

Summary Report on Attitudes Toward Mentoring and Involvement in Mentoring Among Ministers in the Bethel Baptist Association

In order to accomplish the first goal of this project, “To examine the characteristics and needs of ministers serving in the Bethel Baptist Association” with specific relevance to the area of mentoring, the project director conducted a two-pronged study within the association. A written **survey** was designed and administered to all of the ministers of the association to obtain “hard data” on the subject. Then, selected ministers were **interviewed** about their personal involvement in and attitudes toward mentoring. Their answers to the interview questions comprise the “soft data” of the report.

The Survey

The written survey, along with the count of answers recorded, can be seen in **Attachment A** to this report. The two numbers appearing after each possible answer represent the **frequency** of that particular response (out of 31 respondents) and, in parentheses, the **percentage** of respondents who chose that answer. A complete breakdown of the results in spreadsheet form can be found in **Attachment B**.

The survey was mailed to all of the pastors and paid ministerial staff serving in the Bethel Association in mid-September of 2013. At that time, this was a total of 37 individuals. The survey was also made available in digital form and was emailed to those who needed another copy or who expressed a preference for completing it electronically. Completed surveys were accepted until a cut-off date of October 31. Multiple emails, phone calls, and announcements at meetings were given as reminders to complete the surveys before the cut-off date.

Although the project director’s personal goal was 100% completion of the survey, he only received 31 (out of 37) completed surveys back, or 84% of the total population of BBA ministers at the time. The project director has determined that the 31 responses obtained are a reliable, representative sampling of the total population based on two observations:

1. They represent such a high percentage (84%) of the total, and
2. When considered as a group, the six ministers who did **not** respond closely mirror the demographic characteristics (age, experience, etc.) of the 31 who did. Therefore, the project director assumes that their responses to the questions would not have been significantly different (proportionally) than the responses of the 31.

The survey was divided into four main sections. The first section aimed at providing a **demographic profile** of the ministers serving in the Bethel Baptist Association (age, years of ministry experience, tenure at present church, formal ministerial training, etc.). Several characteristics stand out based on these statistics. Generally speaking, ministers in the BBA tend to be older (average age over 52, median age of 54), have served more than one church (average

of four and a half churches served, median of three), have a vast reservoir of ministry experience to draw from (average and median of nearly 20 years in ministry!), and they average six and a half years of service at their current church (median four years). The overwhelming majority (84%) serve as senior pastors, often with no other paid staff to help. Nearly half (45%) are bi-vocational or have some other source of income to supplement their ministerial salary, and the overwhelming majority (90%) have obtained at least some formal ministerial training at the college level or higher.

The second section dealt with the frequency with which ministers encounter **ministry challenges** and their response tendencies to these challenges. Nearly all (94%) of the ministers reported encountering at least one new (first-time) ministry challenge each year, and 97% reported feeling “stuck, overwhelmed, or inadequate” in facing a particular ministry challenge at least once per year. When asked “To whom do you usually turn when facing a ministry challenge?” the most common answers given were “spouse” (61%) and a “minister from another church” (58%). “A key layleader” and the “Associational Missionary” each came in at a distant third place (29%).

The third section of the survey dealt with the ministers’ **relationships** with other ministers. Only one respondent reported feeling “isolated,” eight described themselves as “disconnected” (knowing a few others, but only superficially), and 17 (55%) described themselves as having “a few friends” in the ministry. Only five respondents (16%) described themselves as being “blessed” with close friends and many good relationships in the ministry.

Nearly a third (32%) of the ministers are able to get together with other ministers for fellowship and mutual encouragement at least once a month, and 55% get together with others at least one to four times per year. Four respondents (13%) said they “never” get together with other ministers and, interestingly, no one reported meeting with other ministers on a weekly basis. This last result is probably influenced by the factors identified in the next question as preventing or inhibiting relationships with other ministers. Far and away the most frequent factor cited here was “**time**” constraints (94%). Other major hindrances mentioned were geographical “**distance**” (48%) and “**money**,” or the expense associated with such meetings (29%). The project director found it interesting that no one chose the item “theological differences” as a reason for not getting together with other ministers.

The final section contained six questions exploring the ministers’ attitudes toward **mentoring** and their own personal involvement in actual mentoring relationships. Nearly all (90%) of the respondents agreed with the statement, “It is important to have a mentor.” No one said that they “strongly disagree” with that statement.

A substantial majority (84%) report having been involved in mentoring relationships at some point in their ministry. In fact, the average number of significant mentors recounted by these ministers was nearly three per person over a ministry career. When the ministers were asked “How many other ministers have you mentored?,” however, the results were quite

different. Over half (52%) said that they had never mentored anyone else in ministry! The average number of other ministers mentored by these respondents was one and a half.

Similarly, despite feeling that they have personally benefitted from mentors in their careers (48% “a great deal” and 19% naming it as an “essential factor” in their development), two-thirds of these ministers admitted to not actually being involved in a mentoring relationship within the past two years! Apparently, “mentoring” among ministers is very similar to “evangelism” among most Christians. It is a value that nearly everyone aspires to and agrees as to its importance, yet only a minority are actively engaged in it.

In addition to the simple descriptive statistics involving frequency and percentage of responses, average responses, and median responses, the project director was also curious about how certain selected survey items varied **together**. Specifically, how did items which measured a certain tendency, such as the respondents’ propensity to identify new or difficult “ministry challenges,” vary in relation to other characteristics, such as age, experience, training, and current mentoring involvement? To obtain a picture of these covariances, cross-tabulations were performed on two selected questions from each category of “ministry challenges,” ministry relationships or “connectedness,” and “perceived value of mentoring,” with each of four selected independent variables: age, experience, training, and current mentoring involvement (Question 11). The results can be viewed in table form in the spreadsheet found in Attachment B.

In addition to these cross-tabulations, an effort was made to discern the strength of these relationships by calculating the **correlation coefficient** (r value) for each. Then using an online calculator from Vassar University¹, the project director determined the minimum value of r required for **statistical significance** at the generally-accepted level of 95%.²

As expected, significant positive correlations exist between the indicator pairs (Question 1 and Question 2 for “ministry challenges,” Questions 4 and 5 for “connectedness,” and Questions 7 and 10 for “perceived value of mentoring”). When analyzed against the independent variables of age, experience, training, and current mentoring involvement (Question 11), the following **positive correlations** exist:

- Relationships with other ministers by experience ($r = 0.33520$),
- Frequency of fellowship by mentoring involvement ($r = 0.32860$),
- Perception of being helped by mentors with current mentoring involvement ($r = 0.41746$), and
- Frequency of encountering first-time ministry challenges by current mentoring

¹“Statistical Tables Calculator for r to p ,” Vassar University, web page; available from <http://vassarstats.net/tabs.html#top> ; Internet; accessed 26 December 2013.

²For the purposes of this study, with a sample size of 31 respondents, a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.301 or greater (in absolute value) was determined to be statistically significant (p less than or equal to 0.05).

involvement ($r = 0.45928$).

The last correlation may be surprising to some. But since the determination of **causality** is beyond the scope of these simple descriptive statistics, one can only observe that the ministers who are more actively involved in mentoring relationships currently also appear to identify their ministry challenges more frequently. Finding the cause of this phenomenon, whether it is due to them actually having more problems in their ministry than others, or simply possessing heightened awareness of these challenges, or turning more actively to mentors for help due to these challenges, must be left to a more sophisticated, scientific study of the subjects. Perhaps this would be a topic worthy of further investigation in another project based upon a “research model.” For the ministry project at hand (which is based on a “strategy development model”), the project director is simply concerned with describing the ministers in the Bethel Baptist Association to determine their perceived needs in the area of mentoring.

Comparing the same survey items, the project director found the following **negative correlations**:

- Frequency of overwhelming ministry challenges by age ($r = -0.32453$),
- Frequency of overwhelming ministry challenges by experience ($r = -0.45653$), and
- Perceived importance of having a mentor by age ($r = -0.35852$).

The first two of these negative correlations come as no surprise. The older or more experienced the minister, the less likely he is to feel overwhelmed by his ministry challenges. But the last negative correlation is problematic. It would appear that older ministers tend to appreciate the value of mentoring for pastoral formation less than their younger co-workers. Or, it could simply be that, the older the minister, the less he feels a need for having his own mentor at this stage in his career. It matters whether they interpreted the question as referring to all ministers in general or to their own personal, current situation. More sophisticated measurement tools and analysis might yield a clearer explanation for this rather puzzling response from older ministers.

The Interviews

In addition to the survey of all the ministers in the Bethel Baptist Association, the project director conducted more in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 10 selected ministers. These men were selected based upon their willingness to participate in a “Feedback Group” to assist the project director in the development of a peer-mentoring strategy for the association. After all 10 had been interviewed separately (between September 19 and October 28, 2013), they met together as a group with the project director on two different occasions to discuss the results of the research and to formulate a strategy to address the needs of the ministers.

Although these men were volunteers who had already indicated a willingness to help others in the association, the project director made a conscious effort to choose ministers who represented all of the various demographic segments of the target population in order to provide a

balance of perspectives. Eight were senior pastors and two were staff ministers. Six were full-time in ministry and four were bi-vocational. Six were over 40 years of age and four men were under 40. Four of these ministers were currently serving as elected officers of the Bethel Baptist Association, and six were not.

The interview itself consisted of seven simple questions, five of which were completely open-ended. The project director attempted to write down their answers as accurately and concisely as possible as they were conversing with him. Before moving on to the next question, the project director would read each answer back to each man to confirm and clarify. The interview questions and a complete summary of the responses can be found in **Attachment C** at the end of this report.

In compiling the summary, nearly identical answers were combined and the number of men giving that answer indicated in parentheses. Since respondents were allowed to give as many answers to each open-ended question as they wanted, more than 10 responses may appear for each interview question in the summary report. Only the answers to the two close-ended (“yes” and “no”) questions add up to exactly 10.

Nine out of these 10 men admitted to facing a recent ministry challenge that made them wish they had a mentor. They gave various descriptions of these challenges, many having to do with leadership style during times of congregational conflict or transition for the church. The various scenarios that would cause these men to seek out a mentor (Question 2) were as diverse as the individuals themselves.

Question 3 on the qualities desired in a mentor was very instructive, with strong agreement on the importance of **experience** with similar situations, **trustworthiness**, **humility**, and Christian **character**. Interestingly, formal education was **not** cited as a desired quality. In fact, one minister specifically preferred a mentor who was “not too highly educated.”

Time constraints was the most frequently mentioned obstacle to seeking counsel from other ministers, followed by issues of **pride** and a lack of **trust**. Related to the issue of time management is the attention and energy demanded by the immediate needs within their church, which always seem to take priority over addressing the minister’s own personal needs.

Most of these men (eight out of 10) felt that they at least had enough expertise in some area of ministry to provide some mentoring to others. But, once again, **time** and scheduling was most frequently cited as a hindrance to their mentoring of someone else.

In spite of these challenges, nine of the 10 men said without hesitation that they would be interested in participating personally in a peer-mentoring process within the association. Two specified that they would like to serve as mentors, two specified that they wanted to be mentored by others, and the remaining six said that they could participate as either mentor or mentee, depending on the needs and qualifications of their partner.

Conclusions

Most of the men serving as pastors or paid church staff ministers in the Bethel Baptist Association are middle-aged or older, have a good deal of experience in ministry, and are well trained for vocational ministry. Despite these demographic characteristics, however, there is an overwhelming appreciation for the value of mentoring for pastoral formation and leadership development, and a strong interest in actively participating in a proposed peer-mentoring process within the association. This bodes well for the minorities of under-40 and/or inexperienced ministers, who hunger for authentic relationships with their more experienced counterparts.

Considerable wisdom and the willingness to share it exists among the older, more experienced ministers of the association, while the desire to learn and a teachable spirit are there among the younger and less experienced. A process for bringing the two together in a network of purposeful mentoring relationships would be beneficial to all, and would contribute to the health of the churches which they serve. But, in order to be successful, that process would have to overcome the obstacles of the ministers' busy schedules, geographic isolation, and limited financial resources.