

A hermeneutic of trust

By [Jin S. Kim](#)

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As I read about Jesus' instructions to his disciples in Luke, I think of my church's instruction of interns. We offer a program that's designed for intensive and personal discipleship training and character formation. Over time, the interns learn to relinquish their sense of autonomy and control, and to begin to trust the wisdom, guidance and advocacy of their pastor and congregation in building up the community.

The interns respond positively to assignments to preach, teach or lead, but sometimes I ask them to shovel snow or do the dishes and they're surprised and even dismayed. I lead my interns the way I do because I was mentored that way by the man who has been my pastor and mentor since I was nine years old. He remains a trusted friend and confidant to this day. He sensed a call to the ministry in me years before I or others did. I trusted that he loved me, was my advocate, and that he was closer to the heart and will of God than I was. I never made a serious, life-changing decision without his counsel in those early years of ordained ministry.

I remember complaining to him during my first call: I have to get out of here; the senior pastor is old-fashioned and oppressive, and won't empower me as an associate pastor. My friend's response: Stay put. I wondered if he'd heard what I'd said, but I trusted his wisdom. A year later, I let him know how grateful I was for his advice since things had worked out well.

I realize that the average American would interpret this kind of relationship as cultish. But here's the thing: both my mentor and I were born in Korea. In Eastern civilization, it is an honor to be the protégé of a respected leader, and words like obedience, submission and dependence do not connote weakness, cowardice or laziness. I realize now that I am trying to get my pastoral interns to be more like Jesus, a Near Eastern Asian Jew who had no problem submitting to the Father, and expected such submission from his disciples.

Instead of a childish hermeneutic of blind faith or an adultish hermeneutic of suspicion, discipleship requires a hermeneutic of trust. We suspend judgment and relocate our locus of authority to a fallible other who has demonstrated greater trustworthiness than we have.

*Additional lectionary columns by Kim appear in the March 23 issue of the Century-
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