

THE MENTORING COMMUNITY
of Leighton Ford Ministries

by Leighton Ford

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I N C O R P O R A T E D

Dedication

To Graham Johnston 1960-2011

*The first young leader to serve with us and the first to go to be with his Lord,
and to the many younger leaders we have had the joy to know and who are
committed to lead like Jesus, to Jesus, and for Jesus.*

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge with great joy and gratitude those who have shared in the leadership team of the Mentoring Community, and whose thoughts, suggestions, and examples are part of this book. Chris Woodhull first challenged me not to “take down the table,” but to form an expanded mentoring community. Anne Grizzle volunteered and has served as chair willingly and enthusiastically from the beginning, as well as leading a mentoring group herself. MaryKate Morse and Ken Shigematsu have been invaluable mentors, encouragers, teachers, and part of the core leadership team. My colleague, Nick Valadez, has contributed faithful and imaginative service as coordinator of our mentoring ministries, teacher, and friend to us all. Without the help of these partners, the Mentoring Community would not have been launched, continued, nor expanded.

The participants in our various mentoring groups – especially my own Point and Sigdor groups – have been a constant encouragement as we have watched them grow, and we have learned so much from them.

Our Leighton Ford Ministries board, chaired by Roger Parrott, and including Tom Dooley, Anne Grizzle, Anne Huffman, Hal Northrop, Lon Allison, and my wife Jeanie have shared in and supported the vision from the beginning.

Most of all Jeanie, through all these years, has been my number one encourager, wise counselor, and herself a mentor (without letting herself be called that!) of so many women in the Charlotte community. Everyone who knows her (including myself) realizes I am much wiser when I listen to her!

THE MENTORING COMMUNITY

By Leighton Ford

*Deep and wide
Deep and wide
There's a fountain flowing
Deep and wide
(Children's song)*

Leaders in missions and evangelism need safe places, safe times, and safe people to help them grow spiritually and be fruitful over the long run.

An Introduction

For several years I have wanted to write thoughts on the spiritual mentoring of leaders, which has been the focus of my own ministry for many years. A number of colleagues have urged me to do so. They have suggested it would be helpful to have a brief booklet on insights and practices that I have discovered during these years in ministry. So I write with the hope that these thoughts and learnings might introduce others now and in the future to a transforming friendship with God.

In my ministry, from large scale evangelistic events to quiet walks with young leaders, I have seen, as the children's song so beautifully states, there is a fountain flowing deep and wide, that becomes a river of grace. The great life in Christ comes not so much by telling people about the fountain, although that is vital, as by helping them to come and taste that living water.

Whether inviting people to come forward in public commitment in a great stadium, or walking with them along a path in the mountains, it's been a wonderful privilege to invite them to drink deeply and live fully.

Streaming Light: Deep and Wide

The small city of Rock Hill, South Carolina, about thirty minutes south of Charlotte, has been a significant place for me personally. It was also significant in the development of the Mentoring Community. It was there at Winthrop University in the 1990s that our Arrow Leadership sessions met twice a year. During those gatherings I first clearly realized that God was calling me, and others, to a new phase in our ministry of the spiritual mentoring of leaders. It was also in Rock Hill that at times I went through some deep waters, and dark times, when my own soul needed a new sense of God's care, direction, and healing.

In Rock Hill, I eventually discovered a small community called The Oratory, the center of a Christian ministry to the city and nearby university. David Valtierra was their spiritual leader and became my own spiritual companion. Several times a year for over a decade I spent a day at the Oratory, in quiet reflection and prayer, and in conversation with David. We were friends until the time of his death, and I continue to be grateful for what he meant to me.

So it was fitting when the time came to launch our Mentoring Community, that a small group of us met at the Oratory to plan and pray for this new initiative, which began in 2005-2006.

Someone suggested we should have a visual symbol for the mentoring. I thought immediately about a fountain at the lovely Glen Cairn Gardens two blocks from the Oratory, where I would often take a walk on my retreat days. The gardens are designed around a central fountain with water springing up in a fan like shape at the top, then flowing down through a series of descending basins. When the greenery is lush and full around the fountain the sun lights its descending currents in shapes of light and dark, and blues and greens.

Based on these images I made the painting, which appears on the front of this booklet.

This stylized rendering pictures for me the flowing stream of spiritual mentoring. The vertical lights at the far end depict the Light of the World, our Lord Jesus, who has descended into the darkness. The grove of green trees reminds me of the promise of the first Psalm, that when we walk in the way of the Lord we will be like a tree “planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither” (Psalm 1:3). The earth colors, tan and green, represent the “humus” – the very human reality of our lives as followers of Christ.

As the water flows down and out through the basins it symbolizes the passing on of a vision and a way of life from generation to generation. The alternating ribbons of dark and light are reminders that all of us, including those called to serve God and his people, go through times of light and blessing, and times of discouragement, but that in all these varied passages God’s Spirit continues to flow through us.

Finally, as the water drops off at the very end, no longer constrained by the hard edges of the basins and flows out widely, I am reminded that the river of God is not under our control but flows where and how he wills. This is a visual sign that what He begins through us will go on beyond our own lives.

So the image conveys our hope and prayer: that this Mentoring Community will be one of ... *Streaming Light: Deep and Wide.*

Spiritual Mentoring: A Brief Personal and Ministry History

My own call to the ministry of evangelism began when I was very young. From the outset of my life in ministry I was encouraged and guided by significant mentors.

When I was fourteen, a man named Evon Hedley came to my hometown in Canada. Of medium height and well dressed he looked like a salesman or executive. What he was promoting, however, was our starting a chapter of the Canadian Youth Fellowship, the forerunner of Youth for Christ. That night Evon appointed me as president, assuming because I was tall that I was several years older. He must have wondered afterward if he made a great mistake appointing such a youngster! But he stayed close to me, guided me, encouraged me, sometimes scolded me a bit, sent traveling speakers our way, and included me in leadership gatherings. Well into his 90s Evon is continuing to mentor younger men.

A tall southern evangelist with a thundering voice came to preach at one of our rallies: Billy Graham. I was disappointed that only one young girl came forward in a rededication. Afterward he put an arm around me and promised to pray for me. He later told his sister in North Carolina about a young man in Canada. So he also became a matchmaker, and later my brother-in-law as Jeanie and I married.

After my seminary years, Billy invited me to join his evangelistic team for several months. Those months stretched into thirty years as an associate evangelist preaching around the world. His mentoring was largely two-fold, allowing me to watch closely and learn from his own style of evangelistic communication, and also opening doors of ministry for me and providing encouragement.

In many ways Billy was a model for me. I was once asked how I had seen his leadership and ministry change across the years. The image of an “arrow” came to mind. “Billy Graham,” I answered, “has been like an arrowhead – sharp at the point as the gospel is always at the forefront in his preaching, growing broader like an arrowhead at its base as he understands the implications of the gospel, and then like the shaft of an arrow growing deeper in the Lord.”

My third most significant mentor was also like a spiritual father to me. Bishop Jack Dain, a former missionary and a senior bishop of the Anglican diocese in Sydney, Australia, was the first executive chair of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. When in my mid-forties I succeeded him in that role he showed his servant spirit by insisting that he serve as my assistant at Lausanne gatherings, even embarrassing me at times by insisting on carrying my suitcase – he a man twenty years my senior. From Jack I gleaned the wisdom of one who had been through much, learned through much, and prayed through much. When I later went through some dark times he became my advocate and a strong rock to lean on.

Evon and Billy and Jack were concerned for me and not just their own agendas. They cared for me as Paul did Timothy, the protégé of whom Paul wrote that he had “a genuine interest in your welfare” (Philippians 2: 20,21). So, remembering what Paul was to him and these mentors were to me, I have wanted to have the mind-set of Timothy: caring for others.

Over three decades I had the privilege of preaching in many countries, and often to large crowds. But at the same time my great joy, along with seeing people come to faith in Christ, was to meet and encourage younger men and women, to be a friend to them, and to see them emerge into their own calling as leaders.

About the time I turned fifty the arc of my calling changed. In part this came from a realization that a major leadership shift was taking place throughout the Christian world. Leaders who

emerged after the Second World War were getting older. A new generation was coming on the scene with fresh new visions.

Jeanie and I also went through a grievous loss when our son Sandy died during heart surgery at the age of twenty-one. A young man with a heart for God, Sandy was a leader for Christ at his university. His death touched his peers deeply.

Sandy was a very good long distance runner. Once, as he was leading in a mile race his legs gave out and he fell forty yards short of the finish line. He got up, ran on, and fell again. Finally, pulling up to his knees, he crawled across the finish line, and won. The local paper showed him sprawled on the track with the headline, “Prep Runner Lays Heart on the Line.” That determination showed in his heart for God – a passion to press on to know the Lord. So our loss brought to Jeanie and me a strong desire to help other young leaders to run their race for Christ.

God was calling us to a “new thing,” a call confirmed in the words of Isaiah: “Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:18,19). Difficult as it was after many years to leave Billy’s organization we realized that in our lives one chapter was flowing into another.

- Chapter one had been as a preaching evangelist worldwide.
- Chapter two involved drawing evangelism and mission leaders together in cooperation as chair of the Lausanne movement.
- This new chapter was one of identifying and developing the emerging leaders around the world.

In 1986 we founded Leighton Ford Ministries (LFM) to help young leaders: to lead more *like* Jesus, more *to* Jesus, and more *for* Jesus, and to be kingdom seekers rather than empire builders.

We began programs of leadership development and spiritual mentoring, aimed at shaping younger leaders to become “sharp arrows” (Isaiah 49:2) in the Lord’s hand – sharp in vision like the point of an arrow, broad in understanding like its base, and deep in God like an arrow’s shaft.

We were teaching about leadership, evangelism, and communication, but before long much of my own time was spent in long walks and talks with young leaders, wherever we were meeting, listening deeply to their desires and longings, their hopes and heart questions.

While they were grateful for the teaching sessions, I sensed that most of all they longed for an older person who would walk with them, without having a particular agenda to impose, and would help them to discern what God was saying to them.

Together we were experiencing “holy listening,” what across years of Christian tradition has been called “spiritual direction.” It was a term not very familiar in many evangelical circles, but one that now has become much more widely understood and practiced.

So our ministry – in evangelism, and of developing evangelism leaders - has flowed quite naturally into the ministry of spiritual mentoring.

For those called to lead *like*, and *to*, and *for* Jesus, we want to be *Artists of the soul and friends on the journey*.

Deeper and Wider: the Mentoring Community

We initially set out our mission in these words:

To deepen and energize emerging leaders
on their journey with Christ
through significant interactions,
strategic teaching,
and spiritual friendships.

My own spiritual mentoring has been carried out through retreats, both for individuals and through several select mentoring groups with which I have met annually for many years. At the end of one retreat a group member challenged me.

“You have set a table for us, a place of hospitality and nurturing,” he said. “You can’t take it down. I think you should let this grow into a mentoring center.”

A mentoring center? I took his words to heart. But how to do it at this stage of our life and ministry?

Around this time I had been drawn to a poem by Rainer Marie Rilke:

I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
but I give myself to it.

My life had been one of widening circles – from the small city where I grew up in Canada, literally across the world – and now compacting into these mentoring groups, linked “circles of trust.” Jeanie and I were ready to be part of what might be the “the last circle” – and perhaps the most fulfilling – and to give ourselves to it.

God had entrusted us with some valuable resources to share and pass on:

- relationships and networks – quite an amazing number of them
- hopefully some wisdom and skills learned by experience
- good will and prayerful support
- a modest source of funds

What we felt led to create was a kind of “trust” – a “spiritual will” we might say – through which we could share and give away to other like-minded persons resources they in turn could pass on to other emerging leaders in the years to come.

After a time of thought and prayer and counsel, we decided, in addition to my own personal ministry, to launch *The Mentoring Community* - a kind of “second growth” of our ministry.

The aim is to deepen and multiply the ministry of spiritual mentoring, by creating and supporting new and ongoing spiritual mentoring groups. In this we seek to follow the transforming leadership of Jesus. He proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, preached to the crowds, fed and healed and forgave – and above all died to be our Savior and rose to be our one Lord. But he also forged an ongoing community of disciples through whom the Holy Spirit would continue what he began.

He helped his disciples to grow life on life, in the routines and passages of his life. And because of what he modeled, we believe that a “deep and wide” impact on the lives of emerging leaders comes, by God’s grace, largely through long-term relationships of spiritual mentoring and friendship. Bringing people together over the years in “circles of trust” (a descriptive phrase from Parker Palmer) is vital. These become safe places where servants/leaders in ministry can be received and welcomed, helped to listen to what God is saying to them, and encouraged and prayed for to become all they can be for Christ.

More than leaving a personal legacy, we see the mission of LFM growing deep and wide into the future through the Mentoring Community.

Billy Graham on what he would do if he were starting ministry again:

I think one of the first things I would do would be to get a small group of eight or ten around me that would meet a few hours a week and pay the price. It would cost them something in time and effort. I would share with them everything I have learned, over a period of years. Then I would actually have twelve who would in turn take eight or ten or twelve more and teach them. I know one or two churches that are doing that, and it is revolutionizing the church. Christ, I think, set the pattern. He spent most of his time with twelve men. He didn't spend it with a great crowd. In fact, every time he had a great crowd it seems to me that there weren't too many results. The great results, it seems to me, came in his personal interviews and in the time he spent with the twelve.

THE CALL OF THE LFM MENTORING COMMUNITY

When we launched the Mentoring Community we amplified our calling in some fresh words:

To advocate and practice
the art of Christ-centered spiritual mentoring
from generation to generation
so as to enhance the spiritual, emotional,
and relational health
of kingdom-seeking leaders,
men and women who have a passion to lead for Jesus,
like Jesus, and to Jesus
and through his Spirit
to be a part of God's transforming presence
in their communities around the world.
(Rock Hill, South Carolina, March 29, 2006)

What do we mean by spiritual mentoring, or spiritual direction?

It is not quite the same as what is often called “discipling,” nor the same as coaching, counseling, or teaching. All of these are important elements in leadership development, and a helpful part of mentoring. The focus of spiritual mentoring, however, is to help people pay attention to what God is doing in their lives and to respond. It is not “directing” others in the sense of imposing an agenda on them and telling them what to do. Rather it is meant to be friends, who listen deeply, and who may point out what God is doing and help them to discern God's agenda.

Why the need for spiritual mentoring?

Not only do we have the example of Jesus' own mentoring, but there is a critical need for leaders in ministry today, with all the pressures they face.

At our initial Rock Hill gathering a question was posed by Lon Allison, director of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, and a member of our mentoring Point Group.

“What do you think is the number one value of evangelical leaders in the US?” he asked.

“What do you think?” I responded.

“I'd say it's frenzied busyness,” he answered. “Based on what leaders talk about when we get together at meetings. Everyone is talking or complaining about how busy they are. And if that's what we talk most about it must be what we value most!”

A sobering observation. Whether or not it's a “value,” I have no doubt that most ministers are not only overly busy, but lead distracted lives in a busy world. Journalist Thomas Friedman has said that all of us tend to live in a state of “continuous partial attention.” With so many devices and communication tools available there is no longer a “work week”, with a beginning and an end. Leaders tend to be “on” all the time.

Not only are leaders hassled by the external pressures of a busy world, and the expectations others place on us, but they also live with the internal pressures of dealing with the issues of their own hearts.

I often quote to younger leaders (and some older ones too) an unusual definition of leadership by the educator Parker Palmer:

A leader is a person who has an unusual degree or power to project on other people his or her shadow, or his or her light.

They usually respond with a nod and a smile – or a grimace. We can all think of leaders who are light-projectors and

others who spread darkness, but we also realize that in each of us there are places where light shines, and unrecognized shadow places that need to be brought into the light.

Not only so, but within and under all of this there is also a “prince of darkness” at work who wishes to exploit the dark places of the world and our hearts to despoil us as kingdom leaders.

In the midst of these pressures, from without and within, where can leaders go for safe places and times of renewal? Where can they find an older and hopefully wiser person willing to give them time, listen to their hearts, share their hurts, and help them to discern God’s agenda for them? That is the question that leads to the need for spiritual companionship and mentoring.

***An appreciation from Stephen
(pastor/evangelist/mentor) Sydney, Australia***

“The Point Group has become a very safe and secure place to share my life, my brokenness, my ministry, my disappointments and my joys ... the still waters and green pasture of a busy year ... an experience of Christian generosity affirming me in Christ and the ministry. Traveling with others, seeing them grow as they have been shattered by loss or delight in ‘success’ we are friends, partners, brothers and sister on the journey”

Distracted lives and attentive leaders

In this busy and distracted world one of the oldest, most important, and most difficult spiritual disciplines is simply being attentive. Jesus told his followers to “give your full attention to what God is doing right now” (Matthew 6:33 in *The Message*).

The poet Mary Oliver offers instructions for living a life in three short lines:

Pay attention
Be astonished
Tell about it.

The problem is that many days we don't pay attention, are not astonished, and at the end of a day have nothing to tell.

Spiritual mentoring at its best teaches us to be attentive ones, calling us to the stillness, silence, and solitude which are needed to quiet our over-busy minds and souls.

*In a society in which entertainment and distraction are such important preoccupations, ministers are also tempted to join the ranks of those who consider it their primary task to keep other people busy ..., but our task is the opposite of distraction. It is to help people concentrate on the real but often hidden event of God's active presence in our lives. Therefore, the question that must guide all organizing activity ... is not how to keep people busy, but how to keep them from being so busy that they can no longer listen to the calling Voice of God who speaks in silence. (Henri Nouwen in *The Way of the Heart*)*

Safe places and safe people

If the stress of being overly busy is one reason spiritual mentoring matters, the need for safety and security is another. Every leader is to some degree a lonely person, often trying to keep on in the midst of conflict, criticism, and while the inner voices of doubt and discouragement echo, with all the temptations common to our human condition. For those in ministry leadership, the stress is magnified by fear of letting others know what we are going through. The temptation is to pretend everything is ok when it's really not, automatically to respond "fine" when asked how we are, when perhaps we are dying inside.

Who pastors the pastor? Who listens to the leader's inner struggles?

Lacking wise and caring guides, it is very easy for the leader to project a false self in which he or she becomes more and more defined by their role, and puts up defenses (and fences) to keep the darkness at bay.

*The spiritual journey is not a career or a success story. It is a series of humiliations of the false self that become more and more profound. These make room inside us for the Holy Spirit to come in and heal. (From Thomas Keating in *The Human Condition*)*

So, as Parker Palmer says, true leaders are those who have made the *downward journey*, to “where the monsters are” who have come face to face with their own needs and the reality of God’s unconditional love and abundant grace. On this journey we deeply need friends who know us well and love us just the same, and will stick with us whatever we are going through.

Years ago I recall Presbyterian pastor Walt Gerber pointing out that Jesus our Lord had *safe times* (alone with his Father), *safe places* (like the hills), and *safe people* (like his friends Mary and Martha and Lazarus in their home) to which he would retreat from pressure and crowds. Safe times. Safe places. Safe people. These too can be provided, by God’s grace, in a mentoring community that offers “circles of trust.”

***An appreciation from Deborah
(church planter/pastor) Portland, Oregon, USA***

"Like many pastors focused on making sure everyone else was taken care of, I was not accustomed to peers who were willing to sit and listen to God just for me and I needed it desperately. My group's care has made God seem more attentive. I look forward to this week each year as we freshen friendships, hear God for each other, pray together, eat good

food, tell each other our stories, rest in the presence of great natural beauty and God's presence."

A spiritual director? And where could I find one?

When I first sensed a call to this ministry, I realized that I could hardly serve as a spiritual director unless I had one myself. And, although I had been intrigued by Susan Howatch's series of novels about clergy in England who did have such guides in their lives, I did not know any "spiritual directors" myself.

Where to find one? I prayed – for direction! – and began to ask around. A friend told me of David at the Oratory and I went to see him, not without some trepidation. Who was this person? And could I entrust to him the matters of my heart?

David immediately put me at ease in his office. He was relaxed and friendly, and I felt comfortable in telling him what I was seeking. Would he be open to begin a relationship of spiritual direction with me?

He smiled. And said that he might not be qualified to be my director, but he was certainly willing to be a praying companion. Which was just what I hoped for.

And that is exactly how I have come to think of spiritual direction: not as a matter of directing others from a place of authority, but the offer of spiritual companionship on our journeys.

Spiritual mentoring is an art, the art of friendship. It begins with the offer of hospitality – of open time and place and heart. It provides deep and attentive listening to the other, prayerfully and quietly in God's presence. Its character is receptive, not intrusive. It involves listening more than speaking. It calls for patient waiting, and not being afraid of silences.

It is the sacred gift of being with the other, in the presence of Another, of listening to them and to our own hearts, of being alert to signs of how God may be speaking, of raising questions gently, and of speaking when it seems that God gives us a word to

share, whether of encouragement, or concern, or clarification.

It is not prescribing so much as helping them to pay attention to what God is already speaking and doing in their lives, pointing them in the directions to which God may already be calling.

Perhaps the finest biblical portrait of spiritual direction is that wonderful story at the end of Luke's gospel, where two lonely disciples are trudging to Emmaus, deeply disappointed that their Lord is gone, dead, crucified, their hopes dashed. Jesus comes alongside. He walks beside them awhile, unrecognized at first. He listens to their conversation. Asks them probing questions and points them to scriptures explaining that the Messiah has to die. The stranger gently explores their doubts, and encourages them to believe. Then, accepting their invitation to supper, he breaks the bread and in that moment they recognize him and he lights up their lives! Truly he is *the* Friend on the journey.

From his first calling of disciples to the end, Jesus the Lord was the friend of those he called. So also at its best, spiritual mentoring is a long-term companionship (mine with David was for ten years until his death). Over time, as someone has said, a spiritual director comes to remember our own song when we have forgotten it.

The Anam Cara

In the Celtic tradition, there is a beautiful understanding of love and friendship. One of the fascinating ideas here is the idea of soul-love; the old Gaelic term is anam cara. Anam is the Gaelic word for soul and cara is the word for friend ... In the early Celtic church, a person who acted as a teacher, companion, or spiritual guide was called an anam cara. It originally referred to someone to whom you could share your innermost self, your mind, and your heart. This friendship was an act of recognition and belonging ... In everyone's life

there is great need for an anam cara, a soul friend, in this love you are understood as you are without mask and pretension. Where you are understood, you are home. (From John O'Donohue's Anam Cara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World. New York, NY: Bantam Books. 1999. 35).

Some descriptions of spiritual direction/mentoring

- Helping a person to discern the movements of the Holy Spirit in one's life, assisting in the difficult task of obedience to these movements, and offering support in the crucial life decisions that our faithfulness requires. (Henri Nouwen)
- Domination and submission are not what spiritual direction is about, but "holy listening," presence and attentiveness... spiritual direction is hospitality. (Margaret Guenther)
- Evangelism is a special case of spiritual direction ... helping people to see how God is at work in their lives already. (Ben Johnson)
- Help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personal communicating God, to grow in intimacy with God, and to live out the consequences of that relationship. (William Barry and William Connolly)
- Spiritual direction is not discipleship, where one person guides another through a formal discipleship program. Rather, it is an ongoing relationship in which one person helps another seek God's direction in how to experience love, grace, and guidance as a disciple of Jesus. (Alice Fryling)
- Spiritual direction takes place when two people agree to give their full attention to what God is doing in one (or

both) of their lives and seek to respond in faith. (Eugene Peterson)

- Sometimes spiritual direction is a little like bird watching – waiting quietly and noticing what appears. (Jeannette Bakke)
- Spiritual direction is a prayer process in which a person seeking help in cultivating a deeper personal relationship with God meets with another for prayer and conversation that is focused on increasing awareness of God in the midst of life experiences and facilitating surrender to God’s will. (David Benner)

Scripture gives numerous examples of the ministry of mentoring others – Moses with his young aide Joshua, Elijah passing his mantle to Elisha, Paul with Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila helping others, and most of all Jesus choosing from the crowds twelve to be with him, learn from him, and be sent by him.

***An affirmation from Jonathan
(missionary/church planter) Mexico City, Mexico***

“The opportunity to ‘hear myself’--and to get feedback from what the group is hearing - helps me to listen God's voice more clearly. I've struggled with focusing too much on myself ('How am I doing?'). As a lead pastor I cannot realistically share openly about this inner wrestling, but I can do that in our gatherings. The group's insights help to focus myself more God-ward and less me-ward! My mentor is always a voice of affirmation. I feel like Timothy or Titus encouraged by Paul to serve Christ with courage, even in difficult circumstances of ministry conflict.”

Spiritual mentoring is Christ-centered.

Most important about this art of spiritual mentoring is that Christ himself, as Van Gogh said, is an artist, who fashions people. Above all we listen to him, trust him. Among all the voices that call to those of us in ministry – from the world, from our colleagues, from our own minds – there is one Incomparable Voice.

From the beginning the entire Bible is the record of the God who speaks, in creation, in history, and through his prophets. Isaiah provided this remarkable testimony:

The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious, I have not drawn back. (Isaiah 50:4,5)

God wakes us first to listen, then to have a word for others - words that are apt, right, timely, helpful, convicting, sustaining.

Now, in this present age, the writer of Hebrews tells us, the God who spoke in many ways through the prophets has spoken his most excellent word through his Son, the one through whom he created the worlds and who is the full reflection of God's glory. (Hebrews: 1:1-3)

This is exactly what the Voice said on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:8)

So Jesus says of himself as the good shepherd, "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out ... his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." (John 10:3-5 NIV)

The Good Shepherd is also our model as the Great Listener. Remember his words about listening: "He who has sent me is true, and I speak to the world those things, which I heard from him." (John 8:26)

Of course we don't have that unique intimacy that the Son had with the Father, but he can be our model of listening – including how he listened to others. The One who spoke powerfully also listened deeply. Recall his conversation with the woman of Samaria by the well (John 4). Count the words spoken. She spoke four times as many as Jesus did. In listening as well as speaking he blessed those he encountered.

In this art of spiritual mentoring, Jesus is central. He is the Word. Through Scripture and the Holy Spirit we listen to him. He is the Mentor/Shepherd who guides us, as well as those we mentor. And the end of all our mentoring is that together we become more like him, transfigured into his likeness.

In the lovely words of Gerard Manley Hopkins:

For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

Here is the ultimate goal of spiritual mentoring of leaders: not only that they will be effective leaders, but leaders in whom Jesus is seen, and God is glorified.

***An affirmation from Josh
(campus pastor) New York, New York, USA***

“This mentoring group has given me the safe space to be transparent about my personal life and ministry. The support and feedback has brought direction, growth, and courage, and a much-needed, annual dose of perspective. I have formed friendships that span geography and years, people who have a unique voice for speaking timely and godly wisdom into my life. It provides a refreshing break from the hurry of ministry life, a place where rest and renewal are valued.”

Spiritual mentoring and the art of listening

Spiritual mentoring/direction is not essentially a program, a technique, or a profession. It is an art - the art of listening to others and with others in the presence of Another.

At its heart, this art is a gift from God for others: a gift of listening. Spiritual mentoring it has been said is “holy listening” – listening together, to one another, and most of all to God.

Like any art it is also a practice, an attitude of the ear, the mind, the heart. And we can learn through practicing the gift to listen for their concerns, and to listen for the right “word” to share with them.

Once I was sitting outside a church in Canada with a young friend who had just been called as senior pastor of this historic congregation, which had been declining for years. He told me he was afraid he could not match up to the challenge. I said to him, “Ken, remember God is an artist. He doesn’t make copies. He makes originals. You don’t need to copy someone else. Be who God has called you to be.” Years later he recalls how those few words gave him fresh confidence.

The leader as listener and artist

Listening and mentoring are partners in a dance. It is not surprising that the etymology of the word ‘mentor’ is taken from the noun mentos, which literally means: intent, purpose, spirit, or passion ... it is the task of the mentor to listen for the passion and purpose perhaps not yet revealed, in the one being mentored. (From article by Celeste Snowber. The mentor as artist)

Leaders are often known as good speakers, yet listening has often been overlooked as a key attribute of leadership. When I was young in ministry I remember spending time with several well-known leaders. After long conversations I realized that I knew

almost everything about them, but they knew almost nothing about me. They seldom asked a question. Starting then I was determined I would try to be a listener to others – and later especially to listen to younger leaders coming along. And I found that I learned as much from them as they may have from me.

The leader must be a superb listener...successful leaders we have found are great askers and they do pay attention.
(Warren Bennis in *Leaders*)

If listening is of great value for leaders in any field, it is especially so for those of us who are sensing a call to the ministry of spiritual mentoring and to help guide others.

To live out our call we need to be a community of “superb listeners, who are great askers, and do pay attention.” So a central mark of the Mentoring Community is a commitment to help each other to listen: to God, to our own hearts, and to each other.

This is why our Mentoring Community Gatherings, where we come together to experience and learn about this art, are not conceived as seminars or workshops. They are times to “gather” our thoughts, ask our questions, and learn together; times to listen together, to help each other to discern God’s calling, and to offer this gift to others.

Effective spiritual mentors will seek to learn the practice of “active listening.” Often when we talk with another we are only half-listening, often distracted, thinking of something else. Active listening focuses the attention on the one who is speaking. Think back to those persons who have had the biggest impact on you. Chances are they are powerful listeners.

Again, this is spiritual direction at its core: *wholly and holy listening.*

***An appreciation from Michelle
(spiritual formation pastor) Boston, Massachusetts, USA***

“When I meet with my mentor and ministry peers, it is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on my story and find God in fresh and surprising ways. It is extremely energizing to journey with my brothers and sisters in Christ through their ongoing stories, and to be surprised with them as we uncover God's incredible work. When I want to quit, I am encouraged by those journeying with and ahead of me. This is my real life ‘great cloud of witnesses’ that cheers me on, gives me perspective, reminds me God is ever with me.”

Spiritual mentoring as a way of listening to the Word and the Spirit

Our busy lives and overfull minds and hearts often make it difficult to listen deeply to God's voice. Spiritual mentoring does not take place in a vacuum. It involves first a silencing of the heart and mind to listen to others, but first of all listening for the Word that God has through Scripture for this time.

A personal practice of finding God in the Word:

- *First, bring yourself to God as you are. All you have to bring is yourself.*
- *Sit comfortably, your Bible open to a suggested reading.*
- *Close your eyes and become quietly attentive to yourself ... become aware of your breathing.*
- *Become aware of noises, smells, thoughts, feelings, lists, things undone ... allow these to come and then to pass by.*
- *Let the rush subside to a few deeper thoughts.*
- *Listen ... Listen ... Listen...*

- *Now you are ready to find God in the written Word.*
(Henri Nouwen. *Spiritual Direction*)

I have personally found this practice helpful in coming to attention in prayer, and also as a good way to enter into a time of spiritual mentoring with another person.

As one arrives we have a few minutes of greeting and chatter. Then I suggest we sit quietly for a time – often for several minutes. It may seem uncomfortable at first, but this is the time for busy minds to be quiet, to “be still and know” ... that we are in God’s presence.

I may then ask the one who has come to tell me what has been going on since we were last together, and what concerns, burdens, questions, joys, discoveries they are bringing to our time together.

Very often I have found that a Scripture that I have read just that morning is apt – perfectly apt – for the issue that’s on this person’s mind and heart. It is as if – *truly* as if - the Spirit has prepared my own mind and heart for what is coming. Indeed, he searches the heart.

So I can join with Isaiah in the words quoted above: “The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.”

Spiritual mentoring is whole life mentoring

In *The Call of our Mentoring Community* we have said that the purpose of our mentoring is “*to enhance the spiritual, emotional, and relational health*” of servant/ leaders – with a focus on the whole person.

Remembering, as the old church father Irenaeus said, that “the glory of God is a person wholly alive,” our desire is that we all grow to become all that God has made us to be, reflecting his

beauty in mind, body, emotions, spirit, and all of our relationships, being healed from the brokenness that sin and evil have brought into our lives. So then each of us, as members of the body of Christ, will be able to contribute to the health of the whole body.

Jesus' great commandment (and promise) was that we should love the Lord our God with our whole person – all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. (Luke 10:27)

Many kinds of mentoring can be helpful – some focused on career, some on personal development, some coaching on professional and organizational skills.

Our own spiritual mentoring has a dual emphasis – on ministry and on the personal and spiritual health of the minister. Mentoring needs to be both inwardly and outwardly focused. Without the inward focus ministry can lose its cutting edge; without the outward focus life can become too introspective.

It has become clear to me across the years that what God is doing in the career of leaders so closely relates to what he is doing in their character. So we need to be concerned to see how the “inner” and “outer” threads of their lives intertwine, as in one of the lovely Celtic cords.

***An appreciation from Stephen
(senior pastor) Manila, Philippines***

“I have been greatly encouraged by the authenticity and transparency of the group to live out an authentic non-compartmentalized Christian life in all aspects. To know that all of us go through similar experiences, temptations, struggles, and issues helps me to know that I am not alone... The support of close peers around the world who are praying for me gives me confidence to continue. The spiritual direction of my mentor and the peer to peer mentoring of friends is one of my most treasured yearly experiences. Our group is truly an ‘iron sharpens iron’ experience.”

Spiritual mentoring looks for kingdom-seeking leaders

From the beginning of Leighton Ford Ministries I have been urging young men and women to be “kingdom seekers not empire builders.” So in our mentoring we have been looking for kingdom-seeking leaders, “*men and women who have a passion to lead for Jesus, like Jesus, and to Jesus.*”

Many years ago I took a page from the example of Oswald Sanders, an outstanding mission statesman of his time. Sanders kept a list of younger people whom he sensed had strong leadership potential, so that he could encourage them. I began what I called my own “GGTW” list – *Guys and Gals to Watch*. When I felt particularly drawn to someone I added them to the list, prayed for them, kept in touch by calls and letters, invited them to spend a day together, and occasionally to join me in ministry.

From that list came our first mentoring group – the “Point Group.” They came from different parts of the world. The distinctive focus of their ministry varied. So did their personalities and styles.

What they had in common was that *passion for evangelism* – to lead others *to Jesus*; that *servant mind-set* – to lead *like Jesus*; that *kingdom-seeking orientation* – to lead *for Jesus* and for his kingly rule.

This triple focus is at the heart of our mentoring, and when we invite leaders to take part we try carefully to discern if this is the kind of mentoring they desire and which will benefit them.

Spiritual mentoring leads us to be part of God’s transforming presence in the world

We are committed to keep the mission of evangelism – Jesus’ way of announcing and embodying the good news of the kingdom, and inviting women and men to follow him – always central both in those we invite, and in the way we mentor one another.

When we first met at Rock Hill to launch the Mentoring Community, we knew that our call must include this: to pray that all of us, mentors and mentees alike, through God’s Spirit, will be sharpened and broadened and deepened, “*to be a part of God’s transforming presence in their communities around the world.*”

In the words of the Lausanne Covenant, we want to be deeply committed to the vision of the whole church, taking the whole gospel to the whole world.

Our focus is on leaders in evangelism, not just leaders in general. This does not necessarily mean they must be full-time “evangelists” but that they have a passion to share the faith in the ways of their own gifting and vision.

The Mentoring Community model: a unity of values

Our strong desire and prayer is that the Leighton Ford Ministries mentoring communities will always be evangelical, contemplative, and missional. All three are vital:

- *Evangelical* – centered in the gospel of Christ, for unless we are grounded in Christ’s saving grace as Lord, guided by God’s Word, and empowered by his Spirit, the community may be walled in by rigid legalism, or sway in some vague spirituality.
- *Contemplative* – because without time and silence to gaze on God and listen to his Word we remain captive to the busyness of mere activism.
- *Missional* – because God is a missionary God, and as we abide in Christ we are also sent into the world by him as he was sent by his Father.

By the grace of God in Christ we are saved. In the presence of Christ we are transformed. Empowered by the Spirit of Christ we are sent as his ambassadors. These values we hold in common.

A diversity of styles

The mentoring groups, which we sponsor, meet for retreats once a year for four to six days, each with its own lead mentor.

There is, however, no one pattern or style that fits all the mentoring groups. Each reflects the personality and gifts of the mentor leader, and each is fashioned to serve a diverse group of mentees. The members are engaged in various ministries yet all having a strong commitment to share the good news of the gospel. They are at different stages in their lives and ministries. Their needs vary from time to time and year to year. Some groups are more spontaneous in how they spend time together, others more structured. There is freedom in the Spirit to be faithfully creative.

While there is no one pattern for a retreat, at the core there is always deep prayer and authentic paying attention to each individual.

Then the elements of a retreat may differ. Retreats may include times of listening to the Word, journaling, prayer walks, listening to and writing poetry, centering prayer, learning (as artists of the soul) to see in new ways, times of silence and waiting, free writes, silence during meals while listening to a reading – and times of games and play!

Again, however, while styles differ we are committed to three vital aspects in our spiritual mentoring:

- Attention to whole life development
- Withdrawing together for a time, yearly
- Committed to long-term, and ideally, lifelong relationships

One group on retreat

Perhaps it will help if I describe one of my own groups on a recent retreat. I have been meeting with this group now for about

ten years. Currently there are eight members, five men and three women, most of them now in their mid to late forties. One is Canadian; one ministers in Africa; the rest are based in the United States. Several have been or are pastors. One is involved in ministry education. Another is engaged in mobilizing missionary movements on another continent.

I had some kind of personal relation with each before inviting them to form a group. We met for the first time to explore the idea of an annual gathering, and since then have been committed to meet once a year.

Three others were part of the initial gathering. One chose not to join because he belonged to another similar peer group. Two dropped out for personal reasons and priorities.

One of the commitments we ask is that the members make this group a priority, and come for the whole time unless for an emergency. Our understanding is: “Each of us makes a commitment to be here as if we were the main speaker or teacher for this week.”

For this retreat we met again in a large old North Carolina mountain home of friends who have made it available without charge each year. While we have occasionally met in a more institutional setting we much prefer the informality and warmth of a home.

While two or three arrived early for an extra day of rest our official start begins Monday evening with dinner prepared by members of the group. After dinner we sit inside by the fire and talk informally, bringing each other up to date about recent happenings, and talking about plans for the week.

I remind them that our practice is not to fill the days too full – a mistake we made in the early years of our retreats. “So take time to sleep and relax and just to be together.”

We end the evening with a simple *Compline* prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer (BCP)*, which I lead with one of the members.

The next morning members rise when they wish and prepare their own breakfast. As we gather together about nine we begin with morning prayer again from the BCP.

Now it is time to begin our personal sharing. We agreed last night that each person would have about fifteen to twenty minutes to share, allowing more time to those who have some special need. In previous years individuals have taken much longer, and we sometimes ran out of time.

Who will go first?

“I am here,” says Elizabeth. We all respond, “We see you, welcome.” This is a traditional greeting we have adopted from the custom of a southern African tribe which uses those words to welcome a tribal member back home from a journey.

Elizabeth, a pastor and evangelist, a wife and mother, shares with us about her ministry, but mostly about her children, including her anxiety about a daughter whose knee has been badly damaged during surgery. When she is through sharing we pray for her concerns, some gathering around her with gentle touches. (My dog Wrangler has come with me to this particular retreat, and joins in the prayer circle!)

So goes the morning. One after another speaks as they are led, with no prescribed order, as they will continue to do the next day. Two tell about critical passages in their marriage. One is on a year-long sabbatical and study leave after leaving a difficult pastorate. Another is facing conflict in his denominational relations. Still another rejoices in his small son and the growth of his church in a very secular Canadian city. One of the women reports with pain how she feels totally unnoticed by her leader, yet is excited about the evangelistic trips she takes to remote villages in Africa.

Although we have been apart a year, we have an immediate sense of rapport and understanding. Each comes from a different place – yet all share the same desire – to live holy and humane lives – and all needing the support and prayers of the

others. This spiritual mentoring group remembers, and in a sense sings, each other's song – whether of lament or praise.

The group knows my song too. The third morning it is my time to share. This year mine is a song of loss and lament. Two long time friends have died, one of the first young men I have mentored is seriously ill, and I have been through a case of shingles (thankfully gone). I speak of not having my own pastor at some critical times, and the loneliness that can come to senior leaders. I am not only a mentor. I too am cared for by the group and need this time with them.

The afternoons following a light lunch are totally free for participants to do as they most need – take a nap, run or walk, have a conversation over coffee, read. What we ask they *not* do is to spend the whole time catching up on e-mail or making calls or preparing messages. Slowing down the mind is vital to opening up the heart. For some this is a very difficult rule!

Before dinner we sit by the outdoor fireplace, a cool drink in hand and a warm wrap around our shoulders, just being together. Later we share dinner, either making it ourselves (some preparing, some cleaning up) and perhaps eating out one night.

The evening times vary. This year one of the group has asked that we read Kathleen Norris' *Acedia and Me* – an updated reflection on the “eighth deadly thought” – what the ancient monks used to call “the noonday demon.” We talk about that jaded sense of disinterest in spiritual things – or anything – that can afflict us in the middle years of life. (The year before we read Margaret Guenther's meditations on Psalm 62 – *My Soul in Silence Waits* – and used a chapter daily to stir our reflections.)

A final shared prayer – *Compline* – ends our day together. Some watch a video. Others go to bed early and some stay up talking till after midnight.

We depart on the Friday morning; all with a sense of grace received and companions we will miss. But we will call and email

throughout the year – some more than others – and next year come together again in Canada.

A note on the group's leadership: Although the group looks to me as their leader (hopefully with wisdom learned from my own mistakes- and mentors) my leadership role has changed across these ten years. In the first years I did more teaching and setting of the schedule. As we grew together the times became less formatted, more spontaneous. And while I still convene the group, and give overall guidance, the group more and more guides itself, with an occasional prod. They have moved from mentor-led to peer mentoring. The community is speaking to each other. I do not regret that. They are growing, and so am I!

Small touches and frequent prayers

Not all effective mentoring happens in set times and places. My friend, and our board chair, Roger Parrott has noted that much of my own mentoring has happened in “small touches.” Often a thirty-minute walk or a fifteen-minute phone call have been significant for someone.

I recall some long late evening phone conversations with two different young leaders. Both were on the verge of losing either their ministry or their marriage, because of the stress of disappointment, fatigue, and criticism. In both cases God used a listening ear and heart, and some words of encouragement to hold out hope, and today they are both in even stronger and deeper ministries.

The social media can both distract and connect. I (we) try to stay in touch with those we mentor by regular e-mails among group members. Again, a brief word of encouragement – perhaps only to say “I prayed for you just now” can help to bring a new perspective.

Frank Laubach used to speak of “flash prayers” he would direct toward someone, even perhaps a stranger on a train, when so moved in his spirit. I find myself doing that, perhaps on a walk when my mind is receptive and a particular person pops into my thinking. Sunday mornings I often go “around the world” in quiet prayer, from Sydney to Singapore, and Vancouver to Marburg, and spots in between, praying for members of our mentoring groups as they minister that day.

Short personal retreats can be an added help to those we mentor. From time to time members of my own mentoring groups (as well as others) will come to Charlotte for a personal time of retreat and renewal. We meet for several hours to catch up, talk about the issues they are currently facing, and they then go to a nearby lake house for two or three days of rest, quiet times of listening for God’s voice, reading and journaling, after which they will return for a debrief.

So, God touches through us in many ways, times, and places.

A typical format for spiritual mentoring retreats

As noted there is no one format or schedule which is recommended or invariably followed. Each group, each retreat, is likely to be somewhat different. Yet they usually include the important elements of silence, worship, Biblical reading and reflection, sharing meals, listening to one another’s stories, prayer, fun, conversation, exercise – and rest.

For Example:

- Early morning: prayer walk or contemplative silence (optional)
- Breakfast
- Morning worship including listening to the Word

- Time for listening to and praying for group members
- Midday worship
- Communal meal
- Afternoon activities including naps, walks, conversation, perhaps one-on-one spiritual direction
- Communal meal
- Evening conversations, focused on a topic or book, or casual
- *Compline* prayer together to end of the day
- Quiet conversation and sleep

(Note: for further insights and practices found helpful by mentoring group leaders, go to www.leightonfordministries.org. See the link under The Mentoring Community, a section on Mentoring Group Practices)

The gifts we offer and receive in spiritual mentoring

God’s grace comes to us in so many ways – as one Mentoring Group participant said about his own life: it just comes! So we embrace this Mentoring Community as a gift from God to us – and one we pass on. I asked members of my group (described above) what gifts the Mentoring Community has offered to them. Here are some of their responses:

The gift of hospitality. “Setting a table to make us feel nourished. Not only in the place we meet, but in open hearts, food lovingly prepared, places of beauty and loveliness to gather.”

The gift of space for God. “This is not a vacation or just a reunion. I come to meet with God.”

The gift of listening. “Of being honest, not just blurting things out, but waiting for what shows up in the room.”

The gift of cleansing and renewal. “A kind of spiritual scrub down.”

The gift of trust. “And of exposure. We are able to take the risk of sharing the deepest things in our lives, knowing there is no competition. And complete confidentiality.”

The gift of story. “Over time we get to know each other – the sacred stories about our lives. It is a place for transparency.”

The gift of connecting. “With other like-minded people, networking. The peer to peer relationships are deeply valuable.”

The gift of generosity. “Unlike many training programs that benefit the sponsoring group, this is one that gives without expectation of return. And it is made available without charge.”

The gift of freedom. “Time to be in nature, to meet our own needs ...a nap, a walk, coffee. Space for what we need to do – play, write, pray, think. Not completely programmed.”

The gift of family. “Retreats are like a family reunion, a second family. I don’t do anything else where I am so received and nourished.”

Some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How do you understand and describe the Mentoring Community?

Perhaps best by what we call our “Rule (Way) of Life.” A *rule of life*, it has been said, is simply a structure in which spiritual formation is facilitated. A “rule” is not some kind of strict regulation. Rather it refers to ways of opening our lives to God in a regular way. As a mentoring community our “rule” refers mostly to how we see our call:

- We are called to serve as *a community of friends on the journey* - followers, companions, and learners - together in the way of Christ.
- We are *followers* of Christ as our leader, guided by the Spirit, on the Way home to the Father.
- We are *companions* with those who seek to lead like Jesus and to lead others to him.
- We are *learners* helping each other to grow in the art of spiritual mentoring (or, companionship).

Do you have a statement of faith?

Yes. The Lausanne Covenant is our statement of faith as a ministry. Leaders of the mentoring groups are asked to affirm the Covenant as an excellent contemporary statement of faith and mission. Members of the mentoring groups are not required to affirm the Covenant, although we desire them to be committed, biblically guided followers of Christ.

Where do we find “spiritual mentoring” or “spiritual direction” in the Bible?

The specific terms do not appear in the bible. But spiritual mentoring seeks to recapture a part of the ethos that Jesus modeled with his disciples. This pattern has been lost, neglected, or overlooked in our modern quest for quick solutions, easy growth, and frenetic activity. The call to “listen,” whether to God or another, is prominent throughout Scripture. There are many examples of older leaders mentoring younger, and the mutual sharing of wisdom, guidance, and admonition. One thinks of the admonitions in the Proverbs for young people to listen to wise guides. There are the examples of Moses with Joshua, of Paul with Timothy – and the group counsel Paul sought when deciding to go into Greece.

So, what place does the Bible play in spiritual mentoring?

A foundational and central place. In the Scriptures God has spoken most clearly and fully. We are concerned that some kinds of “spiritual direction” seem to rely more on our intuitions and thoughts than on God’s revelation. As the Lord reminded his people through Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8) In listening to Scripture we believe it is important to interpret all we read in the light of Christ, and that we rely prayerfully on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We also think it is helpful to practice *lectio divina*, in which we listen again and again to some selected portion, until we sense some word or words which seem to speak especially to us, and which call us to receive and act on what we hear. This we think is better than going helter-skelter through many passages, or skimming over one longer passage without inwardly digesting.

What does “lectio divina” mean? And where does this practice come from?

“*Lectio*” is simply the Latin word for “reading.” *Lectio divina* has come to mean, “hearing the Word.” It comes from an ancient practice when the Scriptures were read out loud to a group because there were no printed Bibles available. It is an approach (as described above) for an individual or group to read or have read out loud several times a passage of Scripture. It is more than listening to the words. As Basil Pennington described it “*Lectio* is listening to a Person present. God lives in his Word ... It may be the lips of another, the reader in church or in the Bible-sharing group, or our own lips that now pronounce the words, but it is God who speaks them.” (Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina*)

How do you go about selecting members for a mentoring group?

Each mentor/leader has to find the best way to do this. Generally speaking a group will be chosen from persons with whom the leader already has a mentoring relationship, or a spiritual friendship. Chemistry is a hard to describe affinity, but is very important. Most important is to invite those who have an open, seeking spirit, a desire to grow personally and in leadership, and a mind-set to listen, learn from others, and to have the mind of Christ in caring for the interests of others.

What kind of commitment is asked in starting a group?

We suggest asking them initially to meet one time, with the understanding that after that first meeting they decide if they wish to continue. If so, they are asked to commit to come together annually for at least three years. And after that to make an on-going commitment.

Each member is asked to cover one's own travel costs (with rare exceptions for some unusual cases). Each agrees to make the annual retreat a priority – to come on time and not leave early except for emergencies. We ask each person: don't make the group retreat an option. Treat it as you would if you were the main speaker or teacher. It is helpful to review and update the group commitment from time to time.

What do you recommend as the ideal size?

About 8-10 members. With more than that it becomes difficult to allow ample sharing time. With fewer than that, if some have to miss, the dynamic changes. But there is no hard and fast rule.

How important is it that the groups be diverse?

Quite important. With members engaged in different ministries, in various cultural settings, the cross-fertilization is very valuable. Similarly a group is enriched if its members have different personalities. Blending those who tend to be more activists with others more given to contemplative reflection help all to grow in their love for the fullness of Christ's body.

What about gender? Is it better for groups to be mixed or of the same sex?

That depends. Most of our LFM groups (including my own) include both men and women. Several, however, are of only men or only women. To a great extent this depends on the leader, his or her circle of ministry, and the need. We do think, in today's world, that there is great value in men and women in ministry getting to know each other well and to be comfortable with each other. As one woman said, "I mentor men in my ministry. And I

have learned so much from the men in our group.” The same is true of men learning from the women present. At the same time there can be great value for women to meet together when so often their contribution is undervalued. In some of our long-term groups spouses have occasionally been included.

Related question: what about groups including married couples?

Some reservations on that. For one thing, these are not meant as marriage enrichment groups. But in addition, one of our groups that tried including couples found it didn't work particularly well, partly because of scheduling problems if two parents were away from home at the same time. The criterion perhaps should be: that both are actively involved in ministry leadership, whether separately or together.

Do you recommend groups made up of members from the same ministry or locale?

Generally not. For one thing, spiritual mentoring may not be as helpful and open if the leader is also the boss. Also people may not speak as freely if the other members live or work too closely to them.

How does the overall Mentoring Community operate?

There is a small core group of mentoring leaders who set the direction and carry out the ministry, appointed by and accountable to the Leighton Ford Ministries board.

We sponsor a number of mentoring groups that meet annually in various parts of the world. Most of the mentor/leaders have either been mentored by Leighton, or have been colleagues with him in this ministry.

From time to time there are Gatherings of the community, to which we invite those who may sense a call to do spiritual mentoring, and who wish to explore further their own call. The Gatherings provide resources and ideas, but are less training sessions and more experiences of being part of a mentoring retreat.

We encourage those who come to a Gathering to consider starting mentoring groups of their own, not necessarily sponsored or funded by Leighton Ford Ministries, but with similar goals and values and practices.

Does Leighton Ford Ministries provide financial support for the mentoring groups?

Only modestly. We do provide some seed funds for certain selected or sponsored groups to get underway. Then they are expected to find their own means of support.

Are there fees to take part in the Gatherings?

We do not charge fees for the Gatherings or other events we sponsor. The gifts of friends of the ministry make this possible. From the beginning Leighton Ford Ministries has had a policy of not charging for ministry events. We want to make these opportunities available to leaders who otherwise could not afford to take part. And we want to model ministry as a way to give and not to make money. We understand that not every ministry can afford this approach. But this in part is our way of giving and encouraging and we hope those who benefit will also pass on freely to others.

As stated above, we do ask those coming to a Gathering to cover their travel expenses, with rare exceptions.

What resources can you recommend to learn more about spiritual mentoring?

Here's a brief list of books that may be helpful.

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- Ford, Leighton. *Transforming Leadership: Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values and Empowering Change*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 1991.
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Some guiding values of the LFM Mentoring Community

We affirm the Lausanne Covenant as an expression of our faith and practice with our mentoring communities worldwide.

We acknowledge our call to live out the whole gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, to lead like Jesus and to lead to him, and to serve God's mission in the world.

We focus on spiritual formation, as the process of becoming whole and redeemed persons conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.

We offer spiritual direction/companionship to individuals and groups, a relationship between those seeking a more Christ-like life and others who serve as guides in the process, knowing that all of us are growing together.

We help each other to listen for the voice of God in many ways - in nature, our own hearts, and the words of others - but especially in Scripture, to the words of Jesus the good shepherd with the Holy Spirit our constant guide.

We encourage long-term relationships in our spiritual companionship, and we also understand the importance of "small touches" and briefer encounters.

We expect mentoring groups to meet regularly, providing places and times and spaces for trusting relationships with God and one another.

We value confidentiality, loyalty and mutual respect, knowing that our attitude toward others should be that of Jesus Christ.

We practice disciplines such as holy and attentive listening, stillness, silence, and waiting in our times together – and prayer for one another while apart.

We model in our gatherings un-crowded schedules, with rhythms that include rest, physical movement, and times for fun and relaxation.

We request commitment by mentoring group members to make attendance at group gatherings and communication in between a priority, to stay through the entire time of a retreat, and as far as possible to avoid distractions from other responsibilities in order to be fully present.

We offer hospitality of heart, place and provision during our retreats, with generosity and humility, and that is affordable to everyone.

We trust that those who benefit from this mentoring ministry will pass it on to others for generations to come.

We recognize gratefully the guidance and support of the Leighton Ford Ministries board, and our accountability to them.

*Note: *All scripture quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.*

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