

Abigail Johnson, *Shaping Spiritual Leaders: Supervision and Formation in Congregations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2007), 151 pp.

My work involves the placement and oversight of seminary interns, usually in congregational settings. One of the ongoing issues in that work is the training of internship supervisors. Most clergy have never been trained to be supervisors, and they are often resistant to the idea of thinking themselves as supervisors. They need coaching that will help them be effective in their task. In the future, I will recommend to new supervisors that they read Abigail Johnson's book *Shaping Spiritual Leaders*. They will find helpful guidance there as they take on the supervisory task. I will also encourage experienced supervisors to spend time with Johnson to continue to develop their skills.

Johnson is an experienced field educator, currently the director of the Ministry Based Ordination program at United Theological College in Montreal and formerly the director of field education at Emmanuel College in Toronto. She draws on her experience supervising theological students "in the field" to produce a volume that is practical, down to earth, and helpful.

Johnson places supervision into the larger context of life in the "typical" congregation, using supervision as a paradigm for the training of staff members and congregational leaders. She sees the congregation as a "unique learning environment" because "it is perhaps the only community gathering where learning can take place across generations, where we can learn as much from a 3-year-old as from a 50-year-old or an 80-year-old" and because it is a "gathering of people...bound by faith in God" (p. xi). Dealing directly with common resistance to the idea of supervision, Johnson encourages church leaders to embrace their identity as supervisors, while recognizing that not all persons will have the spiritual gift of supervision. In Johnson's paradigm, "supervision" begins to sound a lot like what others refer to as "discipling" or "mentoring." She draws regularly on a wide range of religious and secular scholars from the field of adult education to describe the process of supervision.

While on solid theoretical footing at all times, Johnson is also unfailingly practical. She illustrates the points she is making with regular visits to "Cross Street United Church," introducing us to Bill, the pastor, and a number of the lay leaders of that congregation, and uses them to illustrate the way supervision can work in a congregation. She provides a number of samples of such things as learning covenants, position descriptions, conflict resolution procedures, and covenanting liturgies. This is a very user-friendly book.

At the same time, it is sometimes a frustrating book. Some of the important issues that pertain to a pastor supervising a seminary intern are different from the issues that pertain to the chairperson of the worship committee supervising a new member of that committee who is learning how the altar flower system works. Both topics deserve to be addressed, but it was not always clear to me which type of supervision was being

addressed. Furthermore, as a layperson in the field of adult education, I was sometimes overwhelmed by the variety of scholars invited into the conversation and had trouble keeping them straight—or even knowing if I needed to keep them straight. I found myself wishing that Johnson had written two books, or even one book with two distinct sections: one on supervision as it takes place in the arena of field education, and the other on supervision as an expression of adult education and the exercise of leadership in the local congregation.

At the same time, I would not hesitate to recommend this book to internship supervisors and other supervisors of field education students. Johnson's insights into such topics as the meaning of supervision, the meaning of leadership, the role of power in supervisory relationships, giving and receiving feedback and moving to closure are a much needed practical addition to the field.

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