (2005): 518–24.

8 J.W. Fowler, "Faith Development and Postmodern Challenges," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11, no. 3 (2001): 159–72.

9 Moore, T. *Care of the soul*. New York: Harper-Collins, 2007, 155.

disciples.¹⁰ The notion of a mature Christian mentoring, or helping a young believer to grow, develop and mature is replete in the Bible. Consider, for example Aquilla and Priscilla helping Apollos to mature and develop in his preaching ministry (Acts 18:24–28). The idea of mentoring is conveyed by a multiplicity of concepts. Concepts as invitation for a closer relationship (Gr. *proslambanow* means to take, partake, receive, or accept one in a house or circles (cf. Acts 27:33, 36; Rom. 15:7), exposure to a deeper truth (Gr. *ekistemin* means to expose, or set forth) in verse 26, and power of encouragement (Gr. *protptethow* means to urge on, encourage, or persuade) in verse 27.¹¹ The collective bearing of these semantic concepts serve to further communicate the quest of Aquilla and Priscilla to “counsel, guide and expedite” the spiritual and career development of Appollos.¹² Similar quests to develop Timothy and Titus are also seen in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, whereby Paul uses similar concepts to underscore his desire to expedite or help to develop the potential capacity and competence of these individuals in the ministry. Second, adolescents’ spiritual formation provides a platform for young people to encounter the living God directly. Adolescents’ spiritual formation is essentially about nurturing their relationships with God and in all aspects of adolescents’ spiritual formation we would do well to let adolescents’ meet God experientially. Yust¹³ rightly notes that adults cannot presume to mediate adolescents’ spiritual experiences by inserting themselves between God and young people as negotiators, but must wonder with young people about the relationship between adolescents’ personal spiritual experiences and the tradition’s understanding of who God is and how God is present to us in all aspects of our lives.

Hence mentoring can be defined as “a triadic relationship between mentor, adolescent and the Holy Spirit, where the adolescent can discover the already present action of God, intimacy with God, ultimate identity as a child of God and a unique voice for kingdom responsibility.”¹⁴ Even though the term mentor

10 Carruthers, J. “The principles and practices of Mentoring,” In *The Return of the Mentor*, ed. B.J. Caldwell and E.M Carter. (London: Falmer Press. 1993), 77–92.

11 Hoehl S.E. “The mentoring relationship: An exploration of Paul as loving mentor to Timothy and the application of this relationship to contemporary leadership challenges,” *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 3, no. 2 (2011): 32–47.

12 Gailbraith, M. W. and Norman H. C., eds., *Mentoring: New Strategies and Challenges: New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 89.

13 Yust, Karen-Marie. “Creating an idyllic world for children’s spiritual formation,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 11, no. 1 (2006): 177–88.

14 K. R. Anderson and R. D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 12.

cannot be found in the scriptures, the notion of mentoring permeates them. Mentor–protégé pairs described in the Old Testament include Moses and Joshua (Deut 31:7–8), Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1:7–18; 2:17–3:16), as well as Elijah and Elisha (2 Kgs 2:1–6). In the New Testament, Jesus mentored the Twelve. One of them, Peter, forged some form of mentoring relationship with Barnabas (Gal 2:11–13), who went on to mentor Paul and Mark (Acts 12:25–13:5). Paul in turn mentored Timothy, Titus, and several others (2 Tim 2:2).

2.2 *Adolescence*

Simply defined, adolescence is the transition between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence is a time of significant physical, social, and psychological changes in a child's life. Mabey and Sorensen¹⁵ define adolescence as the period of human development during which a young person must move from dependency to independence, autonomy and maturity. Young people move from being part of a family group to being part of a peer group and to standing alone as an adult. Erikson¹⁶ accentuates that adolescence involves a process that extends over a significant period of a person's life. There are individual variances, with some young people advancing through adolescence much more quickly than others. However, it must be noted that the task of defining adolescence remains a confusing one since adolescents themselves are influenced by various factors determining when childhood ends and adulthood begins. Adolescence as used in this article refers to the period of life between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence then can be seen as a relational concept because it exists and has meaning largely in relation to the concept of adulthood, therefore resonates directly with the role of mentoring.

2.3 *Spiritual Formation*

In broad terms, spiritual formation is the process of spiritual shaping and growth. However, despite various attempts, there has been little success in formalising a definition for spiritual formation within the Evangelical and Protestant world. Spiritual formation carries a variety of meanings to different theologians. White¹⁷ defines spiritual formation as “sanctification; the

15 J. Mabey and B. Sorensen, *Counselling Young People* (Bristol: Open University Press, 1995), 18.

16 E. H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton and Co., 1994), 138.

17 D. F. White, *Practicing Discernment With You: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 56.

progression of being continually cleansed from sin, reconciled to God and transformed into the likeness of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul after initial justification and salvation." Similarly, Coles¹⁸ views spiritual formation as a movement within contemporary Christianity that discusses and encourages spiritual practices and engagement with the Holy Spirit in an immanent and personal fashion. The purpose of this is transformation into Christ-likeness as "the intentional transformation of the inner person to the character of Christ". Spiritual formation is intentional in two ways: It is part of God's will for the individual believer, and the individual believer makes a conscious choice about it. It is transformation in that it involves definitive growth in a certain direction; it involves the total person in that it concerns itself with character, thoughts, intentions and attitudes, more than with actions, habits or behaviours, and finally, it has the character of Christ as its goal and standard of measure. Willard¹⁹ defines spiritual formation as "the process through which those who love and trust Jesus Christ effectively take on his character." In the same vein, Wilhoit²⁰ adds that "Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit." Spiritual formation is seen as a rather broad term comprising all attempts, means, instruction and disciplines intended towards the deepening of faith and furtherance of one's spiritual growth.

In this article, I have chosen to adopt Naidoo's²¹ definition of spiritual formation because of its simplicity and its relevance to the entire study. She defines spiritual formation as "a lifelong process of becoming, of being, formed and developed in the likeness of the Christ (Gal. 4:19; Col. 1:28; Rom. 12:2)." She adds that "it is a personal and relational formation which seeks to promote encounter and co-operation with God and society as a whole." Spiritual formation is not a programme that is completed in a few weeks, but rather is a lifelong process of being transformed into the image and the likeness of Christ.

18 R. Coles, *The Spiritual Formation of Children and Youth* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2010), 98.

19 D. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2002), 225.

20 J.C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 23.

21 M. Naidoo, "The Call for Spiritual Formation in Protestant Theological Institutions in South Africa," *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 11 (2008): 1.

3 Adolescents' Spiritual Formation

It is important that the faith of young people's faith can put into practice. Wilhoit²² warns that it is perilous when young people think the gospel is simply the door by which they enter Christianity and is something they can leave behind as they grow spiritually. Hence young people must be challenged to live out their Christian faith by intentionally growing into maturity and allowing Christ to be formed in them. However, adolescents' spiritual formation could best be achieved and modelled in the context of relationships. All ministries with adolescents must be directed toward presenting young people with the good news of Jesus Christ and inviting and challenging them to become his disciples. However, for this to become a reality young people need mentors who will model that faith in practice through mentoring. Pope John Paul II rightly noted that "as Jesus with the disciples of Emmaus, so youth workers must become today the traveling companion of young people." Rahn and Linhart²³ echo that it is when adult mentors come to walk alongside adolescents that we can get an up-close assessment of their spiritual needs.

One of the goals of our ministry with adolescents should be to see Christ formed in their lives. Cloete²⁴ relates that adolescents' spiritual formation is a process that we must be aware of in youth ministry, not as something that we can accomplish through the ministry, but of which we are a part of and in service of. We are called to prepare adolescents and nurture them in their faith. Therefore, Cloete²⁵ further contends that "spiritual formation gives an opportunity to youth ministry to nurture youth in their distinct developmental phases." The cultivation of spiritual formation in adolescents is a noble task that adults should be striving to be part of. Blount²⁶ asserts that, as people working with adolescents, we must reimagine Proverbs 22:6 to consider what it would mean to provide guidance to adolescents as they journey with and draw closer to God. Our desire as youth workers is to see that adolescents are empowered to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.

22 Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 23.

23 D. Rahn and T. Linhart, *Evangelism Remixed: Empowering Students for Courageous and Contagious Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 39.

24 A. Cloete, "Spiritual Formation as Focus of Youth Ministry," *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal* 53, no. 3 & 4 (2012): 74.

25 Cloete, "Spiritual Formation," 74.

26 R. Blount, "In Search of Living Waters: The Seven Spiritual Yearnings of Youth," *Journeying with Youth toward Living Waters* (Unpublished Princeton Lectures, 2005).

Spirituality is a universal human capacity. Willard²⁷ captured it well when he said that “spirituality is something we cannot escape, regardless of how we think and feel about it. It is our nature and our destiny.” There is an increase in the quest for spiritual formation among adolescents.²⁸ Purpura²⁹ argues that spiritual formation with adolescents is an urgently needed endeavour in the Christian community. He articulates that one of the greatest needs of young people today is spiritual formation: “never before have I seen more young people seeking to better understand their faith, yet at the same time I have never sensed a greater lack of adults who are available to lead them into spiritual formation.” Religiously speaking, adolescence has been experienced and regarded as a compelling and crucial time. It must be noted that adolescents’ spiritual formation must approach formation from a holistic perspective; it must be approached with the attitude that youth would be developed, not problems to be solved. Cloete³⁰ asserts that:

Spiritual formation is not some kind of trick, tool or strategy that can be employed in youth ministry, but is an integral part of our human existence. Spiritual formation is a process that we should be aware of in youth ministry, not as something that we can accomplish through the ministry, but of which we are a part of and in service of. Spiritual formation gives an opportunity to youth ministry to nurture youth in their distinct developmental phase.

Just as adolescents are longing for identity, and just as they are longing for intimacy, they might also be longing to discover the answer to the question ‘why are we here?’ Hence it is pertinent to help adolescents rediscover spiritual formation in a more meaningful and practical way. King³¹ encourages adolescents’ spiritual formation as follows:

It’s time for a thorough examination of our youth ministry philosophy and praxis. We need to create an authentic atmosphere for young people

27 D. Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding how God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper and Row, 1998), 79.

28 L. Steinberg, “Commentary: A Behavioral Scientist Looks at Spiritual Formation,” *Brain and Cognition* 72 (2011): 160–4.

29 J. Purpura, “Youth and Spiritual Direction. Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America,” 2008. Accessed October, 19, 2013. http://www.antiochian.org/youth_spiritual_direction.

30 Cloete, “Spiritual Formation,” 74.

31 M. King. *Presence-centered Youth Ministry: Guiding Students into Spiritual Formation* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 11.

to seek truth and discover who they are in Jesus. Youth ministry must move away from behavioural modification techniques and focus on creating environments for genuine spiritual transformation. We must guide young people into the presence of God. Spiritual formation provides an authentic avenue for young people to become more like Christ. Spiritual formation in adolescents provides an avenue of helping adolescents to discover God's purpose for their lives. Our challenge is to offer the means that will foster belief that spiritual formation is directly tied to divine purpose.

This calls for our response in helping to shape the spiritual life of young people in order for Christ to be formed in them. Therefore, this article proposes the use of mentoring as a means to facilitate adolescents' spiritual formation. Congregations must nurture adults who model discipleship and faith, and who serve as mentors or guides for young people on their spiritual journey. The call for one generation to share its faith and story with a future generation is deeply embedded in Scripture.

3.1 *The Role of Mentoring in Adolescent Spiritual Formation*

This work of embodied committed and meaningful life in the form of spiritual formation is particularly important to adolescents and the rising generations of our era. Venable³² reminds us that adolescents are overwhelmed by a myriad of ideas about what spiritual formation is and what it looks like. Growing into maturity in a culture where models of moral and holistic integrity are rare, adolescents are anxious to see real people actually modelling to them the reality of spiritual formation.³³

Adolescents deeply desire adults in their lives who are willing to help them navigate the journey from adolescence to adulthood. Importantly, adolescents need mentors who are willing to share their spiritual journey and offer hope to them in their struggles with faith and in their relationship with God. McQuillan³⁴ rightly notes that adolescents need mentors who are open enough to testify about their own struggles and offer the path that helped them grow in their own faith and relationship with God. Dryfoos³⁵ adds that adolescents

32 S. F. Venable, "Adolescents' Rites of Passage: An Experiential Model," *The Journal of Experiential Education* 20, no. 1 (1997): 6–13.

33 Venable, "Adolescents' Rites of Passage," 6–13.

34 L. McQuillan, *Adolescent's Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 25.

35 J.G. Dryfoos, *Safe Passage: Making it through Adolescence in a Risky Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6.

need committed adults willing to walk with them, persons who are called and committed to spiritually guide the next generation. Even though adolescents need committed adults to help them grow into spiritual formation, this article takes account of Cloete's³⁶ warning that "Christian spiritual formation is not a self-help project but is grounded in the grace of God through Jesus Christ from when we received faith as gift and which is not an achievement".

Mentoring in adolescents' spiritual formation may appear similar to the mentoring offered by any other person or community. However, according to Gratton³⁷ mentoring in adolescents' spiritual formation is grounded in the belief that all humans were created by a God who is love in order to love one another and God's creation. It proceeds from an assumption of the fundamental goodness of the protégé towards the glad task of discovering how this particular person is called to love. The relational nature of mentoring offers a wonderful working avenue that will help in the spiritual formation of adolescents. Spiritual formation in adolescents seeks to reinforce the continuing work of God's spirit in the life of the young person in the context of Christian community. "Through Christ, God constitutes us individually as believers and corporately as a community of believers."³⁸ To accomplish this purpose of Christ being formed in adolescents, Chiroma's³⁹ research, as mentioned earlier, reveals that mentoring could foster adolescents' spiritual formation in the following areas: discipleship, spiritual direction, imitation, modelling and walking alongside adolescents. Each of these means of fostering will be discussed in more depth below.

3.1.1 Discipleship

Mentoring in adolescents' spiritual formation provides an authentic avenue for discipleship. The phrase "make disciples" is actually the only imperative in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19f – "go", "baptizing" and "teaching" are particular verbs qualifying or further defining what is involved in making disciples.⁴⁰ The word 'mentor' itself (Gr. *matheteuo*) means "to cause someone to be a follower or imitator."⁴¹

36 Cloete, "Spiritual Formation," 72.

37 C. Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 915.

38 S. Grenz and J.R. Franke, eds, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 48.

39 Chiroma, "Critical Evaluation," 248.

40 E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 471.

41 W.A. Elwell, ed, *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 12.

In accordance with Steele,⁴² a disciple is made and mentoring should occur to the degree that every adolescent is consciously and progressively patterning his or her life on that of Jesus Christ, seeking to do what He did, living the kind of life that He lived and obeying His commands. In accordance with the research findings, many of the respondents indicated how their mentoring experiences shaped their lives as disciples, especially in patterning their lives on that of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is firstly about becoming like Jesus; about entering into a relationship with Him (Luke 6:40). Through the use of mentoring, the basis of a loving relationship that promotes the spiritual development of adolescents can be provided, helping them to become more like Christ, as illustrated by this comment of one of the respondents in Chiroma's study:⁴³ "We truly encountered discipleship through mentoring. We encountered really what it means to be a follower of Christ, the cost involved and the hopes involved. We moved from a baby Christian so to say to a maturing Christian. We are still in the process but the mentoring involvement helped shaped the way for our faith journey."

3.1.2 Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction is another important concept engrained in the use of mentoring within adolescents' spiritual formation. Purpura⁴⁴ reasons that spiritual direction is one of the greatest needs of adolescents, and he concludes that spiritual direction with adolescents is significant to cultivating adolescents' spirituality. The Christian tradition reveals that we recognise and respond to God within a relationship, within a community of faith. Hence, spiritual direction, consistent with Liebert,⁴⁵ is an interpersonal helping relationship. In this relationship, one Christian assists another to discover and live out – in the context of the Christian community – his or her deepest values and life goals in response to God's initiative and the biblical mandate. Spiritual directors as mentors provide discernment, accountability and encouragement to young people as they grow in their formational journey. Spiritual direction is help given by one Christian to another that enables that person to grow in intimacy in his relationship with God. Edwards⁴⁶ sets out that the ministry of spiritual direction must be understood as the meeting of two or more people (in a

42 O. Steele, *Understanding Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 90.

43 Chiroma, "Critical Evaluation," 248.

44 Purpura, "Youth and Spiritual Direction."

45 E. Liebert, *Changing Life Patterns: Adult Development in Spiritual Direction* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 8–9.

46 T. Edwards. *The Study of Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.

context of a relationship) – whose desire it is to grow in their personal walk with God, to be imitators of Christ. Adult spiritual directors accompany adolescents in their pursuit of spiritual formation. Therefore, spiritual direction through mentoring can foster the spiritual formation of adolescents.

3.1.3 Imitation

The Christian faith is an imitative faith and adolescents are looking for adults with an authentic Christian faith to imitate. Christianity has understood itself to be a faith taught by one to another.⁴⁷ The act of mentoring, according to the current research, indicated that relationships in the faith community continue to be influential in shaping the spiritual life of adolescents. This is in line with 1 Corinthians 4:16, where Paul urgently challenges the Christians at Corinth to imitate him (“therefore I urge you to imitate me”). However, Paul made it clear that the object of imitation was Jesus Christ. In other words, Paul is emphasizing that, if the Corinthians are to imitate him, then they are to imitate him in his self-denying, Christ-enjoying fulfilled life. In keeping with De Boer,⁴⁸

[i]mitation here often meant ‘bringing to expression, representation, and portrayal’. It implies the notion of transfer of character or personality from one person to another, e.g. from parents to children, from teacher to pupil, and from God to human beings. In the Hellenistic period, the classical notion of artificial copying – mimicking – is transformed into a concept of ethical and dynamic relationships.

By listening and observing, adolescents are able to learn and to imitate the spirituality of one’s model (cf. 1 Mace 2:15ff.; Sirach 44–50).⁴⁹ Paul encourages imitation by the children of the model given by the father. A similar reference to parental authority appears in 2 Cor 6:13. The realm of imitation in mentoring provides adolescents with models or examples to follow for shaping their spiritual formation. Imitation in mentoring as a supportive pedagogy in adolescents’ spiritual formation is best described by McClane,⁵⁰ with reference to the Greek word *mimetai* (imitation) together with the word ‘mentoring’ described as *mimetai-mentoring*. By this, he means a situation in which the adults in their various capacities are influencing adolescents by their personal, transformation

47 Anderson and Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring*, 15.

48 P. De Boer, *Moment of Christ* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1998), 50.

49 G. Peterson, *Dialogical Mentoring as Seen in the Gospels and Acts* (Downers Grove: Bassey Jones, 1989), 76.

50 J. McClane, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 1–2.

spiritual journeys. Adolescents can learn from where adults have made mistakes and where, by God's grace, they have thrived, as such helping in the adolescents' spiritual formational journey.

3.1.4 Modelling

Mentoring in adolescents' spiritual formation provides an avenue for modelling. Research,^{51,52,53} has shown that modelling is an important instructional strategy in the life of adolescents. The respondents in the current study indicated that they learnt spiritual matters best through modelling, especially by observing what spirituality looked like in the lives of adults. They noted that they looked up in admiration to adults in high positions or celebrities because of their proclaimed success.

The predominant image for the modelling role in adolescents' spiritual formation as used by various authors,^{54,55} is one person looking over the shoulder of another. The image of looking over a mentor's shoulder implies spending time together, communicating with one another, and sharing life experience.

Modelling exhibits the mentor's responses to life experience, but does not prescribe responses to the mentee.⁵⁶ An adolescent observing a mentor on his or her journey is taught skills necessary for his or her own journey. The bottom line here is that people are influenced by those they spend time with – in either a negative or positive way. Biblically, we are encouraged to follow good examples as models. It must be noted that modelling in this context does not carry with it the assumption of perfection or expertise, but it does assume at least a degree of proficiency and experience on the part of the one who models.

3.1.5 Parakeleo (*Coming Alongside*)

Another key concept found in the use of mentoring in adolescents' spiritual formation is the Greek words *parakaleo* and *parakelein*, meaning to exhort, to encourage, to ask, to entreat, to comfort, and, more importantly, to come

51 B. Albert, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986), 145.

52 M. Baldwin, J. Keating and K. Bachman, *Teaching in Secondary Schools: Meeting the Challenges of Today's Adolescents* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2006).

53 J. Duplass, *Middle and High School Teaching: Methods, Standards, and Best Practices* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006).

54 E. Anderson, *Definition of Mentoring* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 57.

55 B. Engstrom, "Spiritual mentoring and formation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation* 4 (1991): 22–46.

56 S. H. Matthaei, "Rethinking Faith Formation," *Religious Education* 99, no. 1 Winter (1999): 543.

alongside. Williams⁵⁷ states that Jesus came alongside various people, as seen in the New Testament (for example, Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, the disciples on Emmaus road), hence He became the first *paraclete*, the first advocate who promised that when He departed, another advocate would be sent to the Church (John 14:16). This advocate continues the role Jesus began, and whoever receives the *paraclete* is called to partake in His ongoing *paracletic* ministry to others. This essential ministry of coming alongside one another as the body of Christ bears on the mentoring relationship we form with adolescents. In the unity of our faith in and baptism into Christ, we have become responsible for one another, and even more importantly, for our young ones. As Paul wrote to the Romans, we have been summoned to admonish, comfort, and exhort one another “that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (Rom. 1:12). Luther calls this the *mutua consolatio fratrum*, the mutual consolation that we owe to one another as the body of Christ. Firet,⁵⁸ a Dutch Reformed pastoral theologian, refers to this ‘*paracletic* ministry’ as the third ministry of the church alongside its *kerygmatic* and didactic ministries: 1) we step into pulpits to preach that the Kingdom has come and displaced all other kingdoms (*kerygmatic*); 2) we stand behind a lectern or sit with a small group to teach about life as citizens of the Kingdom (didactic); and 3) we walk alongside others as they begin to live new lives and speak a new language on the basis of their new identity (*paracletic*). The Word, according to Williams,⁵⁹ must be experienced and lived through ongoing moments of conversion, transformation and reformation.

From the above, it is evident that the use of mentoring in adolescents’ spiritual formation in a Christian context is based on the concept that certain individuals are not only further along in their spiritual journey with Christ than others, but also that they have the ability and desire to assist others (especially adolescents) to make progress in their Christian journey. Our challenge is to provide the context for adolescents through mentoring to enable them to hear and embrace the importance of Christ being formed in their lives.

3.2 *Suggestions for Congregations and Youth Ministries*

Adolescents’ spiritual formation is a vital focus in youth ministry today. According to Cloete,⁶⁰ adolescents’ spiritual formation gives an opportunity to

57 B.A. Williams, *The Potter’s Rib: Mentoring for Pastoral Formation* (British Columbia: Regent Publishing House, 2005), 137.

58 J. Firet, *Dynamics in Pastoring* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986), 68–72.

59 Williams, *The Potter’s Rib*, 137.

60 Cloete, “Spiritual Formation,” 74.

youth ministry to nurture the youth in this distinct developmental phase. To adolescents, mentors embody and inspire the possibility of committed and meaningful spirituality. Mentoring relationships with adolescents anchor the vision of the potential self in spiritual formation, as the mentor offers both insight and spiritual support. Mentoring is commitment on the side of adults to pattern spirituality that is particularly worthy of emulation to adolescents in our era. Youth ministries or congregations that take the ministry of adolescents' spiritual formation seriously should consider the following suggestions.

First, every adolescent in our ministry or congregation should be connected to a responsible adult – if not their parents, then someone else. Despite the abundance of connections adolescents have on social media, the presence of adults in their lives cannot be substituted by such connections. Clark⁶¹ captures it well when he asserts that:

Adolescents have suffered the loss of safe relationships and intimate settings that served as the primary nurturing community for those travelling on the path from child to adult... The young have not arrogantly turned their backs on the adult world. Rather, they have been forced by a personal sense of abandonment to band together and create their own world.

Many adolescents have little or no trust in adults precisely because of this abandonment, however, Clark⁶² encourages us by stating that “contrary to what most adults think, adolescents want significant relationships with adults who care about them.” Therefore, a significant relational role with adolescents in the form of mentoring must be regained in our congregations and youth ministry. King⁶³ sums it up well when he says that youth workers need to mentor adolescents relationally, since such mentoring plays an important role in encouraging adolescents to have lasting faith.

Second, every youth ministry or congregation must train and equip committed and caring adults to nurture adolescents into spiritual formation. As a faith community we must shape an intentional environment of spiritual formation for adolescents, we must see them as capable of growing into maturity in their relationship with God and with God's people. Adolescents' spiritual formation thrive when socialising systems include the family and congregations, and when those systems directly nourish spiritual formation through

61 C. Clark, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 44, 50.

62 Clark, *Hurt: Inside the World*, 53.

63 King, *Presence-centered Youth Ministry*, 25.

encouragement, articulation, teaching and participation in the lives of adolescents. Many adults who desire to be involved have no idea as to where to start, hence training and equipping them will result in bringing more adults on board.

Third, adolescents need spiritual guides or mentors to foster their spiritual formation. Adolescents have a tremendous hunger for spiritual guides or mentors. Yaconelli⁶⁴ stresses this fact when he says that adolescents who are inquisitive about spiritual matters are looking for guides or mentors who can show them spirituality that radiates the love of Christ. Adolescents are not simply searching for information about spirituality; they are looking for how ideas are embodied, how faith is lived out, how following Jesus impacts adults' perspectives and actions. They need adults who embody and practice their theology by means of a particular way of life that mirrors the freedom and passion of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, the youth ministry or congregation will need to develop an online presence. Adolescents are growing up in a world that is increasingly open source in its orientation to learning, authority and work. The internet is often the first place where adolescents look for anything today. An internet presence has that distinct advantage of being more present to adolescents who are anonymously searching for spiritual formation. However, an online presence will not replace face-to-face mentoring for adolescents' spiritual formation.

Fifth, adolescent spiritual formation must help adolescents to have a sustaining, personal relationship with Jesus Christ supported through regular prayer, faith sharing and scripture reading. Even though mentors can facilitate the spiritual formation of adolescents, adolescents must also be encouraged to take personal responsibility for their spiritual journey. Adolescents must be encouraged to "work out their salvation with trembling and fear" (Philippians 2:12). Encouraging them to share the Good News through words and actions, through Christian stewardship and working for peace, justice and human dignity will help them not only to own their spiritual formation, but will also encourage them to help others on their journey of spiritual formation.

Sixth, youth workers or congregations must help adolescents to articulate the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith and to demonstrate a commitment to learning and growing in this faith.

64 M. Yaconelli, *Growing Souls – Experiments in Contemplative Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 30–31.

4 Conclusion

In this article I have proposed that the use of mentoring can foster the spiritual formation of adolescents. This approach summons youth workers and congregations to create and maintain mentoring towards adolescents' spiritual formation. Chiroma⁶⁵ discovered that the use of mentoring as a supportive pedagogy in adolescents' spiritual formation employs several concrete steps, namely discipleship, imitation, spiritual direction, modelling and coming alongside adolescents' in their spiritual journey. It is important that youth ministries or congregations see themselves as a nurturing community, committed to the care and the spiritual nurturing and formation of adolescents.

References

- Albert, B. *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986.
- Anderson, E. *Definition of Mentoring*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Anderson, K.R. and R.D. Reese. *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1999.
- Baldwin, M., J. Keating, and K. Bachman. *Teaching in Secondary Schools: Meeting the Challenges of Today's Adolescents*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2006.
- Beisterling, R. "The Mentoring Approach of Jesus as demonstrated in John 13." *Journal of Youth Ministry* 5, no. 1 (2006): 77–92.
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. Accessed June 15, 2014. <http://www.bbbs.org>.
- Blount, R. "In search of living waters: The seven spiritual yearnings of youth." *Journeying with Youth toward Living Waters*. Unpublished Princeton Lectures, 2005.
- Braun, V. and V. Clark. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.
- Chiroma, N.H. "Critical Evaluation Mentoring Programs in Theological Seminaries of ECWA" (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2012).
- Clark, C. *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004.
- Cloete, A. "Spiritual formation as focus of youth ministry." *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal* 53, no. 3 & 4 (2012): 70–7.
- Coles, R. *The Spiritual Formation of Children and Youth*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2010.
- De Boer, P. *Moment of Christ*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1998.

65 Chiroma, "Critical Evaluation," 179ff.

- DuBois, D.L. and N. Silverthorn. "Natural mentoring relationships and adolescent health: Evidence from a national study." *American Journal of Public Health* 95 (2005): 518–24.
- Duplass, J. *Middle and High School Teaching: Methods, Standards, and Best Practices*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006.
- Dryfoos, J.G. *Safe Passage: Making it through Adolescence in a Risky Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Edwards, T. *The Study of Spirituality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Elwell, W.A., ed. *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. Accessed April 12, 2013. <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary>.
- Engstrom, B. "Spiritual mentoring and formation." *Journal of Spiritual Formation* 4 (1991): 22–46.
- Erikson, E.H. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: Norton and Co., 1994.
- Firet, J. *Dynamics in Pastoring*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986.
- Fowler, J.W. "Faith Development and Postmodern Challenges." *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 11, no. 3 (2001): 159–172.
- Gailbraith, M.W. and H.C. Norman, eds. *Mentoring: New Strategies and Challenges: New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1995.
- Gratton, C. *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*. New York: Crossroad, 1993.
- Grenz, S. and J.R. Franke. eds. *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- Hoehl, S.E. 2011. "The mentoring relationship: an exploration of Paul as loving mentor to Timothy and the application of this relationship to contemporary leadership challenges." *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 3, no. 2 (2011): 32–47.
- King, M. *Presence-centered Youth Ministry: Guiding Students into Spiritual Formation*. Downer's Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006.
- Liebert, E. *Changing Life Patterns: Adult Development in Spiritual Direction*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992.
- Mabey, J. and B. Sorensen. *Counselling Young People*. Bristol: Open University Press, 1995.
- Matthaei, S.H. "Rethinking Faith Formation." *Religious Education* 99, no. 1 (1999): 543.
- McClane, J. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Fourth Edition. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.
- McQuillan, L. *Adolescent's Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Merriam, S. B. *Mentoring and the Academy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006.
- Moore, T. *Care of the soul*. New York: Harper-Collins, 2007.
- Naidoo, M. "The call for spiritual formation in protestant theological institutions in South Africa." *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 11 (2008): 1.
- Nida, E.A. *Greek-English Lexicon*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989.
- Peterson, G. *Dialogical Mentoring as Seen in the Gospels and Acts*. Downers Grove: Bassey Jones, 1989.

- Purpura, J. "Youth and spiritual direction. Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America," 2008. Accessed October 19, 2013. http://www.antiochian.org/youth_spiritual_direction.
- Rahn, D. and T. Linhart. *Evangelism Remixed: Empowering Students for Courageous and Contagious Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- Rhodes, J.E. *Stand by Me: The Risks and Rewards of Mentoring Today's Youth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Steele, O. *Understanding Discipleship*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990.
- Steinberg, L. "Commentary: A Behavioral Scientist Looks at Spiritual Formation." *Brain and Cognition* 72 (2011): 160–4.
- Venable, S.F. "Adolescents' Rites of Passage: An Experiential Model." *The Journal of Experiential Education* 20, no. 1 (1997): 6–13.
- White, D.F. *Practicing Discernment with You: A Transformative Youth Ministry Approach*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005.
- Wilhoit, J.C. *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2008.
- Willard, D. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding how God Changes Lives*. New York: Harper and Row, 1998.
- Willard, D. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2002.
- Williams, B.A. *The Potter's Rib: Mentoring for Pastoral Formation*. British Columbia: Regent Publishing House, 2005.
- Yaconelli, M. *Growing Souls – Experiments in Contemplative Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
- Yust, Karen-Marie. "Creating an idyllic world for children's spiritual formation." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 11, no. 1 (2006): 177–88.