

Guideline for Covenant Partners

Life is a challenge. It is impossible to follow in the footsteps of Jesus without the help of a community of faith. According to Genesis God said, "It is not good for a person to be alone." The faith has always been passed from those with more experience, encouraging and sharing their wisdom. This is what Covenant Partners (mentors) do for those going through Confirmation. It is one way that the congregation lives out the promises made at the time of a child's baptism, to "guide and nurture and encourage them to grow in faith."

In Confirmation each person agrees to "resist evil and oppression, show love and justice, be a faithful member of Christ's church and further Christ's mission in the world." Covenant partners, along with parents, Sunday School teachers and youth leaders make these promises real, by sharing their stories of how to do this in the real world.

Discipleship is a way of living life, not simply agreeing to a specific set of beliefs. Learning this way of life must be personal, positive, practical, grounded in the Bible and relational. Covenant partners provide a unique role in doing so. It is a relationship of a young adult with another adult who is not a teacher or a parent.

A Covenant partner is an advisor. The name comes from Homer's "Iliad," it is the name of the person who advises Odysseus, and helps raise his son. In the broadest sense, a mentor is a person of wisdom who cares enough about someone younger to invest time, patience and energy in a relationship to help in their growth and development. A mentor is a wise, experienced teacher and advisor who can be trusted to have the younger person's best interest at heart.

A covenant partner is:

- *older and more experienced
- *is dedicated to the subject, believing it to be important
- *values learning and desires increase in understanding for the other
- *genuinely cares for the learner
- *encourage and support the learner
- *maintain positive, healthy boundaries

You will be asked to share their faith understanding, pray together, consider how the stories from the Bible apply to life today, struggle with issues of ethics and justice and serve others.

Covenant partners provide a supportive relationship to explore faith and what it means to be a disciple. They will be blessed by the unique gifts and energy of the young person they are mentoring.

Covenant partners offer:

- *Experience- they have struggled with good and evil, faith and doubt, hope and discouragement. They have "been there," so they can listen with empathy and support.
- *Practice- they are already disciples of Christ and serve God in concrete ways. They are willing to work along side of someone who is still growing in discipleship.
- *Caring- genuinely cares for the younger person and their family, friends, problems, opinions, and interests. They practice unconditional love.

Meetings with confirmands: although the confirmand will initiate the Covenant Partner (mentor) relationship, you may need to encourage regular times to meet. It will be the Covenant partner's responsibility to insure that these happen in appropriate times and places. It is important that discussions take place where other people are present, so that no one is completely alone with the young person. This is both for their protection and for yours. Meeting in public places like restaurants or the library or church when others are present, or at home when others are present are good choices. Ask the confirmand's parents about good times to meet.

A few mentoring tips:

Meetings need not be lengthy, so often before or after church may be convenient.

Confirmands are at the age when food is never far from their thinking. You will want enough separation from others so that, even if you can be seen, your conversations can be private enough to allow sharing.

Honesty is always the best course, even for embarrassing answers. Young folks are not afraid of asking direct questions and can easily spot insincerity.

Confidentiality is also critically important. They need to know that they can trust you to keep confidences, particularly with parent and peers. If you are uncomfortable about something you are told, please see me, as confidentiality is not the same as keeping a secret. You can be assured that I will make every effort to keep your confidences, as well.

You asking questions is always a good technique, as young folks need opportunities to share their stories.

Do not worry if your answers are not "churchy," or religious enough. You are providing the practical, human element of living a life of faith.

Do not be afraid of admitting you don't know an answer. Young folks appreciate your honesty, particularly since they will be exploring many areas where they do not know the answer.

Be willing to include them in activities and interests you enjoy.

Never underestimate the power of prayer. Keeping the Confirmand in your prayers will help them (and you) in ways you may not be able to imagine.

And may God bless you in this nearly impossible task !