



The Value of Coaching: Rev. Don Underwood

As I look back on my ministry of fifty years, I am struck by the difference that was made by a succession of mentors, coaches, and one very special peer learning group. Even though I grew up in a United Methodist parsonage, I entered the ministry unprepared for the daunting task of leading a church of any size.

Most pastors bring to the ministry natural communication and pastoral gifts, but effectively leading an organization requires skills typically not learned in seminary. As I look back, I don't think I ever made a major decision without talking it over with a trusted mentor or coach. And this is the interesting part: even when my natural instincts were correct, a coaching partner both gave me confidence and helped me understand and gradually learn the principles behind good leadership.

In the early years I scrambled and found older and more experienced colleagues to mentor and advise me. In recent years, as coaching has become more specialized and available, we have prioritized some of our continuing education funds each year for professional coaching. As an example, we engaged a specialist to help guide the pastoral transition at my church as I moved to retirement. At one point we also added Dr. Alyce McKenzie to our church staff as a preaching coach.

I strongly encourage all senior pastors and PPR committees to work collaboratively to ensure that quality coaching is available. It is a relatively minimum investment that can provide significant returns with regard to both pastoral

effectiveness and job satisfaction. If our goal is to have vital churches and happy pastors, coaching can play an important role.