

## THE PASTORAL SUPERVISION OF PRIESTS, CLERGY AND OTHERS IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

The vocation to priesthood (or clerical ministry) is, as anyone knows who is exercising such a calling, extremely demanding. According to the *Ordination of Priests, also called Presbyters (Church of England)* the calling is to: *'be servants and shepherds ... to proclaim the word of the Lord and to watch for the signs of God's new creation. They are to be messengers, watchmen and stewards of the Lord; they are to teach and to admonish, to feed and provide for his family, to search for his children in the wilderness of this world's temptations, and to guide them through its confusions .... Formed by the word, they are to call their hearers to repentance and to declare in Christ's name the absolution and forgiveness of their sins.... they are to tell the story of God's love .... to baptize new disciples ... and to walk with them in the way of Christ, nurturing them in the faith. They are to unfold the Scriptures, to preach the word in season and out of season, and to declare the mighty acts of God. They are to preside at the Lord's table and lead his people in worship, offering with them a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. They are to bless the people in God's name. They are to resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor, and intercede for all in need. They are to minister to the sick and prepare the dying for their death. Guided by the Spirit, they are to discern and foster the gifts of all God's people, that the whole Church may be built up in unity and faith.'*

... and that's just for starters! But in none of this is there a mention of the pastoral needs of priests themselves. It is clear that many clergy carry enormous burdens; the expectations on them, both external and internal, can mask deeper needs; personal relationships can become confused and boundaries blurred. Indeed, for some clergy there *are* no boundaries. Finally the very vocation to be a priest can become a role that overwhelms personal identity.

And, whilst this is particularly true of ordained ministers, anyone exercising pastoral ministry needs to step back and review their work from time to time with someone who can offer an impartial overview. For all these reasons proper pastoral care is vital. But, amidst the pressures of ministry, such care is often low-down, if not at the bottom, of the list and can seem yet another 'thing that should be done'. However, by ignoring pastoral care ministers are setting a bad example! Formal supervision is a clear requirement in most secular, pastoral professions and no comparable professional walk of life leaves the requirement for self-care absolutely to its own personnel.

The ministry of Pastoral Supervision is intended to address this need: it is a means of being accountable to ourselves, to our vocation and to our God. So what might this involve?

Firstly, it is *not* spiritual accompaniment, counselling or line-management! It is a **'regular, planned intentional and bounded space in which a practitioner skilled in supervision (the supervisor) meets with one or more other practitioners (the supervisees) to look together at their practice. (It is) a relationship characterised by trust, confidentiality, support and openness that gives the supervisee freedom and safety to explore the issues arising in their work. It works within a framework of spiritual/theological understanding in dialogue with the supervisee's world view and work.'** (Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators – APSE. *Definition of Supervision*)

Unlike mentoring, the purpose of which has a particular focus defined as *'maximis(ing)the grace of God in the life of the mentee, through deepening their identity in Christ, developing them in Christlike character and integrating them more fully into the body of Christ. To develop their potential in the service of God's kingdom purposes through discerning more clearly God's direction for their lives.'* (Diocese of Bath and Wells), supervision has no goal other than the *pastoral* needs of the individual.

It therefore compliments the ministry of spiritual direction, which is primarily concerned with the movement of God within the life of the directee.

The ministry of Supervision needs to be:

- psychologically informed – drawing on relevant psychological theory and insight;
- contextually sensitive – paying attention to the particularities of setting both particular and general;
- praxis based – focusing on the work and/or issues that arise in and from the supervisee's pastoral practice;
- a way of growing in vocational identity, pastoral competence, self-awareness, spiritual/theological reflection, pastoral interpretation, quality of presence, accountability, response to challenge, mutual learning;
- attentive to issues of fitness to practice, skill development, management of boundaries, professional identity and the impact of the work upon all concerned parties.

*(Definition by the Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators – APSE)*

**Supervision**, therefore, is about over-looking, from another view/perspective to gain a better vision, extra vision, a further look. It covers awareness of God, growth in insight and professionalism (good practice), space to safely explore feelings and to find encouragement and support

### **THE MINISTRY I OFFER – SOME PRACTICAL INFORMATION**

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** It is important that you are aware of some of the 'norms' associated with this ministry. Confidentiality is essential. However, as a Supervisor I also undergo Supervision and there may be times when I need to discuss aspects of what has emerged with my own Supervisor. This would be anonymous and is, of course, quite normal for those seeking to act professionally. Supervisors realise the importance of being accountable to someone for their ministry;

**DATA PROTECTION:** I may make brief notes about matters that have arisen. These are kept in a secure place and are destroyed at regular intervals.

**COST:** As I depend on this ministry to provide some of my income needs, I do ask for a donation. Your gift will also cover such matters as on-going training, my own Supervision and, where applicable, room hire. As a guide this might be equivalent to your hourly income or you may consider the value you place on this ministry.

**REVIEW:** If you decide to proceed I would expect that, after about 5 sessions, we would review the relationship to see how it's working for both of us. This review would consider the process and content of our time together with the idea of looking at the effectiveness/suitability of the process and whether we are both confident in the way the relationship is developing. Such Reviews would take place from time to time (app. Every 18 mths. or on request)

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*John-Francis Friendship offers this ministry in London. Information is available from:  
<http://www.spiritualdirectioninlondon.org.uk>*