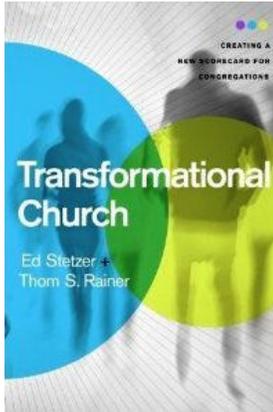


# PLACE AND SPACE

GCI pastoral intern discussion starter

by Greg Williams



Recommended reading:  
*Transformational Church*  
by Ed Stetzer & Thom Rainer,  
pages 173-198.

## How might someone prepare for a lifetime of pastoral service to the church?

This big question is faced by pastoral interns. Grace Communion International (GCI) helps people find the answer through the *Pastoral Internship Program*.

Pastoral ministry is first a calling from God and then a craft that is learned. In the Pastoral Internship Program, learning occurs through three layers of relationship:

1. The intern's relationship with their *Pastor-Trainer*, who is practiced in the art of ministry.
2. The intern's relationships with the ministers and members within their *host congregation*.
3. The intern's relationship with their *Life-Mentor*.

## Place

During my years as a church pastor, I served as the Pastor-Trainer to five different young men. I could not have done so without the enthusiastic support of the host congregation, The Carpenter's House in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

This small but forward-looking and gracious church became known as a "boot camp" for pastors-in-training. At first, they found the idea a bit humorous. However, by the time we were interning our third pastor-in-training, a commitment to preparing young leaders for vocational ministry had become a core value for that church.

Interns in the GCI Pastoral Internship Program find *place* within the host congregation. The intern is included in the ongoing ministry of that church and there finds a place to participate, to experiment and thus to learn.

In the host congregation, the student-pastor experiences "church community" through relationships with the congregation's pastors, ministry leaders and members—all part of an extended church family.



Church community is strong when the members are "plugged in"—given a sense of belonging and ownership. Community is strong when the members understand that serving is normal behavior.

Church community is strong when the congregation's leaders are actively involved—connecting with the members, and encouraging the members to serve actively in ministry.

When a Pastoral-Intern finds his or her place within church community, they experience their own sense of deep belonging, which leads to their own active and meaningful participation in the life of the church.

When I was a pastoral intern and then an assistant pastor (1986 to 1990), I served with two different pastors. I was impressed with how both invited me into their lives, both professionally and socially. They welcomed me into their homes, we exercised together and we shared occasional dinners out with our spouses. We shared life as both co-workers and as friends. An intern receives a rare treasure when given opportunity to serve alongside a pastor who opens a "personal place" for them.

## Space

Though helpful, the experience of *place* is too general without the accompanying role of *space*, which is provided through open and authentic relationships between the intern and their Pastor-Trainer and the intern and their Life-Mentor.

In the relational space between the intern and their Pastor-Trainer, the intern is helped to experiment with ministry; and then to reflect, converse and deliberate on those experiences.

In the relational space between the intern and their Life-Mentor, the intern is able to go deeper in their reflection—discerning more clearly God’s call on their life and considering how ministry weaves together with their family and other life issues.



The Life-Mentor plays a non-supervisory role. By offering a listening ear and words of encouragement, they provide a safe space for deep, reflective learning.

Within the relational space provided by both the Pastor-Trainer and the Life-Mentor, the intern finds valuable opportunity to look back and forward. Here there find truth-telling, meaningful strategizing and enhanced, qualitative growth.

### Discussion Starter Questions

This essay has described two critical aspects of a productive interning environment: *place* and *space*. The following questions are for the intern’s personal reflection followed by interactive discussion between the intern and their Life-Mentor.

1. How well are you connecting and joining into the life of your host congregation? In what ways are its leaders and members allowing you place and space in their lives?
2. How open and honest are you and the pastor with one another? How about the relationship with the Life-Mentor? How can you enhance your ability to communicate honestly with love and respect in both relationships?
3. Your Pastor-Trainer is serving as a “Paul” in your life and the Life-Mentor is a type of “Barnabas.” Who is your Timothy, or Mary or Martha? In what ways are you connecting and investing in him or her?
4. The reading in the book, *Transformational Church* will expose you to the concept of “Community.” Stetzer and Rainer speak of community in terms of small groups. How are small groups working to deepen community in your host congregation? In what ways are small groups contributing to your personal development?