



FIVE MINUTES WITH JOLENE BERGSTROM CARLSON

Jolene Bergstrom Carlson is the former associate superintendent of the Central Conference and currently serves as executive director and president of Ministry Mentors, a nonprofit focused on helping pastors live out God's call on their lives.

Q: Can you tell us about your work and what needs it addresses in the church?

Mentoring is of course very popular in business and medical circles in particular, but it is gaining momentum in the pastoral and spiritual leadership community. Ministry Mentors was born fifteen years ago—and I've been with them for three years.

Q: Pastors care for members of their entire congregation—but where do they go for encouragement and challenge themselves?

Often they have a hard time seeking support systems until there is a crisis or they are about to burn out. Ministry Mentors helps pastors connect with each other and provides interdenominational,

confidential support. Our focus has always been on training mentors to mentor pastors.

Q: You are partnering with North Park Theological Seminary on a new pilot program—what does this entail?

We see so many students with expectations of what it means to be in the ministry that are not always based in reality. So I started thinking, what if we could get into a student's life early and work with first-year students? If we open the door where it is normal and natural—whether you are a student in seminary or you're out doing ministry already—then it will start to feel unnatural *not* to have a mentoring relationship before a crisis happens.

This year we launched a pilot project with students entering North Park Theological Seminary to connect them with mentors. We have received a generous grant so there is no cost to participate. We have twenty trained mentors who meet once a month with

first-year students. If we have more than twenty students, some of our mentors have agreed to meet with more than one person. All but two of the mentors are Covenant clergy.

Q: How does mentoring help families?

This program is invaluable as it also addresses the way families are impacted by ministry and, in turn, impact ministry. Sociologist and Covenanter Lenore Knight Johnson, whose work has included research on clergy and families, is working with the mentors to help the students understand how seminary is affecting their families.

Q: Do you have any plans for continuing the project beyond the first year?

We are looking at what might happen in the second year or beyond seminary. Some of our mentors have had mentoring relationships that have gone longer in other settings and asked if they could continue past the first year. That will be great if it happens.