

PASTORAL SUPERVISION:

Introducing
a process of
reflection on
ministry
experience



A MANDATE FOR SUPERVISION

- Ministry, whether by the laity or by those ordained, is never fulfilled in isolation. Rather, it is always accountable to Christ who calls us, to the people to whom we minister, and also to the wider church who has both tested, recognised and commissioned that calling.
- Such accountability requires continuing competence in ministry and appropriate resourcing of Ministers with a variety of skills.
- Supervision is one means of ensuring regular reflection and critique of the effectiveness of our ministry.
- Such a supervisory relationship requires good communication, the challenge to reflect creatively, and an understanding of the ethos of the Church and the role and responsibility of the Minister.
- It is expected that Supervision is supplemented by Spiritual Direction.

PASTORAL SUPERVISION

Supervision is a safe, confidential relationship which provides a regular opportunity to reflect on our work and professional relationships. It only works where an atmosphere of trust is built up. Supervisee and supervisor are each responsible for building that trust by approaching the other with openness.

The desired outcome of truly pastoral supervision is a **continuing enhancement** of the ministry we offer. Along with this can go increased self respect, released potential, the capacity to see, feel and hear what we have tended not to see, feel and hear, and the bonus of increased health and well-being, as well as increased effectiveness in ministry. Research shows a high correlation between good supervision and vocational satisfaction.

Good supervision supports; challenges; encourages learning, self knowledge, professional development, good use of resources and time; and respect for boundaries.

Every **supervision relationship** is unique.

The focus of supervision is on actual events, on real, living, ministry situations and experiences.

THE FOCUS OF PASTORAL SUPERVISION

- The **GOAL** is continuing enhancement of ministry
- The **CONTEXT** is an atmosphere of **TRUST** and **OPENNESS**
- The **VEHICLE** is a **RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY**
- The **FOCUS** is actual **MINISTRY EXPERIENCES**



WHAT MAKES SUPERVISION PASTORAL ?

Models of supervision from business and industry, psychotherapy and social work have enriched and shaped our understanding of pastoral supervision. However, the question needs to be asked: What is distinctive about *pastoral* supervision? What makes supervision *pastoral*?

1. The concept of and basis for pastoral supervision lies in its Christian heritage:

“The ministry of pastoral supervision, as related to Christ’s own oversight and shepherding, seems to have taken place in the life of the church since near its beginning.”^{1 & 2}

Nancy Ramsay extends the metaphor of shepherd to include trustee, which incorporates the privilege and responsibility that people entrust to the supervisor. According to Scripture, the shepherd is to assure safety and justice for the vulnerable. Supervisors give assurance that the boundaries - personal and sexual - will not be violated. The word trustee similarly conveys that one is worthy of trust – a trust that is more than safekeeping or just action. It includes modelling an ethical vision that is trustworthy. Pastoral supervision involves shaping a person’s ethical standards for the practice of ministry.³

2. Pastoral supervision is concerned about the congruity between belief and practice.

The primary focus is on what happens at the intersection of what one believes and how one lives out that belief. It is at this intersection that the possibility of integration occurs.

3. Pastoral supervision is reflective.

Supervision occurs within a conversation in which people reflect critically on their personhood, ministry, and faith. Supervision is reflective in that the supervisor assists people in seeing themselves and their ministry more accurately, clearly and creatively. Having seen themselves, people can decide to make the changes they need to make.

The process of reflection enables people to take ownership of what they reflected back to them from another angle of vision. It is when people take ownership and responsibility for decisions and their future that the possibility of integration occurs.

4. Pastoral supervision is revelatory.

Pastoral supervision provides a process that can enable people to reflect on the movement of the spirit of God in their lives. The process of pastoral supervision helps us to consider what difference God's presence makes in our lives, and assists in the "movement toward insight" about God's ongoing revelation in the world.

One of the goals of supervision is to promote honesty. Supervision is tolerant of a person's weaknesses and shortcomings. It understands, but does not tolerate, dishonesty and self-deception. Pastoral supervision calls for authenticity and integrity. Its function is to encourage openness to the tradition, culture, and experience: places where God reveals God's self. God continues to work in our lives, bringing new and creative ways into being within us.

5. Pastoral supervision is contextual.

It operates at many different levels of ministry, within and outside the church. The key to pastoral supervision is the facilitation of theological reflection in these different contexts.



PREPARING FOR SUPERVISION

Supervisees are responsible for what they present in supervision and for identifying what they want to be the focus of their session.

Anything is appropriate that arises from actual experiences and can affect, or is affecting, the quality of our ministry. For instance our role in a particular situation, priorities, time management, insights, people, committees or institutions, changes, pressures, needs.

Any of the following may be useful in deciding what to choose for the supervisory process:

- The most significant event in my work since my last supervision is...
- This incident/concern keeps pushing itself back into my mind...
- I am aware of very strong feelings about something that has happened...
- When [this] happened it seemed to be a pattern repeating itself...
- I am so [tired, miserable, elated, inspired, challenged, worried]...
- I want to clarify where I stand on a particular issue...
- I want to stop something like [this] happening again...
- I want to get something like [this] to happen more often...
- I seem to keep avoiding/putting off...
- It is time to establish or review or evaluate my Learning Agreement...

When we commence a supervision session, we need to be able to say:

- In ministry at the moment, I feel ...
- This specific pastoral incident occurred ...
- This is my question or challenge...
- This is what I want as an outcome...

Supervision works best if:

- We are open and honest,
- Trust and confidentiality are guaranteed,
- We report our behaviour, observations, reactions and feelings accurately,
- We accept feedback,
- We monitor our feelings and responses (including our need to justify, explain),
- We remember that what happens in supervision is our responsibility,
- We remember that the purpose of the whole undertaking is to enhance the ministry we offer.



MARKS OF GOOD SUPERVISION

A good supervisor provides:

- ✓ a supportive, safe environment
- ✓ full attention
- ✓ encouragement and space for me to reflect on what I do and how I do it
- ✓ feedback to the supervisee
- ✓ feedback from from the supervisor
- ✓ relevant information, sources or referral etc.

A good supervisor encourages the supervisee to:

- ✓ be active in supervision
- ✓ accept responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, actions
- ✓ observe and clarify their thoughts, feelings, reactions
- ✓ become aware of the effects of their words and actions
- ✓ find other ways of looking at things
- ✓ discover and explore any options
- ✓ come to their own conclusions, choices and decisions
- ✓ acknowledge their strengths and successes
- ✓ respect and maintain confidentiality
- ✓ keep the focus on the process/response material presented [not its specific circumstances]
- ✓ keep in mind the fundamental goal of improved quality of ministry
- ✓ pursue ecumenical openness in all expressions of ministry

A good supervisor has knowledge, experience, integrity & skill to:

- ✓ maintain 'professionalism'
- ✓ help deal with the transferences in ministry and in the supervision process.
- ✓ recognise parallel process [When a relationship from my work is presented in a like or an inverted way in the relationship with the supervisor],
- ✓ recognise the limits of their skill and offer appropriate referral elsewhere.

A good supervisor doesn't:

- ✓ talk a lot or give lots of advice
- ✓ do all the work in the session
- ✓ take responsibility for my work
- ✓ respond to words but miss feelings.

OBSTACLES TO SUPERVISION

- The work load of providing supervision or of being supervised
- Previous unsatisfactory experiences
- Fears about confidentiality
- Practical difficulties --- distance, cost, lack of suitable people
- Assumptions (maybe unrecognised, maybe unchallenged) e.g.
 - I don't need supervision
 - My needs don't matter
 - God will supply all my needs (in the way I say)
 - I shouldn't have any needs
 - There's no time
 - It's too expensive
 - There's no one suitable
- Defences e.g.
 - No one's going to judge me
 - No one's going to tell me what to do
 - No one's going to be allowed to see that I'm vulnerable

SUPERVISION ISN'T...

- Supervision isn't primarily friendship, giving advice, spiritual direction, therapy, counselling, prayer, telling your story, joint sermon preparation, discussion of common problems or concerns.
- All these may be good things in themselves; but if supervision time majors on these, it isn't supervision
- **Supervision never** involves a sexualised relationship
- **Supervision never** involves gossip

SIGNALS THAT NEED ATTENTION

Either person....

- tends to forget the time or day of the appointment, to be late, to want to finish early
- feels it's just a friendly chat
- can't point to anything achieved in the session
- feels a strong attraction to the other, feels a strong dislike of the other, sits too close or makes physical contact

The supervisor....

- is drowsy, falls asleep, doesn't attend
- gives lots of advice or takes responsibility for the supervisee's work
- does all the work in the session
- responds to words and misses feelings
- takes the 'expert' role or talks a lot about his/her own experience

The supervisee....

- arrives unprepared
- doesn't focus on actual events
- doesn't mention things they feel uncomfortable with
- avoids some aspects of her/his work altogether
- ignores their true feelings
- asks for lots of information or advice
- expects the supervisor to tell them what to do
- has not made progress towards the learning goal or specific learning objectives already agreed



Questions

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN PREPARING FOR YOUR SUPERVISION REFLECTION

1. Describe the person you worked with:
2. Describe the issues you are presenting:
3. Why select these incidents?
4. How did you feel during each of these?
5. What personal performance issues are involved here?
6. What questions are raised about your work?
7. Where do these things come from in you?
8. Where else do you see these issues occurring in your life, either past or present, family, personal, spiritual, social, work etc?
9. What spiritual issues are raised for you?
10. What safety issues are raised for you?
11. What ethical issues are involved?
12. Select a biblical incident/passage that relates to the situation or issues.



A Sample of Process Questions You May Be Asked In Supervision:

Phase 1: Identifying the Issues (for you and for the client):

1. Key points
2. Shifts in action
3. Thoughts and feelings

Phase 2: Exploring the Issue:

1. What is life like in this world?
2. What is destructive or alienating in this world?
3. What causes stress or tension?
4. What caught your attention/ shocked you/ shed new light?
5. What or where do you see a change of heart?
6. What would bring reconciliation and new life? What might be celebrated?
7. What image/metaphor expresses the situation's key point?

Phase 3: Connecting:

1. How does our faith tradition/Church connect with what is happening?
2. What does our society / culture have to say about what is happening?
3. Where do you stand? What is your point of view? Do you feel torn?
Are your beliefs being challenged?

Phase 4: Applying:

1. What affirmations and implications can you draw from this?
2. What beliefs can be affirmed?
3. What will you do now? What actions do you need to take?



RESOURCES:

1. Kenneth Pohly, *The Ministry of Supervision*, pp.7-13;
2. The first letter of Peter describes Christ as shepherd and overseer of the Christian community. Other New Testament writings describe a similar function being carried out by members of and Ministers to the community. The fact that the words for “shepherd” and “overseer” are consistently associated with each other in the New Testament suggests that within Christian ministry the administrative and pastoral functions are not to be separated.
3. Nancy Ramsay, “*Pastoral supervision: A theological resource for ministry*”, *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry*, 12 [1991]. P.193.

Adapted and extended from
The Uniting Church in Australia
Ministerial Education Commission
September 2001

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2014



