

Mentor

One on One



Rev. Peter Chou, PhD
President, IBS

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International Biblical Seminary--Bivocational Ministry.

Chapter 9:

Mentoring in ministry

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Chapter Nine: Mentoring in ministry

How do you make the unleavened bread for communion?

On the first Sunday of our church Worship in 1978 we met the problem. Fortunately, I made it once in HOD, purely out of curiosity. I recalled from memory, that the dough cannot be too thick, and it cannot be over-kneaded; it has to be thin, pan-baked to perfection with no oil, no burns on either side, crispy and crackling to the touch. It was easier said than done. After several tries we succeeded, though it tasted still a tiny-little sticky. Of course you could buy a matzo from the supermarket—but that would be too Jewish, too commercial and too common; or you could buy the ready-made small round communion wafers—but that would not be one whole piece of bread. Actually, making our own bread did not make us more authentic in remembering the Lord for we had no way to find out what bread Jesus and the disciples used. (And I doubt seriously that they would feast on such a small piece of ‘Passover Bread.’)

Tradition; we were just happy to stay with a tradition. Many of the things we thought important or inviolable truth were just traditions of dubious origins. One day this tradition was challenged. One of the early members asked if we could use separate cups, small cups—on hygienic reasons. Unfortunately, my core co-workers have split votes on this. I would be the first to admit that I did not handle it right but who would have thought that I would lose Carl as a co-worker over trivial details of Communion! Of all things, a disharmony over the basic symbol of unity!

In the foundational stage of the church, since we felt that the Lord led us together we wanted to serve Him as a church with the same mind and vision but our different backgrounds really caused troubles. We all agreed that we would serve God in the biblical way; but beyond that, ‘what are the biblical ways’ could trigger more arguments. We all held onto some traditions, or the way we were used to doing things that each felt good about; but whose tradition were we to follow? There could not be two or more ways in one church. We could not use one large cup one week and small cups next. This was the moment I learned that we needed to set ministry models, whatever they might be, for future peace and harmony. It was not so much the theology, but tangible, reasonable patterns. Were these patterns necessarily biblical? We hoped so; and that’s the best we could hope for.

Years later, when I went back to seminary, they told me what was called church culture: the way we do things here. In a starter church, every time when a certain practice is chosen, whether a tradition or a new way, it will influence and define the church culture, with reasons and intrinsic values. A small group of members then learn the practice by examples, and the more they follow the examples the stronger the culture will be built—until the new members arrive and assimilate with the culture—then, no questions asked, with or without understanding of the intrinsic values or reasons. We were a starter church, and although I was not conscientiously doing it, we did build our own culture. But that

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was a mentoring process; culture is more mentored than by preaching. You can teach the vision, the value system, the biblical emphases, Christ-centeredness, forgiveness, love, humility . . . all you want, but until it is mentored and become a church culture what you preach is still a head-knowledge, not the reality; for spirituality is what you are, not what you know, or you think you know. But, once the culture is established it will be hard to break for it is deep in the people, in their lives. This is church.

In four years, this young church would have a major addition to its tender culture; the vision changed. It happened in the year when my wife was bed-ridden with placenta previa of our third child; I had to commute to the HOD Summer Conference. I was assigned to teach 'Apostolic Authority' the next day but the Lord drastically altered my topic to 'All Saints', literally in the eleventh hour the previous night. After the workshop, I was in a very awkward position with HOD-Testimony Mission. Newman knew how serious it was; from his point of view I departed from his teaching, but I did not initiate this for I just received a vision. In the mindset of Apostolic Authority the church is built down from the top with ministers' authority, but All Saints idea is to build the church from bottom up to the maturity of the saints. God moved my position from a minister-centered leadership to a servant-hood ministry. The gifts of the workers are to benefit the saints, not to be something of the ministers' achievement.

The church grew in size as the word of God drew people in, and I was very busy. I did all the ministerial things, preaching, teaching, evangelizing, caring, and administration; there was not a thing I did not do, and some—and that was the problem. I was too busy and tired; I was on the verge of a burnout and unaware of it. Few young ministers can escape the temptation to bulk up the works when he gains some success, either in preaching, in his other spiritual gifts, or in things of his strength, but the problem is: success is not measured in numbers in God's work. I knew His heart was on all saints, not only on a few leaders or certain groups, and I'd love to serve all saints; still, my idea (for all saints) was to serve a lot of people, not individuals, until the leadership crumbled in the church splits. There were outside agitators too, but the main problem was internal that we did not have a team of leaders who understand the vision.

To say that I did not ever build leaders is misleading; and to say losing sight of the 'all saints' vision cannot be further from the truth; but I did not communicate the vision to the leaders properly. It is harder to mentor a vision than to teach ministry skills. The attacks came, accusing me of departure from truth (and tradition) that I no longer believe in apostolic (and biblical) authority; but I was able to search the scripture and establish biblical teachings of priesthood of all believers, etc. And then, they thought my heart was not in the church and I was about to desert the congregation, aiming at higher and bigger things, such as a global mission, or at least to form a denomination. I did not do any of that; but I did start a magazine *For All Saints* to share my vision with anybody who sought biblical truth. I later compiled and published several books from these quarterly issues of magazines. The titles and contents ought to have reflected our efforts to develop a church with biblical foundations: *Messages*

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on Leviticus, Services (A Set of NT Word Studies), Problem Church and Church Problems, The Essence of Church, etc.

Actually, the magazine onset the first church split, instigated by Newman who used a young minister of HOD and started a church several miles from where we were. They claimed they were to rescue our congregation from doctrinal errors and re-establish a Testimony. Since many of the church members already knew this young pastor, it created a 'Paul, Cephas, Apollos' controversy. (1 Cor 1: 12) The irony was, Steven declared independence and split from Newman soon after the church was semi-established. A year later, in 1984, Newman published a new bi-lingual *Hymnary* and the Chinese title means *All Saints Hymns*. Not *Testimony Hymns*, eh? Interesting!

They also thought that 'for all saints' meant to turn over the leadership to the congregation immediately. I did install elders and deacons within a couple of years, but I did not leave the church as Paul did (Acts 14: 23); they thought I would stay for three more years as Paul did in Ephesus (Acts 20:31) but I stayed longer. They said I was insincere. When Victor, a dentist, came from East Coast and gained some respect in leadership, began to agitate and caused some unrest among young people. He knew Bellman, another 'testimony' strategist who also helped me in my student years. Bellman and Newman were kicked out of Local Church at the same time, but they could not work together. I did not know this when I chose Newman over him into full-time ministry. When Bellman told Victor, and he spread the word, that following me means suffering of the church, they decided to part ways and establish a new church. This split was in a volcanic seismic scale because Peter, whom I mentored weekly for months and June, whom was the original core member and treasurer of the church also took part in it. Funny was it that they said their new church would be a church for all saints. They thought a church without a Reverend Pastor **is** a church for all saints. And for some not so funny reason still, they later kicked out Victor.

Robert, the anesthesiologist, was the next split. He wanted (or pretended) to merge with us and then let me go since I ought to be doing apostolic mission of 'for all saints' anyway. This would be known in industry as hostile takeover. I had no problem with this but the church thought it was ridiculous. The gesture of friendliness in his part, plus claiming he was rich enough to buy a meeting place without burdening the rest, and perceived unwillingness in my part to cooperate, won some people over to him. But the church survived every split and my vision grew clearer with all the attacks. Well, God moves in a mysterious way; after all volcano dusts settled and my vision became clear He led me to start 'For all Saints Team Ministry'. He turned a new page in my life. But I wish someone had mentored me to face church splits—before they happened. What Paul said greatly help me after these many splits that, "the important thing is that in every way . . . Christ is preached." (Phil 1:18) O, would I have the measure of Paul; I wouldn't have suffered than for so long!

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A consolation was Margaret's wedding. That was the last thing I officiated in OCCA. I did not send out individual personal invitations to church members for fear of neglecting someone; when people heard the news many of the former members requested if they could come. I was touched. They could just use a ready excuse that they didn't know, or that they were not invited; but they purposely called. That day, over capacity crowd packed the wedding banquet. The splitters, not wanting or knowing how to say sorry came in person. That's the kind of sorry the Chinese will 'say' by deeds. Almost everyone came, except Victor. After all, they saw Margaret grew up in this church and she was innocent in all these church splits. I praised them for their decency which made future social and church gatherings a lot easier. We are brothers and sisters in God's family, but they just didn't understand "For All Saints".

What is 'For All Saints' vision?

All the afore-mentioned misunderstandings may have some partial validity but they were just outward forms of practices. The most important concept is: 'For All Saints' is more than a vision, it is a nurture and mentoring process. We, God's servants (the pastors, etc and their co-workers with the same vision) want to **serve all saints**, until **all saints** can **serve** God and each other. We developed the catch phrases per 2 Tim 2:2, "Teach the teachers to teach, train the trainers to train, evangelize the evangelists to evangelize, etc." This is mentoring. And we can now include, "Mentor the mentees to mentor." However, underlying is the servant attitude. If anyone, being mentored, now thinks he is a leader and as a boss can 'instruct' or 'order' others, then I say, he does not understand the vision at all. I believe that in the mentoring process spiritual gifts will also be developed, but a changed life of spiritual humility is what we are looking for as final product of mentoring.

Does it make sense?

Now, let us bullet the points we learn in this chapter:

- People are usually happy to stay with traditions; and often times the origins of traditions are untraceable.
- Tradition, simply said, is, 'the way we are used to doing things here'
- Church culture is mentored by repeating and reinforcing 'the way we do things here'
- A new comer usually arrives and assimilates with the culture—not asking questions, and not knowing the intrinsic values or reasons

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- Once the culture is established it will be hard to break for it is deep in the people's lives
- Churches who emphasize Apostolic Authority tend to build down from the top with ministers'
- For All Saints idea is to build the church from bottom up to the maturity of the saints
- There are different leadership styles: a minister-centered leadership and a servant-hood ministry
- The gifts of the workers are to benefit the saints, not something of the ministers' achievement.
- Few ministers can escape the temptation to bulk up the works, especially if he is gifted
- Success is not measured in numbers in God's work.
- To mentor a ministry the most important thing for the mentor is to communicate the vision
- It is harder to mentor a vision than to teach ministry skills.
- The way Paul would build a church, he taught, was to the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry and for edifying of the body of Christ.
- 'For all saints' is not just a formality to turn over the leadership to the congregation, or elders and deacons, but build the leaders (and congregation) into maturity
- A church without a pastor is not necessarily a church for all saints.
- Church mergers do not happen often; In any merger, the personnel reorganization is hardest
- Too bad, church splits are not usually mentored—before they happened.
- 'For All Saints' is more than a vision, it is a nurture and mentoring process.
- God's servants ought to **serve all saints**, until **all saints** can **serve**
- "Teach the teachers to teach, train the trainers to train . . . etc. is a mentoring process.
- Spirituality or spiritual humility is what we look for as final product of mentoring

Here are a few questions to ponder:

1. How important is a church culture? How do you cultivate it?
2. What are traditions? How were they formed? How do you deal with them, if you believe the right way is the biblical way?

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3. What would you do if the core partners do not see things eye to eye? Why do you want to be extra careful?
4. Why does a church need to be built on biblical foundation? Can we just follow our traditions? Can we just trust the Holy Spirit to guide us every step of the way? Are they all different or the same? Are there more than one or two ways?
5. What is the danger or dangers a pastor runs the whole church business, even if he is fully capable?
6. How would the pastor or church leaders avoid burnout?
7. What is the danger or dangers of delegation in church ministries?
8. How do we reduce the risks of delegation in developing a church as an organization?
9. Do Apostolic Authority and For All Saints concept necessarily clash? Think of Paul, who was a *bone fide* apostle but preached a message of perfecting of all saints.
10. What is a vision? What is its modern usage? What is a biblical, spiritual vision? Why do we call an important biblical truth a vision?
11. What is 'For All Saints' vision? Mention both the outward practices and the real spiritual insights.
12. Why is spirituality, humility in particular, is utterly important in church?

Action Item(s):

Write down at least one action item for yourself, relating to this chapter. And do it immediately.

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