

Initial Guidance Notes concerning GROUP SUPERVISION for SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS -John-Francis Friendship APS*

'The primary purpose of Supervision is the personal growth of the Spiritual Director as Spiritual Director.' (Barry and Connelly)

The scope of supervision is wide. It covers awareness of God in one's ministry, growth in insight and professionalism (good practice); a 'safe-space' to explore feelings, encouragement and support. Sometimes the issues that come up in spiritual direction can be very complex, confusing or difficult to disentangle. It might be that the relationship between director and directee has become troubled, for whatever reason, or perhaps the director feels the directee is stuck in a given situation. Supervision offers the opportunity for the director to step back and reflect with another professionally trained and trusted person in an environment of confidentiality and complete anonymity in an attentive and supportive climate which should allow the director to explore new options and ways to approach the difficulty that has arisen.

I have spent many years as a Spiritual Director and have a close relationship with the *London Centre for Spirituality* at St. Edmund's, Lombard Street. From 2000 to 2002 I undertook the *Ignatian Spirituality Course* and now lead the second year of the *London Course in Spiritual Direction*. In 2005 I undertook training in *Supervision Skills for Spiritual Directors* and was accredited* as a Pastoral Supervisor by the *Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators (APSE)* in 2010. I offer a choice of Supervision Groups that involve participants in the process: these offer an opportunity for members to have individual time for facilitated supervision as well as peer-group help. Concerning shared supervision George J. Scheme; SJ, in his book, *'Beyond Individuation to Discipleship'*, writes:

'The purpose of peer group supervision is to develop the directing skills of the directors within the peer group. We are interested, not so much in the case being presented, but rather, what is going on right here in this room at this time. Our emphasis is on these people and what they say to each other. Peer group is a fine opportunity for ongoing education among spiritual directors ... It gives them an opportunity to have some kind of reality check on themselves so that they do not become a kind of private guru. In addition one checks out his or her own communication skills, decisions about some of the things that they have been doing in the directing situation with other good directors who also have experience.'

The *task of supervision* has been described as:

Contemplative - Awareness of God

As in Spiritual Direction, so in Supervision: the central task is fostering a contemplative attitude. The focus of Supervision is on the presence of God in the session discerning 'where and how God is' in the work of Direction.

Formative - Growth in Insight

There is often need for ongoing formation in the ministry of Spiritual Direction. This might take the form, of:

- theory, sharing of knowledge and insights ;
- reminders about communication/listening skills, awareness of content and process, appropriate interventions, and use of silence;
- development of self-understanding, especially strengths and weakness;
- identifying and clarifying any transference and counter-transference, i.e. strong feelings, thoughts and fantasies. What is their source? Does it originate with the director, or is it being stimulated by the Directee?

Normative - Growth in professionalism or good practice

This area concerns standards and ethics. Supervision is the place to bring these areas as they arise – either in Director or Supervisor – and so encourage good practice. Typical examples of this are boundaries and referrals.

Restorative - Release and holding

Supervision offers a place in which to discharge feelings. If these are not attended to they will push you around! Own them, claim them and release them.

Affirmative - Encouragement and support

Many of the tasks above imply a fair bit of gentle challenge: all this is done in the context of ongoing support and affirmation.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION:

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

Before joining a Group all those involved will be asked if there might be any known clash of interests.

From time to time it becomes apparent that a Directee is known to another member of the Group. In such a case it is advisable that the situation is clarified within the Group so that appropriate action can be taken by anyone affected. This would normally involve withdrawal from the Group for the duration of the presentation

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.

DONATION: It is my custom to ask for a *donation (£15 is suggested)*.

COMMITMENT: Members are expected to be committed to the Group. If you cannot attend for any reason, please advise me as soon as possible. I normally email members of the Group a reminder a few days in advance of our meetings.

REVIEW: At the end of each year there will be a review form to complete. If you wish to withdraw from the Group at any time, please discuss this with me. It is important to handle endings with sensitivity, both for the individual and the other group members.

*** NOTES ON CONFIDENTIALITY AND CHILD/ADULT ABUSE**

Whilst the relationship between the Supervisor, Spiritual Director and Directee is confidential, information which is disclosed during meetings will need to be disclosed to the appropriate person if someone's safety, including that of the Supervisor or Directee, is seriously at risk. It is possible that in such a close and private setting a Spiritual Director may hear of situations in which the protection of a child or a vulnerable adult is an issue. It is important that all Spiritual Directors understand what is expected of them should they become aware of any concern which falls within this description. There is guidance in *Protecting All God's Children* (The Church of England's Child Protection Policy) ssA3.2 - A3.6. More detailed information can be found in the chapter on confidentiality in *Working with Young People*, published by the Children's Legal Centre, which sets out the general principles governing confidential relationships for all age's groups.

WONDERING WHAT TO BRING TO SUPERVISION?

In preparation: Have a notebook beside you. Relax, take some deep breaths and allow yourself to concentrate on your breathing for a minute or two. Then let your mind drift back over your work with your Directees. Some of these questions may help to reflect on your work and your feelings about it. After reflection, make some notes. Think about what you want to learn and how you might present your material, and yourself, in supervision.

What surfaces for you immediately? Notice it and let it go.

What things left you feeling pleased? In what way did they go well?

What interventions, things that you said or did, seemed to be most helpful?

What was difficult for you? How did you feel when experiencing these difficulties?

What were you, are you, uncertain about?

What are you looking forward to in your ministry as a Spiritual Director?

Are there any anxieties about the way you are working with any one?

Are there some doubts/anxieties just 'out of view' which you would rather remained out of view? Identify the feelings not the items.

This may not be what you talk about when you get to supervision but you will have given yourself and your areas of work an 'airing'. Preparation can be a valuable form of self-supervision, reviewing our work and identifying what we really want to explore, to help ourselves and therefore as a result those with whom we work.