

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND SUPERVISION OF THOSE IN MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION

Anyone working in (ordained) ministry is involved in processes which concern the whole of their being as it encounters that which lies outside of the Self. Our personal history, faith journey, psychological make-up and personality type all impinge on who we are and who we are becoming. These, together with the cultural, religious and environmental worlds we inhabit have a deep bearing on us and can blind us to the fact that we are not the role we inhabit, whatever that may be – husband, mother, doctor, teacher, artist: clergy, in particular. All need to be aware of the impact of the role they inhabit and the effect this has on who they are. It is easy for a clergy-person to view who they are through the lens of their role, something that David Brenner observes when he writes:

‘There is one major form of self-organisation that ... serves as a potential transitional place between the body-centred self and the mind-centred self. We see this in those whose identity and consciousness are centred on what they do (vocationally) or can do (by virtue of talent, training or role) e.g. Mother, physician, poet or comic. ... The centre of consciousness is still the body because our roles, at least initially, are still body based. But movement from the public or material self to the role self involves broadening the perspective we take on the world and ourselves.

... The question now is “How am I doing in my role?” But ... I am now my role. ... No longer am I simply meeting the expectations of others. It is now a question of how I am doing in being myself, in being my role ... how I am doing in a role that is “me”.

(David G. Benner: *Spirituality and the Awakening of Self* by. p.97. Brazos Press. 2012. This forms part of his reflection on developmental stages of ‘Human Becoming’ from the ‘Body-Centred Self’, through the Mind-Centred, Soul-Centred to Spirit-Centred Self)

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND PASTORAL SUPERVISION

Who we are is not our role, nor is our ultimate calling – our vocation – to be equated with that role. We are, firstly, called by God into a unique and deepening unitive relationship with the Self, the Other and with God and this is the proper arena for Spiritual Direction. Pastoral Supervision, on the other hand, is concerned with identifying the various movements that affect the ministry of the ordained person (or any person who has become over-identified with their role) in order to see more clearly how the person can work from a place of greater freedom.

Whilst there are overlaps between Spiritual Direction and Supervision each perform a different function. For the purpose of this reflection I will use the definition of **Spiritual Direction** as *‘help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship’.* (William A. Barry SJ and William J. Connelly SJ: *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* p.8).

Supervision, on the other hand, 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 the supervisees’ practice which gives the supervisee freedom and safety to explore the issues arising in their work. It is praxis based – focusing on a report of work and / or issues that arise in and from the supervisee’s pastoral practice and 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 of Pastoral Supervision –The Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators – APSE)

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Arguably Spiritual Direction is, therefore, more concerned with PROCESS than CONTENT. Whilst both are important within Spiritual Direction it is, ultimately, the Process by which the directee encounters God that is the focus of direction. As Barry and Connolly point out: *‘Growth in a relationship requires that I pay attention to the other person. It also requires that I pay attention to what happens inside me when I am in the presence of the other and that I share my reactions with him. ... Noticing these reactions is fundamental to growth in the spiritual life, and helping a person notice and communicate them is one of the most fundamental tasks of spiritual direction.’* (*‘The Practice of Spiritual Direction’* p.65) Here the word ‘process’ can be used in a number of ways. There is the process that occurs between director and directee; the process that occurs within the directee; and that which occurs within the director. But, primarily, it is the process that occurs within the directee as they orientate themselves towards God (*see diagrams at end*)

So one way of understanding the PROCESS of Spiritual Direction, as someone has expressed it, is that of helping a person notice the movements and counter-movements of the Spirit – these are deeper than feelings and can be recognised as movements of ‘consolation’ (an increase in faith, hope and love) or ‘desolation’ (a decrease in faith, hope and love) heard in the Process. CONTENT is, of course, important for it provides the context in which these ‘movements’ occur. These will involve the story that is told – that has to unfold – which the Director needs to enable but not focus on nor seek to analyse, for this isn’t counselling. But the PROCESS concerns how the director helps directee notice movements of consolation and desolation that lie beneath the content and which the director will gently encourage the directee to allow to emerge. This Process is intended to enable the Directee to encounter the CORE PROCESS which concerns their desire for God, and God’s desire for them. This aspect of the Process may be beyond words – biblical, or other images, might enable this movement as might physical movement – but is rooted in our deepest desire.*

In all this it’s important to adopt a contemplative rather than an analytical approach. The encounter between God and the Directee is holy ground and the role of the Director is to listen deeply to the narrative (without getting bogged down in it) as it unfolds in order to elicit the ‘sweep’ and feeling of it; the subtle shifts, changes and movements. In all this the Director is *not* seeking to solve a problem but to help someone get in touch with what’s happening at a deeper level – the level of their encounter with the Spirit – to help them notice what obstacles there may be and where God may be leading them. As Duane R. Bidwell wrote in *Presence: the Journal of Spiritual Directors International* (Vol. 8. no.3. Oct. 2002) *‘A director might be expected to have knowledge about God and the spiritual journey, but cannot know precisely how to create spiritual growth or healing for a particular person or even know for certain what the directee is experiencing in a particular situation. The director has expertise about the process of spiritual direction, but cannot claim special knowledge about the content of an individual’s relationship with God or what spiritual practices might lead to the growth people seek through spiritual direction.’*

SUPERVISION

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 bearers 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 role of a priest can overwhelm not only the vocation to live out of their priestly calling but also their identity as a human being, called by God into relationship with Him. Ultimately we should not speak of a calling *to* ordained priesthood but, rather, of priesthood as a locus whereby a person is called to respond more freely to God. The role of the spiritual direction of priests (and, by extension, anyone who is responding to a call to exercise pastoral ministry) is, therefore, to keep their eyes fixed on the God who is calling them to Himself *through* the ministry to which they were ordained. Priesthood, like any other vocation within the Church, provides the context in which a person finds their freedom to seek God. The danger comes when the context becomes the focus of the vocation.

Whilst this is particularly true of ordained ministers, everyone exercising pastoral ministry needs to step back and review the way they are responding to that context from time to time with someone who can offer an impartial overview. But, amidst the pressures of ministry, personal pastoral 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, to the Church through which that calling has been affirmed and to our God. So what might this involve?

Firstly it should be noted that Supervision is *not* spiritual accompaniment, counselling or line-management, for reasons mentioned above. 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 Christ-like 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), the focus of Supervision is 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.

Pastoral Supervision, therefore, is about working with someone to gain an over-view 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 tasks of Pastoral Supervision have been described as: Contemplative

(Awareness of God); Formative (Growth in Insight); Normative (Growth in professionalism or good practice); Restorative (Release and holding of feelings); Affirmative (Encouragement and support).

CONCLUSION

The Spiritual Direction and Pastoral Supervision of priests are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin. One side is primarily concerned with the personal vocation of the priest. By keeping the focus of the person fixed into the process of their desire for God, the priest is enabled to realise afresh the One who calls them to Himself. In order to do this, and, maybe, to move the individual from focussing their attention on the content of their ministry to the process whereby they realise the movement(s) of the Spirit, it can be helpful to invite the person to move from their head to their heart. To reflect on images, symbols or dreams; to invite them to notice what is happening in their bodies or to use the imagination. And to notice what is happening in *our* bodies as we sit with the person. (Projective Identification – a psychological term first introduced by Melanie Klein in 1946 to describe what can happen when the client, closed to their feelings, projects onto the therapist who, in turn, ‘feels’ their feelings of which the client is unaware). All this calls for the Director to be in touch with their own interior movements as the story of the Directee unfolds. Whilst the Director should not ignore the content of a Directees ministry (the Director must listen to the context – the unfolding story) they need to remember that it is not the focus which, ultimately, concerns the individual’s desire for God.

Pastoral Supervision, on the other hand, has as its focus the context of the priest’s ministry in which their vocation is exercised. Both require reflective practise as those involved work with the content and process of the encounter.

Give me a candle of the Spirit, O God,
as I go down into the depths of my being.
Show me the hidden things,
the creatures of forgotten memories and hurts.

Take me down into the spring of my life,
and tell me my nature and my name.

Give me freedom to grow,
so that I may become that self,
the seed of which you planted in me at my making.

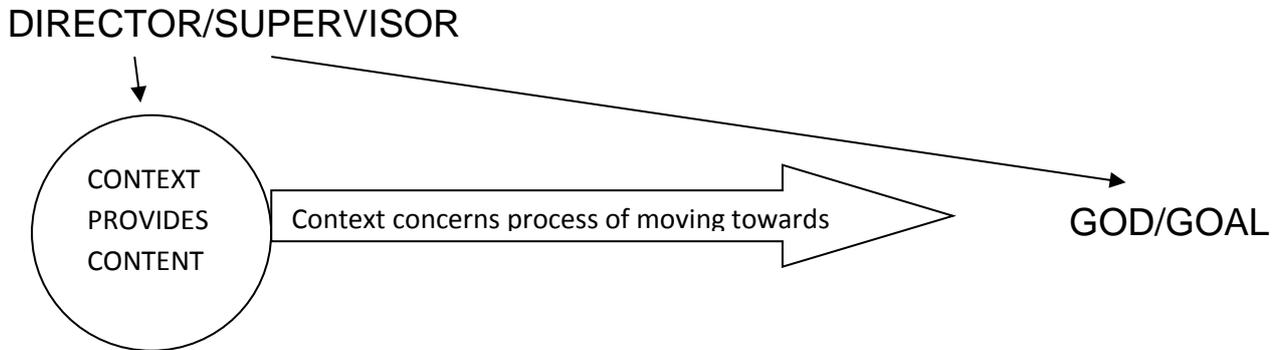
Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Bishop George Appleton (1902 – 1993)

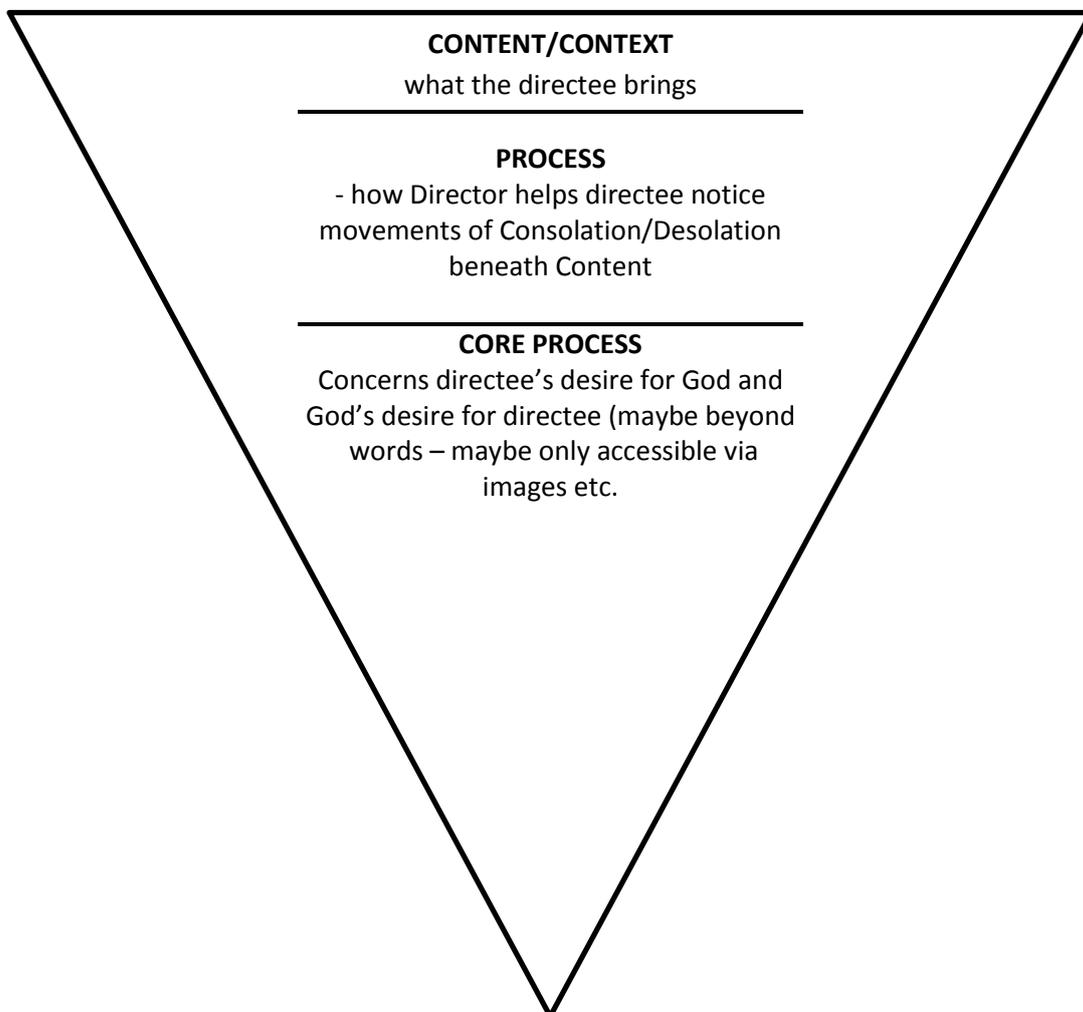
* Julie Dunstan: ‘Encounter’ 2014

TWO MODELS OF WORKING WITH CONTENT AND PROCESS

1) Working with Content to achieve the 'goal':



2) Working with Process to enable Directee to encounter God's activity in the core/heart/centre:



SOME QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- If you supervise Spiritual Directors who are working with priests/pastoral workers do you experience confusion between Direction and Supervision? How do you work with this?
- If you supervise priests/pastoral workers what part does the spiritual life of the supervisee play? How do you distinguish between Supervision and Spiritual Direction?
- How might you describe the personal vocation of a priest? Is the vocation to priesthood and priestly ministry the same? If not, how do you work with this difference?
- What part does Content and Process play in your work?
- How does Reflective Practice help?