Disciple Development Coaching

Christian Formation for the 21st Century

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Foreword

If you are looking for a "program in a box/book" to transform your Christian education and discipleship programs at the congregational level, you will need to rethink your presuppositions as you read and work through the ideas in this pivotal work. A twentieth-century mentality will not carry you very far into the movement contemplated by Tidsworth and Harrison. This is an urgent call for the church to realign with the nature of the twenty-first-century world of which we are a part. If for no other reason, this book is a significant read.

The authors support their discussion with clear biblical and spiritual insights. The chapters also provide some good contemporary background from others who are writing and thinking about church development. Reading this book will help bring the reader up to date on leadership, church culture, change, and the general state of God's church in the twenty-first century.

All around us we hear moaning about how the church has lost its place in the world. *Disciple Development Coaching* is a highly relational movement that has the potential to empower all Christians to find their places in the world. It also locates the responsibility for the church's mission in the hands, hearts, and minds of all disciples.

The chapters are set forth in a highly linear and logical manner as the authors explain thoroughly their proposal. It is a "working read." The reader must place herself in the text and move through exercises in the context of a training manual. Yet, this is not a method or program. The entire foundation is relational, almost natural. One wonders why we didn't figure this out a long time ago.

The relationship between the coach and the disciple is a movement through conversation with a major emphasis on listening and empowering the disciple to develop competencies already available in his frame of Christian reference. The coach and the disciple ask, listen, explore, design, commit, and support in a shared experience that has a natural move back and forth. There is no beginning or end; it is a relational process that is part of an intentional long-term way of life.

As the authors state in the opening chapter: "Disciple Development Coaching is a way of thinking and relating that empowers disciples and focuses on change, growth, and transformation." The book

succeeds in defining, describing, and outlining how this can happen across the boundaries of faith traditions. This is a movement that holds promise for God's church. It is not something we should simply read and then put back on a shelf. It is a book we should read and then act upon.

—*Ginger Barfield*
Associate Dean
Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

Preface

"These are the kinds of conversations we Christian disciples want to have all along. This is really what we should be doing anyway."

We were winding down the workshop in Disciple Development Coaching (*DDC*) when a minister spontaneously erupted with the statement above. It was one of those moments when a person has an epiphany or gains an insight, and it's all he can focus on in those moments. Throughout this training we could just see the wheels spinning for this minister. He asked questions, engaged the learning, and was trying to wrap his mind around coaching disciples as a form of Christian formation. When his light bulb came on, it did so with a flash. He spontaneously erupted with his insight. "Yes, this is what we have wanted to do in the Christian church all along: engage in substantive dialogue and conversations with each other about our callings, dreams, and challenges."

We have yearned for faith-laced relationships that provide a context for exploring our faith and life. We have needed support, encouragement, and even accountability to help us rise to the next level of our spiritual lives. And now, this minister was putting it together. *DDC* is a tool to facilitate this kind of relationship and conversation. It is an opportunity to help each other grow into more fully developed people who orient their lives around Jesus Christ. This minister discovered in *DDC* a format, structure, and activity for doing what he wanted to do in his ministry all along: intentionally developing disciples. But it was not always so.

In 2008, I (Mark) was invited to facilitate a lay leadership retreat for a mainline church. A third of the leadership team rotates on/off each year, so the retreat at the year's beginning is to set an agenda, gain inspiration, and start ministries.

I was delighted with this particular invitation, having coached the pastor for a while and learned what kind of leader he is. He is the founding pastor of this church, and the church had progressed through several developmental stages through its twelve years of existence. Now the pastor and the lay leaders recognized they could not "be or do church" as in the past. Due to size increases, no longer could the pastor be the

primary disciple developer for every person in this congregation. No longer could the lay leaders operate as managers and not leaders or rely on the pastor to conduct all the leadership development with emerging leaders in the church.

Since coaching had been so helpful to this pastor, we decided to experiment with training the lay leadership in this concept. If the leaders could learn and apply coaching principals, then disciple development in this congregation could escalate.

In preparing for this retreat, I simply transferred many of the principals from coach training and practice to my presentation. I anticipated a great day and a half of learning, inspiration, and growth. About halfway into the retreat, the pastor and I used a break time to confer. "How's it going?" we asked. "Not good," we both answered. Quickly we refocused the retreat and restarted with a new agenda.

Later we debriefed what happened. The principals of professional coaching do have great promise for use in the church. However, the practice of coaching as it is designed for professional coaches cannot directly transfer to life in the church. The church's goals are similar, yet different. The church's context is unique. Professional coaches work by appointment, charge a fee, use professional forms, and have liability insurance. Life in the church is very different.

As you might guess, we traveled a long way between the first story and the second story above. Our current approach to coaching is the result of many starts and stops, of many learning experiences with clergy, church staff, and lay persons. Through the crucible of real-life experience, testing, and adjusting, we discovered and then refined our coaching process.

How do you decide on a name for a movement? Perhaps the best way is to allow the name to rise up from within the movement. This is how the name "Disciple Development Coaching" evolved. We did not sit down and think up a name, or narrow names down through conversation. Instead, this name found us. Let's deconstruct this name as a way to help you grasp the essence of the *DDC* movement.

Disciple
Following Christ's example in word, deed, and action

A disciple is so captivated by another that he wants to become like the other. He wants not only to learn the teachings of another but also to integrate and live out those teachings. A disciple is far more than a learner

or admirer; a disciple wants to model life after the other. The Christian disciple orients all of her life around Jesus Christ. She wants to so internalize the life of Christ that Christ-like qualities, actions, and attitudes emerge from within. Student, learner, and follower are all good words, but they lack the comprehensive nature of discipleship.

Development
Growing, changing, transforming, and moving toward goals

Some development happens unintentionally. Physical growth in children is an unintentional process. Of course good nutrition, adequate rest, vigorous exercise, and a safe environment contribute to physical development, but the developmental process has a life of its own. Development of disciples is different. Although we grow spontaneously at times, intentionality is involved. God does not force God's self onto us, but God wants a relationship with us, as demonstrated through Christ's incarnation. To develop as disciples, Christ-followers must want and seek growth. This is our contribution to the spiritual journey.

Coaching
Facilitating growth in others through intentional conversations

We first used the coaching process with clergy and church staff but quickly recognized its usefulness for developing all God's people in their spiritual journeys. Building on the principle in Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* that starting with the end goal in mind is a healthy practice, we direct our focus toward the end question of "What have you gained from this coaching conversation?"

After completing the following study on *DDC*, consider what you have gained. The book is organized into three parts: Part one provides the background, context, and foundation for and introduction to *DDC*. Part two describes the *DDC* model, along with examples and related practices. Part three focuses on the application of *DDC* to congregational life.

We believe that the Spirit of God is still moving among the people of God. Our prayer is that this *DDC* process will help open you and your congregation more fully to the Holy Spirit's movement in your journeys.