



Should We Start a Life Coaches Ministry in our Church?

The vision of Life Coaches is to turn the tide of father absence by mentoring single parent young people in life skills, character development and Christian faith. Our mission is to equip the church of Jesus Christ to develop mentoring ministries to “father the fatherless...to defend the widows ...to set the lonely in families.” Psalm 68:5

Over fifty percent of children in the United States experience the pain of father absence. In some inner city communities, it is a staggering ninety percent. Father absence is the primary cause of both economic and social poverty. It is the number one correlate to dropping out of school, drug addiction, behavioral disorders, criminal behavior and out of wedlock pregnancy. And sadly, father absence begins a cycle that leads to more father absence for future generations. Father absence cuts across all racial and social/economic boundaries. In some communities the primary factor is out of wedlock births and in others it is divorce. In either case the effects can be devastating on children and often last a lifetime. Over eighty percent of young people who become incarcerated for criminal activity have grown up without a father in the home.

How would Jesus have his followers respond? James reminds us that “Pure religion that is undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction...” James 1:27. Jesus said “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me...” and “...I was a stranger and you welcomed me...inasmuch as you did it unto the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me.” Luke 9:48 & Matt: 25: 35, 36

Life Coaches exists to help equip churches minister to the father absent young people in their church and community. All of work is done through partnerships with local churches and other Christian organizations.

What is Life Coaching?

Life Coaching is becoming a friend to a young person who needs a friend. It requires no specialized skills. Life Coaches need only to love God and to love young people. They should have some gift for friendship, which generally shows up as good listening skills, empathy and ability to relate well to young people. Life Coaches® commit to long term

relationships with the child they mentor. As trust and authentic friendship is developed, Coaches are able to share who they are and what they have learned and are learning about how to be the person God created them to be. Kids often come to a new understanding of themselves, their gifts and their purpose. Our prayer is that they develop a strong commitment to love and serve God and to love and serve others as well.

In short, it Life Coaching is believing in someone until they believe in themselves. It is loving someone until they can love themselves. It is walking with Jesus alongside a friend until they can walk with Jesus by themselves. We believe that in the course of these long term friendships (the commitment is a minimum of one year), that many of these young people will get to the point in their lives where they will say that this cycle of father absence is going to end with them. They will commit to finding the right young woman or young man to marry before they themselves have children and they will commit themselves to that person and to God to stay in that marriage and to be the kind of parent to their children that God desires.

How Do We Get Started?

Most Life Coaches ministries are led by a lay person or couple. Pastors are generally too busy to take on another ministry, but pastoral support that is passionate and encouragement that is constant is vital to the success of this work. We call the lay leader a Life Coaches® Director and Champion. It is someone who feels called to this ministry and who God has equipped with sufficient leadership and organizational skills to make it happen. Life Coaches will meet with the interested Pastor(s) and lay leadership to discuss the process and to determine the best timing and approach for launching the ministry at the church.

What is the Role of the Life Coaches® Director and Champion?

The lay person who feels called to lead this ministry and who is approved by the pastoral leadership and Life Coaches is critical to the success of the work. Their role involves:

- Recruiting a Steering Committee
- Promoting the ministry in the church
- Arranging for a kick-off Sunday pulpit announcement
- Coordinating the Orientation and Training Session for prospective Life Coaches
- Promoting the opportunity to single parents and single-parent youth
- Connecting with other community groups like inner city para-church ministries or children of prisoner ministries for access to father absent kids.
- Interviewing prospective Coaches
- Reference checking and getting background checks done on prospective Coaches
- Matching Coaches and kids

- Supporting the relationships that develop with regular phone calls to parents and Coaches.
- Holding “Huddles” with Coaches three times a year
- Attending Champion “Huddles” three times a year
- Regular updates with the church and pastoral leadership

The time requirement for a Champion is similar to that of a lay leader for a Men’s or Women’s ministry. Four to five hours per week is often required to get the ministry launched and a similar time commitment is required to support it on an ongoing basis.

How does the Life Coach Champion get trained?

Life Coaches provides individualized training to the person approved by the church to lead the ministry. The initial training involves the five hour Orientation and Training session given to all prospective Life Coaches plus an individual five hour session with the prospective Director. All Directors meet three times a year with other Directors in their area for Huddles with the Life Coaches President. Huddles provide opportunities for Life Coach leaders to learn from each other how best to support the ministries in their respective churches. Life Coaches provides monthly consultative support to Directors on an ongoing basis.

Are there any risks?

Any ministry involved with children involves some degree of risk, but Life Coaches has developed a process that incorporates best practices to manage these risks prudently. All prospective Coaches are interviewed; reference checked and receive background checks. Churches require a minimum of one year regular attender status to ensure that the individuals are known by the church community.

To help ensure that Life Coaches are effective role models for kids and will have an effective influence in helping end the cycle of father absence, prospective Life Coaches are required to sign a “Character Covenant.” The Character Covenant stipulates that the mentor is a follower of Jesus, lives free from illegal drugs and will save sex for marriage.

Churches generally find that their current liability insurance is sufficient and that their current system of doing background checks on adults working in their current youth programs is also sufficient. A national background check covering all fifty states is available at a reasonable cost. To date there have been no known incidents of inappropriate behavior between a Life Coach and a youth.

What about costs?

While mentoring can be prohibitively expensive for many churches, Life Coaches® has found a way for everyone who is interested to participate. While most mentoring organizations estimate their costs between \$2,000 and \$4,000 a match (one adult with one child) per year, Life Coaches, due to the voluntary nature of its staffing, costs a small fraction of this amount. Our costs average less than ten percent of these national averages and are primarily absorbed by the Life Coaches for Kids® national organization. Churches that can afford it are asked to pay \$1,000.00 as part of a Partnership Covenant with Life Coaches. This minimizes some of the fund raising requirements for Life Coaches and obligates Life Coaches to provide training and consultative services to the church over a period of at least two years. In addition there is generally a cost of \$10.00 each for Training Workbooks and \$15.00 each for background checks. Many churches ask participants to share or pay these workbook and background check expenses. Churches that cannot afford the Partnership Covenant fee are offered reduced fees of as low as \$50.00 to ensure that cost will never be a factor in deciding to provide leadership to this ministry.

How does Life Coaches differ from Big Brothers/Big Sisters or other mentoring organizations?

There are a number of helpful mentoring organizations for young people, but Life Coaches exists to address several unique differences:

- Life Coaches is a Christian mentoring ministry. Life Coaches believes that while traditional community based mentoring can be helpful to kids, that true transformation require a holistic approach best embodied in a mentor with a deep commitment to following Jesus Christ as Lord and life leader. Unlike most mentoring organizations, Life Coaches requires that all mentors be followers of Jesus and display character qualities and a life style consistent with traditional Christian teachings.
- Life Coaches is an equipping ministry and not a direct provider of mentoring relationships. The actual mentoring is done by church and para-church partners. Our role is to help cast a vision for this ministry and to equip our partners through training and consultative support to become largely self sufficient in leading their Life Coaching ministry on an ongoing basis.
- Life Coaches for Kids® becomes a ministry of the partnering church and is shaped in a way that best meets the needs of the church and community. While Life Coaches has a few basic guidelines every attempt is made to work with local partners to design the ministry in a way that best meets the needs of their congregation and communities.

Is Life Coaches primarily designed for single parent kids in our church, for those in the community or for an outreach into the inner city?

Jesus said when we begin our work of discipleship we should begin first in Jerusalem and then reach out to other parts of Judea, Samaria and the rest of the world. For most of our partners, beginning in Jerusalem means providing a Life Coach opportunity to every single parent child in their congregation. They then reach out to others in their surrounding communities, perhaps through partnerships with schools or social agencies that serve kids in the neighborhood. Most of our church partners also reach out to kids in the inner city. This is often done in collaboration and partnership with an inner city church or para-church ministry. Life Coaches works with several children of prisoner ministries that are eager to partner with churches who wish to mentor these special needs young people.

Is our church the right size for this ministry?

Most successful Life Coach ministries are in churches of one thousand regular attenders or more. Initial classes of prospective Life Coaches should average fifteen to twenty persons from a church of one thousand members. A good goal for the first year of the ministry is to match ten to twenty adults with a corresponding number of young people in Life Coaching friendships.

What happens after the first two years?

Over the course of the first two years, Life Coaches will have worked with your Life Coach Director and Steering Committee, will have conducted Orientation and Training Sessions for prospective Coaches and will have equipped the church to carry on the ministry as an ongoing part of the churches youth ministry and outreach work. Ongoing training or consultative assistance continues to be provided for all subsequent years of the partnership and is provided by the Life Coaches organization at no additional charge.

Where are other Life Coach ministries operating?

Life Coaches started in 1997 in partnership with Urban Ventures Leadership Foundation in Minneapolis. Beginning in 2000, it organized as a separate 501C3 organization and began partnering with a variety of churches and para-church organizations in Minnesota. While we are still a mostly regional ministry, in the past couple of years interest has been expressed by many churches and organizations throughout the United States and increasingly other countries. Our largest partner is Emerging Young Leaders in Bangalore, India and we are currently in the process of developing partnerships in several new cities in the USA and other countries as well. We are also currently partnering with several ministries that work with children of prisoners, including Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree. A list of churches and contacts in your area will be provided on request.

Who provides leadership to the Life Coaches organization?

Glenn Jeffrey retired from the corporate arena in 1996 where he served as President of Ceridian's Performance Partners. Previously he had been Executive Vice President of Organizational Resources at Ceridian and earlier as a Vice President of Human Resources for the Pillsbury Corporation. He volunteers his time as Founder and President of Life Coaches and is supported by an excellent Board of Directors. The critical work of on site leadership and supporting the Life Coaching relationships is done by our partnering churches and their volunteer Life Coach Directors and Life Coach mentors.

How do you measure success?

Mentoring, when done effectively, is the most successful social intervention strategy ever studied by child development specialists. We know that even secular mentoring can make a significant difference in school attendance, academic performance, drug use and teen pregnancy. We believe that Christian mentoring, when done effectively, has the highest possibility of having a life changing and transformational difference in the life of at risk kids. Ultimately, it is through God's love, embodied in human relationships, that the pain of father abandonment gets healed and the cycle of father absence can end. Mentoring is not quick or simple and it often takes several years to experience substantial change. The measurement of our success comes as young people, once on a path to self destruction and failure, begin to see new possibilities for themselves and through the role modeling and support of a friend who deeply cares, commit to becoming all that God has designed them to be. Someday we hope to have long term statistical studies that trace the kids we work with through their adult years. Today we rely on the individual stories we experience of lives changed and changing, of hope renewed and grades improved. We hear from single Moms who tell us of positive changes in attitudes, behavior at home and school attendance, of the significant difference it makes in their kids lives to have someone there for them, voluntarily, who is a role model and who truly cares.

What's the next step?

Call Life Coaches at 763 475 0290 or e-mail GlennJeffrey@LifeCoaches.org. We will introduce you to Pastors and Life Coach Champions from churches you admire and respect. Within a few months you could have a Life Coaches ministry launched. It will energetically engage your adults and will support the most needy of your single parents and young people. You will be addressing one of the most critical social and spiritual issues of our day. You will be stewarding your time and resources with the most effective strategy for life change available. It will not always be easy, but it will make a difference in kid's lives. It will make a difference in your Life Coaches lives. It will make a difference for your single moms. It will make a difference for the kingdom.