

# Supervision reframed: an offer of pastoral care by the church and a spiritual discipline for the practitioner

Alan Niven

## Initial reflections

My purpose is not so much to outline the practical processes and dynamics of pastoral supervision (see Appendix 2), as to engage the pastoral, theological and ecclesial themes that support a rationale for supervision as expressive of our conference themes – health and integrity. Before doing so, I will outline my concerns.

First concern: In other caring professions, if I were addressing senior and experienced practitioners, or those responsible for formation and training, they would be completely familiar with most of the supporting principles and rationale behind supervision in their profession, whether it concerned (a) initial supervision methodology and practice geared to formation in education and training contexts, or (b) ongoing supervision for professional purposes. This familiarity with supervision principles and best practice is rarely true in church contexts, and certainly is not true for many senior church leaders who we assume are also ‘practitioners of ministry’ but have never experienced supervision. I am concerned that recent responses to anticipated and actual Royal Commission findings and recommendations have a tonality of ‘damage control’ in a context of ‘crisis and threat’. I am also concerned that supervision may end up, formationally and educationally, at the bottom end of adult learning processes, and that it will not be truly integrated with our overall mission practice, contextual theology, and spiritual formation for ministry. David Leary highlights this in a paper proposing a University of Divinity Centre for Health and Integrity in Church and Ministry:

*This means devising ways to rebuild from the ground up: a healthier education in pastoral theology and practice for priests and ministers; better pre-service training; positive mentoring and support; greater transparency and accountability; ongoing mentoring and pastoral supervision throughout the working life of pastoral workers, ministers, leaders and priests.*<sup>1</sup>

This reflects existing documents of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. In her paper for the conference, Janiene Wilson has indicated that *Integrity in Ministry* emerged out of a statement made on 29 November 2002 by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The bishops stated that they were concerned ‘to respond adequately to the issue of sexual abuse within the Church’, and made a commitment to ‘renew our resolve to follow our agreed procedures’ by accepting ‘the need for accountability and consistency in all that we do’, and by proposing ‘that the National Committee for Professional Standards continue to assess and refine these procedures’.<sup>2</sup> This document led in 2004 to *Integrity in Ministry*. Section 4.1 of *Integrity in Ministry* clearly sets out that Catholic clergy and religious are required to maintain accountability by:

- keeping abreast of literature in the area of pastoral care
- attending seminars/in-services related to pastoral care
- reflecting regularly on one’s pastoral practice with a competent supervisor or colleague
- ongoing development of one’s knowledge and understanding of scripture, church tradition and teaching
- remaining updated in the social sciences and disciplines that contribute to pastoral skill.<sup>3</sup>

1. Leary, D. (2016–2017). *Discussion Paper: Establishing a Centre for Health and Integrity in Church and Ministry: A Collaborative Research, Teaching and Practice Unit within a University*.

2. A message from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to the Catholic people of Australia, <https://www.catholic.org.au/documents/493-a-message-from-the-australian-catholic-bishops-conference-to-the-catholic-people-of-australia-1/file>

3. National Committee of Professional Standards. (2004). *Integrity in Ministry: A Document of Principles and Standards for Catholic Clergy and Religious in Australia*, reprinted 2010, s4.1, <https://www.catholic.org.au/documents/1344-integrity-in-ministry-2010-1/file>

Section 4.2 recommends regularly undertaking appropriate professional development.<sup>4</sup>

This is primary, secondary and tertiary pastoral care. But has it been done, and have supervisors been trained?

Second concern: In parallel with undertaking parish ministry, I began teaching part-time in pastoral and ministry studies at Stirling Theological College in 1980, and full-time from 1994 until 2016. For all those years, I taught (first hour, first lecture) that for church members, clergy and lay, and any others in the scope of our care, that:

- Primary pastoral care is expressed and embodied by a culture of honesty and transparency, awareness of power complexity, gender respect, cultural sensitivity, good communication, and conflict resolution.
- Secondary pastoral care rests on the availability and promotion of books and studies, sermons/homilies, special liturgies and theological reflections on life skills, experiences and challenges; then, on the provision of educational experiences addressing everything from marriage enrichment and parenting to stress and depression. All this, within a frame of discipleship, spiritual maturing and faith development.
- Tertiary pastoral care uses counselling and therapeutic referral/intervention, issue-specific support groups (e.g. bereavement or addictions), and crisis intervention such as refuges or Crisis Assessment and Treatment (CAT) teams.

I am concerned that, for all denominations, the 'professional supervision response' to the Royal Commission will be a tertiary care response, marginally resourced and unsupported by a formational, educational and spiritually mature reflective framework.

Third concern: Teaching pastoral and ministry formation has been a richly ecumenical experience. When teaching, there were typically students from six to eight traditions present at lectures, including non-MCD/University of Divinity students.<sup>5</sup> Over 20 years, my supervisees have come from seven different traditions, none from my own, which is a personal policy. In our Graduate Certificate of Supervision, one particular cohort had six different Christian traditions represented, plus a woman rabbi and a Hindu priest, with a Buddhist head of pastoral care 'thinking about it'. My concern is that the church will:

- not address this issue ecumenically or use multidisciplinary wisdom, thus creating huge challenges (and consequent fragmentation) of people-resources and educational programs
- engender impoverished spirituality through limited theological reflection, and impoverished learning due to minimal diversity in multi-context reflective practice
- not engage collegially and strategically with supervisors in other caring professions, accrediting bodies like the Australasian Association of Supervision, the Clinical Pastoral Education sector, and elsewhere.

Again, from David Leary:

*The task of repair and renewal after rupture cannot be undertaken alone, in a 'silo' approach, within a single community of believers. It is beyond doubt that the many complex tasks to be undertaken cannot be done without the input of individuals and disciplines from outside the faith community and its academic institutions.*<sup>6</sup>

This task of repair after rupture includes supervision – supervision training, supervision delivery, and supervision research.

## Introduction

Let's forget about the Royal Commission for a moment. How long has this supervision agenda been before us? Pastoral theologian John Patton suggests that the ministry of pastoral supervision, 'as related to Christ's own oversight and shepherding, seems to have been taking place in the life of the Church since

---

4. *ibid*, s4.2

5. The Melbourne College of Divinity (MCD) was founded in 1910 by an Act of the Victorian Parliament. The MCD became the University of Divinity in 2012, following the approval of the Victorian Parliament in 2011.

6. Leary, D. Discussion Paper: Establishing a Centre for Health and Integrity in Church and Ministry.

near its beginning', and he explores a number of biblical texts in support of his argument. There's no time to explore this today. However, what he has to say could almost be a summary of my own concerns in this paper:

*Pastoral supervision may no longer be thought of as only a specialized interest and competence of certain chaplains certified to conduct clinical pastoral education. It is a central concern of the Church. Seminaries in attempting to develop genuinely professional degree programs are searching for and attempting to train competent pastoral supervisors ... In the [March 1971 issue of] The Journal of Pastoral Care, Mark Rouch describes an effort to develop appropriate means of supervision and consultation for young pastors [priests and ministers] three to five years out of seminary. Another denomination has experimented with seminars for bishops, priests and deacons which offer training in supervision and in being supervised. The concern with supervision and consultation is widespread.<sup>7</sup>*

This is almost half a century ago! What has been the cost of neglect since then? Recently, ABC journalist Julia Baird has exposed several layers of domestic and family violence within the church. Her 2018 University of Divinity Graduation Address highlights the need to pay attention. She said:

*As poet Mary Oliver wrote: 'The first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know: [is that] the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness.' Iris Murdoch said paying attention is a moral act; it is also a spiritual act. For Christians, it is a responsibility and a discipline, especially in a world of distraction ... attention is a rare and precious commodity ...*

*Vigilantes of grace would be people who, even if leadership has failed, can model love and keep an eye out for danger. For many decades, we have failed to observe and be vigilant. There is much work to do, much grinding, important work lies ahead. Some will be done one heartbeat at a time, in your parish, your street, your home. And grace will always leak through the cracks.<sup>8</sup>*

I believe that one of those graces will be growth and maturity through supervision. My purpose statement – the key message that I want to leave with people at this conference, church leaders, and my students – follows below:

*Effective supervision for those in ministry settings, embodies: individual responsibility; collegial responsibility; ecclesial responsibility. I will propose that: (a) the development of a culture of supervision-awareness, (b) training for supervision, for supervisors and supervisees, and (c) the provision of supervisory structures, from initial formation to professional practice, exemplify the very best of what has traditionally been recognised as pastoral care, where the 'individual and systems' (both ecclesial and other) and spiritual care coincide.*

*The provision of skilful, trained, and accredited supervision for ministers, priests, pastoral/spiritual carers and chaplains can best be seen as an act of thoughtful, responsible, compassionate and practical pastoral care – not just as an instrument of compliance, legal constraint and duty. (We must go beyond the Royal Commission in spirit – pastorally and theologically.)*

*I am suggesting that supervision should be reframed consistently by accrediting church bodies, not just as an exercise in accountability and compliance (essential), but also as a ministry of pastoral care and compassion and as a spiritual discipline to be embraced by the practitioner. This is the 'ought' of appropriateness, not the 'ought' of obligation.*

*How supervision is framed, theologically and pastorally, by accreditation bodies and practitioners, is (a) critical for acceptance, reception, effectiveness and sustainability, and (b) essential if supervision is to be an authentic experience of spiritual growth and maturing. It must be offered within a culture and framework of primary, secondary and tertiary pastoral care.*

It should be noted that throughout this paper I will be interchanging or paralleling the terms 'pastoral care' and 'pastoral supervision' – not to swallow up one in the other, or even remotely to assume they are one and the same thing, but rather to set up a dialogue as to how the one is expressive of, or complements, the other. When I use 'pastoral care', I will never assume pastoral counselling, which is a separate, distinct and valuable discipline within the suite of pastoral care support that the church offers.

---

7. Patton, J. H. (1971, September). Editorial: Pastoral Supervision – a Ministry of the Church, *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, XXV(3), 145. See also Rouch, M. A. (1971, March). Young pastors pilot project: an experiment in continuing education for ministry, *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, XXV(1), 3–11, emphasis added.

8. Baird, J. (2018, 16 March). Vigilantes of Grace, Graduation Address, University of Divinity, <https://www.divinity.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2018-03-16-Graduation-Address-Julia-Baird.pdf>

## Supervision as an example of pastoral care

I am therefore proposing a theological frame for supervision that resonates with the essential elements of pastoral care. In 1964, William A Clebsch and Charles R Jaekle published a theological, historical and ecclesial meta-review of almost 2000 years of pastoral care by the church, in which they revealed a number of themes that in earlier days were seen as normative and essential activities for any pastor, minister or priest as they engaged with people or systems.<sup>9</sup> Those classic 19 centuries of historical themes were: *guiding, healing, sustaining, reconciling*. Following Howard Clinebell and other in the 1960s and 70s, *nurturing* also emerged, thanks to feminist and liberation theology. Acts of pastoral care were also directed towards *empowering and advocacy*, both individual and systemic.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1970s and 80s, pastoral care re-emerged as a place where religious belief, tradition, faith practice and service meet contemporary experience, questions and action, and conduct a dialogue which is mutually enriching, intellectually critical and practically transforming. This dialogue (in the context of a pastoral encounter) could be at a bedside, in a school, hospital, home, workplace, or ... within a supervisory setting.

I like Stephen Pattison's phrase 'humanity in mission', which he *almost* equates with pastoral care:

*You can't have too much humanity in mission – that is the message of the incarnation. And pastoral care [ministry supervision] is one of the places where the humanising vision of Christianity comes into sharp and practical focus. We need the actuality and reflective opportunities that pastoral care [ministry supervision] provides if we are to avoid becoming thoughtless institutional entrepreneurs. Might I therefore suggest that it is once again time to rediscover pastoral care [ministry supervision] and its significance for the contemporary world and church?<sup>11</sup>*

In the 1980s, in one of my earliest encounters with the literature of field education and pastoral supervision, Kenneth Pohly set the parameters for supervision within a ministry frame that is 'collegial, mutual, holistic and inclusive', arguing that:

*... to speak of supervision as a way of doing ministry, is to declare that supervision is both integral to and formative for ministry. There has been a tendency, at least in practice if not also in theory, to see it as something external to ministry, occurring somewhere outside of ministry and in control of it. Much of the baggage that is brought to supervision is the fear that some person or institution 'out there' is in charge. I am suggesting, rather, that there is a particular kind of supervision that is ministry. Theologically this kind of supervision can be described as being relational, covenantal, incarnational and grace-full.<sup>12</sup>*

Note that this was written *thirty years ago* – echoing writing from the 1970s. I wish to go inside Pohly's broad ministry frame and identify a particular aspect of ministry, namely, the classic discipline of pastoral care. In healthcare and chaplaincy practice, I might prefer the idea of 'spiritual care', but given today's brief (church, clergy, church workers, theology), I believe it is appropriate to use 'pastoral care'. There are many practitioners (now often viewed as 'allied health practitioners') representing the church in community care agencies, aged care, hospices, hospitals, etc., who have come under local/contextual supervisory and professional requirements for many years. They are mostly covered by workplace expectations and reporting, just as volume 16 of the Royal Commission's final report now indicates for the church.<sup>13</sup>

Wearing my 'qualitative researcher' hat, I used basic data analysis techniques<sup>14</sup> to distil key words and phrases describing supervision essentials that appeared in some core samples from five decades – almost 40 years of supervision literature. Seven of the 30 or so texts are referenced below with representative 'key terms'. They range from dedicated supervised field education texts to multi-disciplinary clinical supervision, and I have preferred more recent examples. Of course, this was not an exhaustive list, but one where some items embraced or included others that we might normally expect to see. Emerging themes can help us define supervision and perhaps shape best practice.

---

9. See Clebsch, W A., and Jaekle, C R. (1964). *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective: An Essay with Exhibits*, Harper and Row, New York.

10. See Clinebell, H. (1984). *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, SCM Press, London.

11. Pattison, S. (2008). Is Pastoral Care Dead in a Mission-led Church?, *Practical Theology*, 1(1), 7–10 at 9.

12. Pohly, K H. (1988). The Distinctiveness of Ministry Supervision, *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry*, 10, 114–130 at 125.

13. See Recommendations 16.5 (directed to the Anglican Church), 16.25 (directed to the Catholic Church), and 16.45 (directed to all religious institutions in Australia).

14. See Patton, M Q. (2016). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, Ca., 541–552.

Consider these words and phrases:

*Extended, intentional relationship ('journey metaphor'); mutual agreement; story; theological reflection/critical reflection; concrete practice; contextual awareness; case study; culture and contextuality; knowledge of the human sciences; personal growth and integration; contextually integrating and reconciling inner and outer worlds; nurturing spirituality and spiritual identity; community; self-care/self-compassion; whole person; spiritual care and guidance; formational; soul care.*<sup>15</sup>

I then blended these themes with Pohly's key terms – collegial, mutual, holistic, inclusive, relational, covenantal, incarnational and grace-full – to develop several themes and categories.<sup>16</sup> The emerging category that resonated most closely with these thematic prompts was classic and contemporary expressions of the discipline of pastoral care.<sup>17</sup> More specifically, Pamela Cooper-White's relational paradigm (*Use of Self in Pastoral Care and Counselling*) of internalised self-supervision by the pastoral carer echoes important themes in the supervision literature:

*... effective pastoral care includes giving close attention to one's own thoughts, feelings, fantasies and behaviours. This 'use of self' is not a matter of self-preoccupation, but, on the contrary, a healthy utilisation of one's own responses to enhance the quality of pastoral care. Appreciation of the complex, affect-laden nature of the intersubjective relationship between helper and helpee can deepen understanding, strengthen empathy and increase the mutuality of respect, even as it enhances the creation of a safe space with healthy boundaries.*<sup>18</sup>

If Cooper-White writes as a pastoral carer, Judy Rigby writes as a supervisor and helps me pinpoint the dynamics (and effectiveness) of self-reflexivity: 'If I know my sense of self, spiritual life, faith, hope and love, I am more likely to listen to the [supervisee's] worldview, hear their need, help them to sort out their feelings, values, hopes, and spiritual values.'<sup>19</sup> The supervisory dialogue, as in a pastoral care encounter, is cyclical and iterative as well as expressive of the guest-host motif where the roles can sometimes, with care, be interchangeable.

Resonance between pastoral care and supervision dynamics is common in pastoral care writings. Bruce Rumbold, who has 15 years' experience as a lecturer in pastoral care at Whitley College, Melbourne College of Divinity, and 15 years lecturing in pastoral, spiritual and palliative care at La Trobe University, identifies this common thread where elements of pastoral care and supervision dynamics intersect:

*Spiritual Care begins when we connect as people. It is about making space that people can use themselves. Sometimes making space means doing whatever we can to keep people in touch with places and things that are important to them. Sometimes it's making the space to listen to the stories as people review their lives and sort out 'the things that endure', the experiences and commitments that make them truly themselves. Sometimes it is making space for religious observance and ritual activity so that the place they now inhabit can be made holy.*<sup>20</sup>

Question: If clergy don't (or can't) actually do pastoral care in its classic form, will they be able to be supervised effectively?

The academic transcripts and formation/training notes for most seminarians and theological students are pretty much a 'pastoral studies-free zone'. I'm sure many have the heart, but maybe not the art or time for truly pastoral activities beyond the management of a few off-the-shelf resources for their people's souls.

- 
15. See Pohly, K H. (1977). *Pastoral Supervision*, The Institute of Religion, Houston, 42–51; Steere, D. (1989). *The Supervision of Pastoral Care*, John Knox Press, Westminster, 65–68; Seals, M., and Pyle, W. (1995). *Experiencing Ministry Supervision: A Field-Based Approach*, Academic Press, Boston, 8–17; Carroll, M. Supervision: Critical Reflection for Transformational Learning, Part 1, *The Clinical Supervisor*, 28(2), 210–220; Leach, J., and Paterson, M. (2010). *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook*. SCM Press, London; Hawkins, P., and Shohet, R. (2012). *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, McGraw Hill, Open University Press, Berkshire, UK; Gardner, F. (2014). *Being Critically Reflective: Engaging in Holistic Practice*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 51 ff; Falender, C and Shafranske, E. (2016). *Supervision Essentials for the Practice of Competency-Based Supervision*, American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.
  16. For more comprehensive meta-analysis, whole texts can be analysed using NVivo, just as we use this software to analyse the text of transcripts of interview.
  17. See Doehring, C. (2015). *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*, Westminster JKP, Louisville, Ky.
  18. Cooper-White, P. (2004). *Shared Wisdom: Use of Self in Pastoral Care and Counselling*, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 128.
  19. Rigby, J. (2010). Reaching for the Realities in Rituals, *Australian Journal of Pastoral Care and Health*, 4(1), 14.
  20. Rumbold, B. (2002). *Spirituality and Palliative Care: Social and Pastoral Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 21.

## Reframing supervision as an act of pastoral care

Here's the challenge: start early, educate, demystify the whole process of supervision. A minister had pulled an uncomprehending face at some basic teaching on supervision as essential for sustaining our ministry. I followed up with him and I finally got through to this former agricultural engineer with this quote.

*I am beginning to understand that life is not so much a search for answers, as it is a search for clearings. Clearings are the required stopping places in our lives when our lives get to be too much. A clearing is a place of shelter, peace, rest, safety, quiet and healing. It is a place where you can get your bearings, regroup, inspect the damage, fill out the estimate and make the repairs. It is a place where mid-course corrections are made – where you can change course, even start over. A clearing is a place where you can see what you couldn't see and hear what you couldn't hear.<sup>21</sup>*

Within supervision, 'sustaining' can be much more than just hanging on. It is the creation of new stories that give hope for tomorrow and maybe even 'starting over', an eschatological dimension of care.

Sustaining work goes deep. Supervision enables 'translat[ion] usefully into ways of locating how one's own hidden thinking (and choices about one's own thinking) helps influence professional practice'.<sup>22</sup> It is understood that supervision involves incremental work that needs time and seasons. But the sustaining, supportive nature of supervision has a vision of transformational learning, where:

*... supervisees critically reflect not just on their experience but the way they construct their experience, creating new mental maps or meaning-making frameworks that help interpret their experience, learn from it and go back to their work with new insights and new behaviours. This is supervision at its creative best and most courageous.<sup>23</sup>*

I truly desire that leaders and practitioners understand that supervision is one of the best theological and pastoral gifts on offer – perhaps even a sacred space in which to encounter God.

## Challenges to choosing/using pastoral supervision

Over the past decade, I have asked more than 50 people in ministry: 'You say you don't have supervision – why is that?' In answer to that question, I have received a variety of responses, which I have summarised as follows (added in brackets, is my hypothetical interpretation of the operative church context that is likely to be informing each response):

- 'Never really considered it ...' (Lack of formation; uninformed culture; systemic neglect)
- Confidentiality confused with confession ... (Inadequate education. Wrong focus)
- Ignore the signs until we fall over ... (Culture of 'burnout acceptance'. No self-awareness. Minimal systemic care)
- Programmed to keep going 'no matter what' ... (Theology of sacrifice. Abusive ecclesial models. Personality issues)
- Value boundaries but do not give priority ... (Lack of accountability. No vision of self-care. Too tired to discern!)
- 'Costs too much; don't have time ...' (Lack of formation in supervision; no culture of systemic support)
- 'There are not enough (good) supervisors ...' (Culture unaware and unprepared. Ecclesial/systemic priorities elsewhere. Isolation)
- And the very sad 'Tried it once ...'.

Not one saw supervision as a form of pastoral care, spiritual discipline or invitation to theological reflection!

---

21. Yaconelli, M. (1995, Jan/Feb). Clearings, *The Door*, 5, <http://www.clearingonthelake.com/files/yaconelliarticle.pdf>

22. Fook, J., and Gardner, F. (2007). *Practising Critical Reflection: A Resource Handbook*, McGraw-Hill Education, UK, 70.

23. Carroll, J. (2010). Supervision: Critical Reflection for Transformational Learning (Part 2), *The Clinical Supervisor*, 29(1), 1–29 at 17, <https://tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07325221003730301>

Emmanuel Lartey summarises core pastoral care themes that clearly reinforce this resonance with supervision practice. For Lartey, pastoral care, (and I would say, supervision):

- is an expression of human concern through activities designed to bring wholeness and healing in a variety of modes as expressed by Jesus in John 10:10 ('... life abundant')
- happens when carers can recognise transcendence leading to exploration of the spiritual dimensions of life
- happens when the motivation is love ('we love because God first loved us')
- aims at prevention, fostering and advocacy (the prophetic edge of social justice).<sup>24</sup>

In practical care mode, pastoral care 'primers' by Robert Wicks and Thomas Rodgerson (1999), John Patton (2005), and Carrie Doehring (2015) all identify the following aspects of practice that extend beyond the expected and basic listening skills:<sup>25</sup>

- Care (supervision) concerns whole people in physical, emotional, social and spiritual aspects (Lk 4:16–21).
- Care (supervision) is mutual – we care cooperatively for each other, offer welcome on the journey, and express hospitality in our learning together (Gal 6:1–5; Romans 12:13).
- Care (supervision) depends as much upon who we are (integrated life, personality, spirituality, etc.) as on what we can do (Philippians 2:1–11).
- Care (supervision) invites us to reflect upon the meaning and purpose of our lives and behaviours (Matthew 5:1–12).
- Care (supervision) creates community in a variety of dimensions (John 13; John 21; John 15:11–17).

And from the perspective of that essential mode of care, the invitation to theological reflection, John Paver offers a classic theologically reflective framework for the working focus of pastoral supervision:

- the 'text' of faith experience and contextualised, systems-aware practice
- the 'text' of scripture and Christian tradition as related to the person's identity and spirituality both within and beyond their immediate ministry
- the 'text' of culture and the context/events/process of ministry.<sup>26</sup>

Paver's discussion of the role of theological reflection suggests that pastoral conversation as a mode of supervision fits well with pastoral practice and style. He cites Mary Boys, for whom all forms of ministry must have clear pastoral dimensions and even her teaching, 'is more than mere transmission of knowledge [and] involves entering into unfamiliar worlds – not only of texts that present radically different perspectives, but also of hearts and minds and of those whom we meet in the classroom'.<sup>27</sup> Pastorally, each person is a new text for us (whether counselee, supervisee or student), but the common thread of theological reflection takes seriously:

- an experience of life: an event, story or narrative
- an experience of work or ministry: an event, story or narrative
- an issue in ministry: justice, suffering, inculturation
- a vision of ministry: a personal mission statement.<sup>28</sup>

### **Pastoral supervision as a theological discipline?**

Again, consider the thematic resonance with the following from practical theologian, Professor Daniel Louw, Professor of Pastoral Care and Counselling (retired) in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, a member of the International Academy of Practical Theology, and former president of the International Council of Pastoral Care and Counselling.

---

24. Lartey, E Y. (2003). *In Living Colour: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling*, Cassell, London. For contextual and cultural discussion, see also Lartey, E Y. (2006). *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, Epworth, Peterborough UK.

25. See Wicks, R., and Rodgerson, T. (1998). *Companions in Hope: The Art of Christian caring*, Paulist Press, New York; Patton, J. (2005). *Pastoral care: An Essential Guide*, Abingdon Press, Nashville; Doehring, C. (2015). *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*, Westminster/JKP, Louisville, Ky.

26. Paver, J. (2006). *Theological Reflection and Education for Ministry*, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot UK, 33–79.

27. Boys, M C. (1999). Engaged Pedagogy-Dialogue and Critical reflection, *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 2(1), 129–136 at 130.

28. McAlpin, K. (2009). *Ministry that Transforms: A Contemplative Process of Theological Reflection*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 114.

On his faculty webpage, Louw outlined his approach to teaching pastoral care, as follows:

*Pastoral Care is viewed as a theological discipline. Within the framework of the traditional understanding of pastoral care as cura animarum (care of the human soul), we endeavour to develop Pastoral Theology as a healing enterprise, which focuses on care from the perspective of salvation. Pastoral Care is faith care applied as life care. The main objective is to help people towards a meaningful life with the aid of an appropriate understanding of God and God's presence. [In the context of life, work and discipleship] the following important existential issues should be addressed:*

- *Our anxiety around rejection, isolation and death – hence the human quest for intimacy and acceptance.*
- *Guilt, and guilt feelings – hence the human quest for liberation and freedom.*
- *Despair and doubt – hence the human quest for hope and a meaningful future.*<sup>29</sup>

This indicates that there can also be a healing aspect to the pastoral supervision function, whereby a representative Christian person facilitates another's path towards restoration to a condition of wholeness, a restoration that also achieves a new level of spiritual insight and wellbeing. The wholeness that pastoral healing seeks to achieve is not simple restoration of prior circumstances, physical or otherwise, but integration with deeper spiritual insight than was previously experienced. In this sense, supervision fits well with the pastoral theological enterprise.

Within pastoral care, both parties are changed as degrees of mutuality build community in a covenantal context that also embraces the presence of Christ in their midst, a liminal space often deemed sacred. Felicity Kelcourse conceives of supervision as 'soul care' within a 'spirituality of integrity', suggesting that critical reflection is essential for both supervisor and supervisee. She writes that all of us carry wounded places (loaded with assumptions and expectations) that:

*... continue to suffer from not being seen, known, heard, or respected in the ways we needed to feel whole. The transformative hope of [supervision] is that these wounds will be recognised, explored, and understood by both supervisor and supervisee, soothed by reparative experiences, and healed to a manageable degree over time.*<sup>30</sup>

For practitioners and supervisors alike, these wounded places sit right alongside 'the values from which they wanted to operate ... [and] their values were in conflict with what they had felt or done'.<sup>31</sup> Critical reflection works to identify hidden dimensions of self or values, spoken and unspoken, and aims to explore how our practice or actions, beliefs and assumptions need to change or be affirmed to fit with our desired assumptions and beliefs. Although clearly not intended to be a therapeutic process, it is still potentially a healing process. As Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet describe it, this also extends to include parishioners or clients:

*Supervision can be a very important part of taking care of oneself and staying open to new learning, as well as an indispensable part of the person's ongoing self-development. We have found that when we have been able to accept our own vulnerability and not defend against it, it has a valuable experience both for us and our clients [parishioners]. The realization that they could be healing us, as much as the other way around, has been very important both in their relationship with us and their growth. It is another reminder that we are servants of the process.*<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the Royal Commission, in its recommendations in Volume 16, speaks of mandatory 'professional/pastoral supervision'. The fairly clear implication is that the Royal Commission wants the supervisors themselves to be professional. And yet, the fact is that most supervisors are currently under-trained and unaccredited.

---

29. See [http://academic.sun.ac.za/theology/Profiles/louw\\_profile.htm](http://academic.sun.ac.za/theology/Profiles/louw_profile.htm) (accessed 20 November 2018)

30. Kelcourse, F. (2013). Supervision as Soul-Care: A Spirituality of Integrity, *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*, 33, 154–168 at 159 (online), <http://journals.sfu.ca/rpfs/index.php/rpfs/article/viewFile/273/272>

31. Gardner, F. (2014). *Being Critically Reflective: Engaging in Holistic Practice*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke UK, 5

32. Hawkins, P., and Shohet, R. (2012). *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, McGraw Hill/Open University Press, Berkshire, UK, 15.



From the Australasian Association of Supervision (AAOS) website:

*Supervision interrupts practice. It wakes us up to what we are doing. When we are alive to what we are doing, we wake up to what is, instead of falling asleep in the comfort stories of our clinical routines and daily practice. The supervisory voice acts as an irritator interrupting repetitive stories (comfort stories) and facilitating the creation of new stories.*<sup>33</sup>

Sustaining is a key pastoral practice. It consists of helping any person with complex or perhaps even threatening challenges (psychological, spiritual, emotional or physical), to endure and to transcend a given circumstance, rather than sink into old 'comforting' or survival behaviours. Turning back the clock, or restoration to a former psychological, spiritual, emotional or physical state, is not realistic and sometimes recovery from illness, struggle, or condition is either impossible or so remote as to seem improbable. The sustaining work goes beyond simple survival in the face of complex, harmful, or challenging experiences, by reaching toward spiritual growth through endurance and faithfulness.

As noted earlier, within pastoral supervision, 'sustaining' is much more than just hanging on, it is the creation of new stories that give hope for tomorrow, an eschatological dimension of care. A supervisory session might 'translate usefully into ways of locating how one's own hidden thinking (and choices about one's own thinking) helps influence professional practice'.<sup>34</sup> Supervision involves incremental work that needs time and seasons, but the sustaining, supportive nature of supervision has a vision of transformational learning. This reflects our earlier note:

*Supervisees critically reflect not just on their experience but the way they construct their experience, creating new mental maps or meaning-making frameworks that help interpret their experience, learn from it and go back to their work with new insights and new behaviours. This is supervision at its creative best and most courageous.*<sup>35</sup>

Question: Where will the Supervisors come from?

Five hours before the Titanic left on her doomed maiden voyage, civil servant Maurice Clarke inspected the liner for lifeboats and safety equipment. He made handwritten notes at the time in which he clearly stated that the vessel did not have enough lifeboats. But he wrote that if he had made the recommendation official, his job would have been threatened, as the Titanic's owners had pressured his superiors into giving the fated ship the all clear.

I wonder if we even have *one* life raft for the numbers we are considering. Supervisors are few in number, often represent an ageing demographic, and already have more than enough supervisees. How will more be trained and where will this training be offered?

Currently, the minimum level of training required for supervisors, entails:

- a pre-requisite of five years' experience in a relevant field
- a record of 50 hours face-to-face training in professional supervision
- evidence of supervision practice of 200 hours
- evaluation reports from trainers/supervisors of the person plus their own self-evaluation while under training.

Where can professional pastoral supervisors train?

- St Mark's National Theological Centre, Canberra (Charles Sturt University): Grad Cert Professional Supervision (Clinical/Pastoral), delivered in various states and via Ridley College and Alphacrucis College.
- University of Divinity: Grad Cert and Grad Diploma in Supervision, delivered via Jesuit College of Spirituality and Stirling Theological College
- Transforming Practices, Sydney
- Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) programs
- Multi-disciplinary sources (which may not address spirituality and theological reflection).

---

33. <http://www.supervision.org.au/what-is-supervision> See also Ryan, S. (2004). *Vital Practice*, Sea Change Publications, Portland.

34. Fook, J., and Gardner, F. (2007). *Practising Critical Reflection: A Resource Handbook*, McGraw-Hill Education, UK, 70.

35. Carroll, M. (2010). Supervision: Critical Reflection for Transformational Learning (Part 2), *The Clinical Supervisor*, 29(1), 1–19 at 17.

Special note: Beware the false hope of cross-disciplinary hybrid pastoral supervision. In my view, it is not respectful or wise as a matter of policy to suggest that spiritual direction be used as a response to the need for 'professional pastoral supervision'. Is it, perhaps, a helpful short-term, stop-gap response if we're desperate? Even then, I think not – but where is the research on this?

Question: We're supposed to be teaching all this, but what about research?

Remember, in terms of the number of available supervisors, and where and how hundreds of different faith groups across Australia are meant to find them in order to comply with the Royal Commission's recommendations – do we have even one life raft?

Theological colleges are key partners in theological and pastoral formation of practitioners. The church would probably not survive without theological education, pastoral/spiritual formation, and pastoral supervision in some format (but which may not necessarily be provided by and through theological colleges!) Theological colleges join in this task with the people of our own traditions, other colleges or CPE providers, various stakeholders and peak bodies, and of course those who we serve and minister with (they are probably our best teachers!).

Over the years, I have observed that most churches and colleges still significantly underfund what informs the practice and sustainability of ministry. Will we also neglect to do research on what is essential and now apparently mandated?

In relation to the need for research, I would make the following observations:

- We are obviously moving into the development of courses in pastoral supervision – an evolutionary process. I believe education must be ecumenical and closely allied to research. The teaching-research nexus will be critical over the next five to ten years. What are the statistics regarding our supply of existing (many ageing) supervisors, a cohort that will inevitably shrink (dead, demented, or retired for the third time!).
- Remember that the church is already doing some good work in the area of pastoral supervision. Firstly, let's use appreciative inquiry to evaluate and improve existing work; secondly, let's set up *culturally and demographically diverse* pilots that reflect our ministry profiles and demographics, to help us understand where we need to go.
- In my view, we should piggy-back on the work of our colleagues in healthcare, as they have faced the challenge of evidence-based practice. Their knowledge and skills in research will be transferable to teaching and it will be a good bridge between domains of service.
- Good mixed methods research will enable the voices of those on the ground – supervisors and supervisees – to be heard. This will help us avoid the danger of top-down ('Here's the program, get with it!') planning and implementation.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have only touched on two of the seven (that's another paper) elements of good, effective pastoral care that can also become the key elements of effective supervision. For now, I am deeply conscious of the huge deficit in our duty of care, from numerous angles, which has been a reality historically and maybe (notwithstanding the shock behind why we're here today) also in the future. I hope not. For these three conference days, we are in some small way the stewards, guardians and 'honourers' of the horrific stories that have prompted this conference. We have listened and we have heard. These are past tense verbs. Necessary words, but limited. They begin the story of the new, and perhaps, as Julia Baird has suggested, we will continue to pay attention and become 'vigilantes of grace'.

Part of my childhood was spent in Newtonards, Belfast. Not quite Syria, but I thought it would never end. In my bible I have a cutting from *The Age* showing Ian Paisley sitting down with Sinn Fein. I conclude this paper with a reflection from Northern Ireland, a poem by Liam Mac Uistin, *We Saw a Vision*:

*In the darkness of despair we saw a vision of hope. So we lit a light of hope and it was not extinguished. In the despair of discouragement we saw a vision of strength, so we planted the tree of courage and it blossomed. In the winter of imprisonment and entrapment we saw a vision of freedom. So we melted the snow of lethargy, and the river of resurrection flowed from it. We sent our vision aswimming like a swan on the river. The vision became a reality. Winter became Summer. Imprisonment became Freedom. And this, our children, we leave to you as your inheritance.*<sup>36</sup>

36. Mac Uistin, L. (1995). *We Saw a Vision*, in Ward, H., and Wild, J. (1995). (eds.), *Human Rites: Worship Resources for an Age of Change*, Mowbray, London.

## Bibliographical resources

The following list is offered as a starting point for people interested in reading further.

- Bolton, G. (2005). *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Sage, London.
- Boys, M. (1999). Engaged Pedagogy-Dialogue and Critical reflection. *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 2, 1999, 29–136.
- Capps, D., and Fowler, G. (2001). *The Pastoral Care Case: Learning about Care in Congregations*, Chalice Press, St Louis, Missouri.
- Carroll, M., and Tholstrup, M. (2001). *Integrative Approaches to Supervision*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.
- Carroll, M. (2001). The Spirituality of Supervision, in Carroll, M., and Tholstrup, M. (2001). *Integrative Approaches to Supervision*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.
- Carroll, M. (2007). One More Time: What is Supervision?, *Psychotherapy in Australia*, 13(3), 34–40.
- Carroll, M. (2010). Supervision: Critical Reflection for Transformational Learning (Part 2), *The Clinical Supervisor*, 29(1), <https://tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07325221003730301>
- Carroll, M., and Gilbert, M. (2011) *On Being a Supervisee: Creating Learning Partnerships*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Vukani, London.
- Cooper-White, P. (2004). *Shared Wisdom: Use of Self in Pastoral Care and Counselling*, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis.
- Clebsch, W., and Jaekle, C. (1964). *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective: An Essay with Exhibits*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Clinebell, H. (1984). *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, SCM Press, London.
- Coombe, N. (2011). Fear and Stepping Forward Anyway: My Journey To and Within the Interfaith Seminary, in Shohet, R. (2011). *Supervision as Transformation: A Passion for Learning*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.
- Crotty, M. (1996). Doing Phenomenology, in Willis, P., and Neville, B., (eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice in Adult Education*, David Lovell, Melbourne.
- Falender, C., and Shafranske, E. (2016). *Supervision Essentials for the Practice of Competency-Based Supervision*, American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.
- Foskett, J., and Lyall, D. (1988). *Helping the Helpers: Supervision and Pastoral Care*, SPCK, London.
- Gardner, F. (2011). *Critical Spirituality: A Holistic Approach to Contemporary Practice*, Ashgate Publishing Company, Farnham, Surrey.
- Hawkins, P., and Shohet, R. (2012). *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, McGraw Hill, Open University Press, Berkshire, UK.
- Kelcourse, F. (2013). Supervision as Soul-Care: A Spirituality of Integrity, *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*, (Online).
- Kinast, R L. (1996). *Let Ministry Teach: A Guide to Theological Reflection*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.
- Lartey, E. (1997). *In Living Colour: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling*. Cassell, London.
- Leach, J., and Paterson, M. (2010). *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook*, SCM Press, London.
- McAlpin, K. (2009). *Ministry that Transforms: A Contemplative Process of Theological Reflection*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.
- McCarty, D. (1978). *The Supervision of Ministry Students*. Southern Baptist Convention, Atlanta, Georgia.
- Pattison, S. (2008). Is Pastoral Care Dead in a Mission-led Church?, *Practical Theology*, 1(1), 7–10.
- Patton, M Q. (2016). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, Ca.
- Patton, J. (2005). *Pastoral care: An Essential Guide*, Abingdon, Nashville.
- Pembroke, N. (2006). *Renewing Pastoral Practice: Trinitarian Perspectives on Pastoral Care and Counselling*. Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, Surrey.
- Pohly, K. (1977). *Pastoral Supervision*, The Institute of Religion, Houston.
- Pohly, K. (1988). The Distinctiveness of Ministry Supervision, *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry*, 10, 114–130.
- Proctor, B. (2004). *Group Supervision: A Guide to Creative Practice*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, Ca.
- Rigby, J. (2010). Reaching for the Realities in Rituals, *Australian Journal of Pastoral Care and Health*, 4(1).
- Shaw, E. (2004). The ‘Pointy End’ of Clinical Supervision: Ethical, Legal and Performance Issues, *Psychotherapy in Australia*, 10(2), 64–70.
- Rumbold, B. (2002). *Spirituality and Palliative Care: Social and Pastoral Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Seals, M., and Pyle, W. (1995). *Experiencing Ministry Supervision: A Field-Based Approach*, Academic, Boston.
- Shohet, R., (ed.), (2011). *Supervision as Transformation: A Passion for Learning*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.
- Speedy, J. (2000). Narrative Approaches to Supervision, in Carroll, M., and Tholstrup, M., (eds.), *Integrative Approaches to Supervision*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.
- Ward, H., and Wild, J. (1995). *Human Rites: Worship Resources for an Age of Change*, Mowbray, London.

---

**Rev Dr Alan Niven** is a Churches of Christ minister. Following 19 years of parish ministry, he was Lecturer in Pastoral Theology and Family Studies at Stirling College, University of Divinity (from 1994–2016). Currently Stirling’s Director of Research, he supervises doctoral work in healthcare, spirituality and chaplaincy, pastoral counselling, disability, policy and pastoral care, multicultural ministry, and ageing and spirituality. He has supervised ministers and priests (six different traditions) in their practice for over 20 years. He has helped develop denominational codes of conduct and was active in disciplinary processes including victim advocacy. In 1997, he first taught the study unit ‘Violence and abuse: Theological, pastoral and spiritual responses’, as a personal response to family violence and the growing evidence of abuse within the church.