



Shaping pastoral supervision

Gill Carding describes the work of the Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education (APSE)

This article traces the evolution of pastoral supervision for those in ministry, considers its particular features in comparison with counselling supervision, then goes on to explore the various contexts in which pastoral supervision might be used.

Evolution

There are a number of strands that have come together to shape pastoral supervision into its present form. Supervision, as the counselling world knows it, exists to safeguard and enhance the quality of the work of the counsellor with clients. Because of the nature of the work, it does this by attending to the state of the counsellor as well as the client. In a similar way, pastoral supervision can be understood both as being of those in ministry, where the emphasis is the minister's pastoral work with others, and as being for those in ministry, where the emphasis is pastoral care for the minister.

Longtime proponent of pastoral supervision, David Lyall, laments of the church and other faith organisations: 'No other people-centred profession lets practitioners loose whose basic training has been so deficient in properly supervised fieldwork', and talks of them now 'play(ing) catch up in developing their own structures of support and accountability.'¹

It was during the 1960s that Dr Frank Lake championed clinical theology, which he defined as 'theology rooted in the love and power of God but meticulously observant of the sound practice of psychiatry and psychotherapy'.² His groundbreaking experiential seminars sought to heal the psychological wounds of clergy to enable them better to attend to the wounds of those to whom they ministered. Since that time there has always been a minority of clergy within the Christian churches committed to his ideas, which have been developed over the years by successors in the Bridge Pastoral Foundation. Those working as chaplains, in particular, have tended to espouse this approach which values self-awareness, reflection and

supervision. Hudson,³ and Gubi and Korris⁴ have eloquently outlined in recent issues of this journal the particular stresses experienced by clergy in today's society, and presented two different types of facility to meet the needs resulting from such stresses. Hudson described the Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service, and Gubi and Korris reported on their research into the benefits of reflective practice groups for Church of England clergy. These demonstrate respectively a remedial and a preventative approach to clergy support.

As counselling became more widespread and mainstream during the 1990s, most denominations of the Christian church developed some form of psychotherapeutic service for clergy. Both the Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service (comprising mainly Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches) and the Anglican Association of Advisers in Pastoral Care and Counselling were formed in 1996.

Also during that decade the concept of ongoing clinical supervision became enshrined in counselling codes of practice. By the 2000s there was a growing appreciation of the benefit of non-managerial supervision also for those using listening and counselling skills as part of 'people' jobs; for example, teachers, nurses and clergy. Kevin Chandler⁵ suggests that 'ongoing consultative process supervision is our gift to other professionals such as teachers, medics and managers who might also benefit from a safe, thoughtful, structured relationship through which to reflect upon the personal and emotional cost of their work, and to better appreciate the dynamics of working relationships that can give rise to powerful and disturbing emotions'.

The Affirmation and Accountability Report,⁶ published in 2002, which looked at clergy stress and ill health, highlighted the need not only for therapeutic or remedial services to help those who were struggling, but advocated an upstream approach of equipping clergy to better

withstand the inherent stresses of ordained ministry. It recommended training for clergy to develop emotional resilience. This coincided with theological colleges reviewing the training programmes for ordinands (those training to become ordained as clergy), shifting towards a formational model of learning with an emphasis on reflective practice.

Meanwhile, international clinical pastoral education was arriving in the UK and influencing the nature of training for chaplains. It offers an action learning model where an intrinsic part of the training is reflecting on practice with peers and a supervisor.

The emerging recognition of, on one hand what psychological concepts had to offer those in ministry, and on the other hand, the benefits of a separate, safe reflective space for support and accountability, led to the formation in 2009 of the Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators (renamed the Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education last year), APSE.

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Features

APSE identifies the following components of pastoral supervision.⁷ Most are the same as are found in counselling supervision, but others



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are specific to pastoral supervision, so blended together the entity is distinctive.

1. Pastoral supervision is a regular, planned, intentional and bounded space where supervisor and supervisee meet to consider the supervisee's practice, either individually or in a group. There is a commitment to factor into the diary appointments at set intervals, with mutual expectations of frequency, duration, cost etc explicitly agreed by the supervisor and supervisee. This is similar to counselling supervision. However, it is likely to be a newer type of experience for many in ministry than for counsellors, who have been inducted into the process from early in their training. It is also often at variance with other parts of a minister's working life which may well be less planned and bounded.
2. The quality of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee is seen as crucial in both counselling and pastoral supervision. To be effective the supervisory relationship needs to be based on trust, confidentiality and openness, within which the supervisor monitors the balance between support and challenge. Because the relationship between supervisor and supervisee is so important, there needs to be acknowledgement that a certain pairing might not always work, and the supervisee should have some choice in who supervises them. Again, this is no different from counselling supervision, although some church organisations

might be less familiar with such flexibility than counselling agencies.

3. Pastoral supervision is praxis based, focusing in a report of the work and/or issues that arise in and from the supervisee's pastoral practice. As in counselling supervision, the content of the sessions can be either case or issue related. But, whereas in counselling supervision the majority of what the supervisee brings to supervision will be case material, in pastoral supervision it is more common for it to be issue based.
4. Spiritual/theological understanding provides the framework within which pastoral supervision is conducted. Here is the key difference between the two sorts of supervision. Spiritual direction asks the question 'where is God in this situation in your life?' Pastoral supervision is infused with the enquiry 'where is God in this situation in your work?' Pastoral supervision comes from a Christian background, and most people seeking pastoral supervision are Christian clergy or lay pastoral workers. However, those in chaplaincy roles work in multifaith settings concerned with broad-based spiritual care, so reflection needs to be wide enough to dialogue with other belief systems and patterns of meaning.

The spiritual/theological reflection shows itself when considering passages of scripture or sacred writings and what application they may have for the supervisee's present situation or issue. For Christian

ministers, it is usually the Bible that provides material for reflection; for those of other faiths, their sacred writings; or it might be words from a prayer, hymn or poem. It might be a whole story or just a short phrase. Mostly it is introduced by the supervisee, but can be raised by the supervisor. An example might help clarify the process:

The vicar of a group of rural parishes arrived for pastoral supervision, slumped down in the chair, tore off his dog collar and let out a deep sigh. The lack of people to take any responsibility in one of the churches and the personality clashes in another had been ongoing themes in the sessions for the past year. As he poured out the events of the last couple of weeks, it emerged that both situations had come to a head, and he was on the receiving end of some vitriolic criticism. Usually positive and resourceful, he was now exhausted and despondent. The supervisor commented that he reminded her at that moment of Elijah on Mount Sinai. He knew the story of Elijah fleeing for his life after dealing with the prophets of Baal. Elijah had given all he could and had had enough. The vicar took up the analogy and reflected on Elijah's state of mind, the angel bidding him firstly look after himself and eat; his encounter with God, not in the wind or the fire, but in the 'still, small voice'; then God's instruction to return to the fray, but with the promise that others would join him in the battle. This led to the vicar deciding firstly that he needed to get some specific advice and assistance from beyond the parishes to help resolve the deadlock, and secondly to reconnect with a group of supportive colleagues to help counter his sense of isolation and maintain his wellbeing.

5. Pastoral supervision is psychologically informed, drawing on psychological theory and insights to illuminate intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics. It does this in the same way as counselling supervision. What is different is the level of self-awareness that the supervisor can expect of a supervisee. Clergy and pastoral workers will not necessarily have

had any training in psychological/emotional processes or had personal therapy. So the supervisor might need to reside more in a formative/educative mode than would be usual in counselling supervision.

6. Pastoral supervision is attentive to ethical issues such as fitness to practise, management of boundaries, professional identity, accountability and the impact of the work on all concerned parties. Again, these areas are similar to what is covered in counselling supervision; the difference is in their application. For example, where appropriate boundaries lie will be different for clergy than for counsellors; and the question of professional identity and how it connects with personal identity is likely to feature more with clerics than with counsellors.

Contexts

The last feature of pastoral supervision cited by APSE is that it is contextually sensitive to the particularities of setting, culture and worldview. This speaks of the capacity to engage with diverse understandings about the nature of God and the transcendent, as well as cultural variations in the interpretation and practice of faith.

I take a separate heading for this in order to move on to outline some contexts in which pastoral supervision might take place, and how different contexts can affect the shape that supervision assumes.

Pastoral supervision is relevant to several groups of people in ministry: chaplains (health, college, prison, industrial, agricultural etc), parish and local clergy, lay pastoral workers, theological educators and spiritual directors/accompaniers.

The term and concept of pastoral supervision are probably best understood and accepted, and most widely practised, by chaplains in healthcare. Parish and local clergy are beginning to appreciate the benefits of a separate reflective space, although the term 'supervision' does not always sit comfortably with them. Reflective practice groups, similar to those outlined by Gubi and Korris,⁴

seem perhaps a more amenable option.

The last decade has seen significant improvement in the quality of practice in supervising newly ordained curates and probationers. It has generally become recognised that clergy having such responsibility should have some training in how to supervise, with ongoing support and accountability. Supervision in this context includes aspects of line management and assessment, so issues about dual roles need careful consideration.

As yet, few inroads have been made into lay pastoral workers by APSE. The assumption tends to be that the local priest/vicar/minister will supervise the work. This arrangement is all too often irregular and concentrates on practicalities, with little attention given to a reflective space. As the numbers of clergy continue to fall and lay people take more leadership roles in the work of the church, this situation may well change.

Theological educators need pastoral supervision for facilitating formation groups (the equivalent for ordinands of personal development groups in counsellor training), and for managing the community dynamic, particularly in residential settings.

The shape of things to come

APSE seeks to promote the value of pastoral supervision in ministry and to secure good standards in its practice. Pastoral supervision is becoming better known and accepted; training opportunities are increasing and standards are improving. But it is still a long way from becoming standard practice in all the arms of ministry.

There are mixed signs about the future. With cutbacks in the NHS, some healthcare chaplains are finding that time and funds for pastoral supervision are being reduced. How to pay for pastoral supervision is a real inhibitor to expanding the service for cash-strapped churches. In contrast, investigations into child abuse by clergy are raising concerns about their accountability and isolation, and ongoing supervision as standard practice is being considered by several church bodies. At this stage it remains to be seen whether a non-line management model as described here would be adopted.

It seems clear that a two-prong top-down and bottom-up approach will continue to be needed for the foreseeable future in order to grow pastoral supervision. And the shape and expression of it will continue to evolve.

Those who do engage in regular pastoral supervision know the benefit it affords. As one supervisee said as he left the session, 'Thank you - coming here makes me able to carry on with this job'.

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Biography

Gill Carding is a BACP senior accredited counsellor and supervisor, and an APSE accredited senior pastoral supervisor. She was formerly Director of Counselling for an Anglican diocese and now has a small private practice counselling mainly people in ministry, clinical and pastoral supervision. Gill is currently Chair of APSE.

