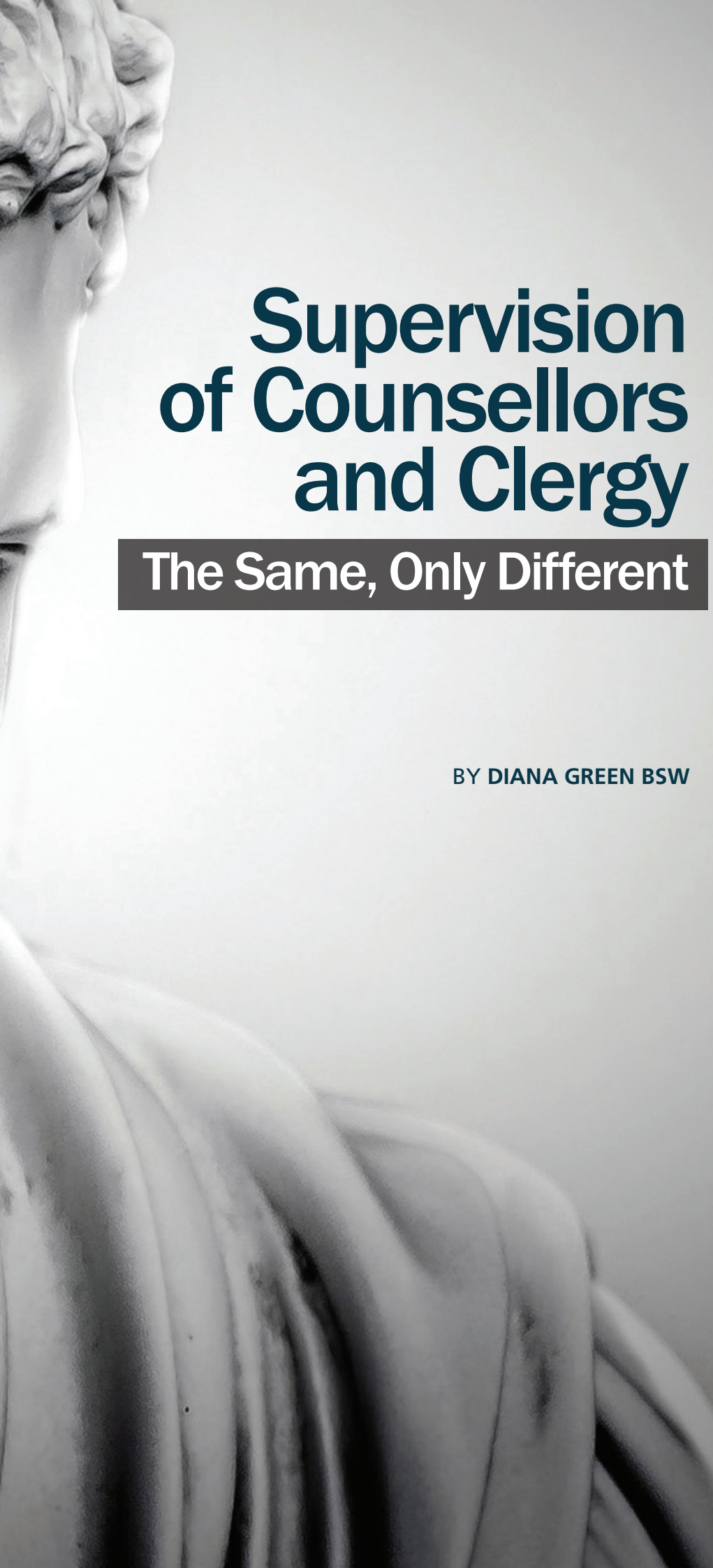

Supervision of Counsellors and Clergy

The Same, Only Different

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INTRODUCTION

Clinical counselling supervision is a specific, contractual relationship between two counsellors, similar to, and different from, the counselling relationship. Since the 70's, supervision of counsellors has been recognised as a necessary part of counsellor growth and development, both personal and professional. It is now considered an essential part of keeping both clients and counsellors 'safe' within the therapeutic relationship.

Regular supervision, along with continuing professional development, is therefore a requirement of membership of any Professional Association. With so many similarities between counsellors and clergy, there are sound arguments for clergy – pastors, ministers and priests – to receive supervision similar to that required by counsellors, social workers and psychologists. (Nydam, p1)

While many clergy agree that some sort of supervision or mentoring is probably a good thing, in application it is quite haphazard. Each denomination has its own requirements for supervision, mentoring and spiritual formation, and within any denomination, the requirements can vary from area to area, and diocese to diocese. Within denominations, there may be little or no oversight or management of these processes. And then there is the plethora of independent and non-denominational churches that make up their own rules around pastor supervision, personal and professional development, and church and pastor welfare.

The recently-released report from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse looks set to change all that. A key recommendation is that "each religious institution should ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, have professional supervision with a trained professional or pastoral supervisor who has a degree of independence from the institution within which the person is in ministry". (Recommendation 16.45) It is even more specific for Anglican and Catholic

churches; they are to institute mandatory national standards for all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including bishops, provincials, clergy, religious, and lay personnel. These standards are to include "mandatory professional/pastoral supervision". (Recommendations 16.5 b, 16.45 b). While these recommendations will not, indeed cannot, be implemented overnight, should they be adopted, there will be a huge increase in the demand for professional pastoral supervision over the next several years. This paper will explore the nature of supervision of counsellors and clergy, especially that which is unique to the supervision of clergy.

What is Supervision?

Supervision, as a concept, has many different facets and meanings, both formal and functional. For many, the word 'supervisor' suggests one who goes around, being the expert and correcting others. The word carries with it a sense of policing. The supervisor has a responsibility to ensure that everything in the organisation runs smoothly. In a small survey of pastors, (seven replies from fourteen surveys sent out), only three were receiving regular supervision. Although these three respondents spoke highly of their experiences, the others seemed to shy away from 'supervision' and its negative connotations. R6 wrote: "The word 'supervisor' conveys a meaning of, 'What are you doing? I'm here to check.'"

Pastors who don't receive supervision tend to prefer the concept of mentoring. Mentoring carries more the sense of an elder helping a junior to find their way. It feels friendlier, less threatening, more of a comfy place for talking, modelling, working through issues, getting reassurance and good advice. There is much to be learned from people who have been there before and learnt a few things along the way. We ignore wisdom gained from experience to our cost. However, clinical pastoral supervision, being more reflective in nature, is different, and equally important.

Although difficult to define, clinical pastoral supervision can be thought of as a relationship between a supervisor and a pastor, or group of pastors. This relationship is stable, positive, hierarchical, purposeful and collaborative.

- **Stable**: it is regular, ongoing, predictable.
- **Positive**: it is beneficial for the pastor, who (hopefully) looks forward to it.
- **Hierarchical**: it is not 'mates having a chat'; there are defined roles, with implied authority for the supervisor to help explore and reflect on the supervisee's life and work.
- **Purposeful**: one would expect to have achieved something at the end of each session.
- **Collaborative**: the supervisor and supervisee work together to achieve the best outcomes. (Sotheren.)

A goal of pastor supervision would be to support each pastor as he/she navigates the complex world that is family and church work. It would be to help each pastor explore her/his sense of self, and develop confidence to be themselves within their family and church. It would be to ask the pastor "Who are you? What do you want? What do you believe? And how can you remain true to yourself and your convictions through all the turmoil of life in full-time ministry?" Good supervision will support a pastor as he/she reflects on and works through issues in both personal and professional aspects of her/his life. Clergy supervision, then, may be defined as "an extended relationship, a collaborative venture, … a formative process that fosters the development of the pastoral identity, skills, and competency of the supervisee." (McCluskey, p224)

In what ways might supervision of clergy and counsellors be similar?

There are many similarities between counselling and vocational ministry. Both are essentially caring professions, which can, in itself, be mentally and emotionally exhausting. In addition, counsellor and clergy 'clients' are often hurt, even traumatised, people who are trying to get along in life the best they can. Both clergy and counsellors are trying to bring healing and change to these people, and help them grow in maturity and wholeness. Most likely, both are working with people who (probably unconsciously) resist change. And with all of that, both clergy and counsellors are all susceptible to their own triggers, transference/co-transference, getting 'stuck', and the challenges of resisting the invitations to rescue and get caught up in conflict triangles.

Being a pastor and being a counsellor are both vocations where success or failure in the job is closely bound up with personal identity. "I disagree with you" can equal "I don't like you", can equal "You're a failure". The challenge for both is to maintain a strong sense of who they are, irrespective of whether they are liked or not; whether they are perceived to have 'failed' or not.

All clergy, and many counsellors, are working within an organisation. They have obligations to that organisation, and must work within its structures, policies and procedures. Many clergy have obligations not just to their churches and parishioners, but also to their denominations. In addition, many clergy and counsellors work within a team, and often lead that team. This requires not just organisational skills, but also skills of listening to and negotiating with people. Whether working within a larger organisation or, as many counsellors do, in their own private practice, all clergy and counsellors must ensure that all legal requirements are met. This can feel onerous and a waste of time when what one really wants to do is what they are trained for.

Counselling and ministry both require a high level of training and expertise, both initial and ongoing, in their particular field. It could be easy for an outsider to dismiss their work as simple, or of little value; "Ministers only work one day

a week." However, a good counsellor, like a good pastor, is highly skilled and competent.

Complexities specific to church ministry

While ministers, pastors and priests are likely fully qualified in Bible ministry, very few have training, qualifications or any real experience in counselling. Yet, he/she is often the first person parishioners call on in times of stress/distress. Clergy are being asked to do something for which many are, at best, poorly equipped. Sometimes, though, they believe that, since they have the Word of God, they have everything they need.

Typically, when parishioners come to their pastor, they come expecting advice. While there is a time for sharing truths from God's Word, the very great temptation is to cut short the listening process and go straight to giving advice. This is especially tempting when it is exactly what the person seems to be asking for. However, to fail to listen well to the story is to fail to understand the situation properly; it is to fail to validate the person and their experiences. The gift of truly listening is a rare and precious gift, an act of love which is all too often overlooked in our time-poor society.

Family and domestic violence is of growing concern in our community. Many Christians experiencing family and domestic abuse are likely to go first to their church minister. For those who don't go, the signs will still be there. Clergy who are blind to these signs may miss the gravity of what they are hearing and seeing, and not take appropriate steps to protect the victim(s). This may (though not necessarily) be a particular issue where headship and submission are taught, and marriage is held in high esteem. Clergy, probably more than any other profession, will need to be able to identify and manage situations around family violence, and they need to develop skills to do this well.

In many ways, being a Christian adds a level of complexity to life. We know we should be a) joyful, b) content, c) evangelising, d) other, e) all of the above. We know we should have a marriage that reflects the relationship between Jesus and the church. We know we should be living the victorious life. And yet, that is rarely our reality. So now, as well as being depressed, anxious, fearful, and fighting with our family, we also get to feel guilty and defeated as well.

If my Christian client is bringing all that to me, their counsellor, they will likely also be bringing it into their church, even unawares, as in, "This is the Me who is coming among you in church today." And if they actually do come to the pastor for 'counselling', what is the pastor to do with that? What if the pastor is feeling exactly the same? (What are the chances she/he probably is feeling the same?) How helpful is this for either the pastor or the congregation member?

Added to this is the fact that Christians can be very clever at hiding behind God to avoid facing the real issues. A Christian alcoholic doesn't need to go to AA because church is their AA. Someone with depression, anxiety, fear just has to keep reminding themselves of God's goodness and grace to them. We just have to keep reading the Bible more, praying more, or (fill in the blank) more. In my practice as a counsellor, I have had to invite God to 'take a seat' while we do the work we need to do. A pastor is likely to get sucked into God-speak, and not look under that for what is really going on. They will also likely do this for themselves, in their own times of stress and distress, getting stuck in the guilt and defeat that comes with 'just try harder'.

Life is full of conflict, and church is no different. Pastors will constantly be faced with internal dilemmas around ethics, use of time, uncertainties around leadership and direction, etc. And external conflict will always occur, wherever two or more are gathered together, because, though made in the image of God, we live as if we are God. We have "become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity… full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice… gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful, senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless." (Rom 1:29-31) We are these people; we are the people who fill churches. We are also people whom God, by his Spirit, is regenerating back into his image. However, this is a lifelong journey, and, in the meantime, there will be conflict. Pastors will, and do, get caught up in these conflicts; inevitably, a large part of managing people is managing conflict.

A pastor's whole work is made up of dual relationships. Most of a pastor's current friends are her/his job. How does one handle that well? What happens when a pastor has to rebuke a friend, or, worse, report a friend who has broken the law? How does a priest ever not be 'working', when all her/his friends are their work or work colleagues? To whom can she/he unload in such a tight-knit community? Furthermore, when clergy retire, it seems inappropriate to stay on in the same church, so they lose not only their job and identity, but their friends as well.

Added to this is the particularly strong link for pastors between their identity and their job. Ministry is a calling, a vocation, a sacred trust from the God of the universe. Pastors have a deep desire to save and to serve people; they have given up their day job to do this. So what happens when someone leaves because they don't like, or they disagree with, their pastor? What about when the church starts to shrink or, worse, splits? Is that somehow the pastor's fault? What do they do when 'just try harder' doesn't work? And who are they when they retire, when they no longer have their identity as 'Pastor'?

The senior pastor is, in a sense, the CEO of a large organisation. That means they will likely be leading a team of other pastors and lay workers. And, like any good CEO, they need to keep growing this church. In addition, the senior (or only) pastor must manage the organisation, chair meetings and fulfil any other leadership roles required. They must balance competing interests and demands of different people within the congregation, always being tempted

to look over their shoulder at "Who am I offending now?" And let's not even mention music! Many clergy have opposition from power blocs within the church, as well as from individuals, either actively or passively, undermining their leadership. And through all of that, they are constantly being judged on their (perceived) godliness.

On the home front, while every marriage has its vulnerabilities, vocational ministry is especially hard on marriages. Extra-marital affairs may be a particular risk to clergy families. The endless demands of church work can mean that the church effectively becomes 'the other woman/man' at the expense of the minister's own family. Added to this, working closely with another person in ministry (another pastor, office staff, etc) or 'counselling' a congregation member (perhaps recently bereaved or separated) can be a particular risk to a pastor's marriage, especially if their own marriage and family life are not going well. To make matters worse, their family is constantly on display, adding the pressure of having at least to look good, no matter what the reality is.

How might supervision benefit clergy and the church?

Supervision is a place where clergy can be helped to grow both micro-vision (relating to individuals or small groups) and macro-vision (direction and process) around church and ministry. It is also a place where they can safely bring personal and family issues. In the survey, to the question "What are some issues you raise in supervision?" responses included: difficult pastoral care cases; leadership, planning and governance; personal issues, eg marriage, family and future plans; conflict or difference of opinion, and strategies to work through those; conflict between personal ideals and organisational structure and expectations; and trying various ministry ideas and dreams as a sounding board. (R1, R3, R5)

Given that people do go to their church minister/pastor for counselling, supervision may be an opportunity for clergy to learn skills of listening, responding, reflecting, and being present with people in their times of need. The "difficult pastoral care" (R1) and the "conflict or differences of opinion" (R5) are ideal opportunities for clergy to explore their own 'self' in those situations, and learn from example how to stay present and navigate through them. Or they may recognise that it is appropriate to refer some people for outside counselling rather than try to do it all themselves.

Good supervision may also be an opportunity for clergy to grow their awareness of what is happening in a complex web of family and church relationships. This awareness can be internal, eg, "What is this person triggering in me, causing me to react this way?" Or it can be external, eg, "What are the invitations to give advice, or to rescue; how can I manage the situation and avoid the traps?" They may be helped to sit with the discomfort of not giving advice, and of not being able to fix everything. They may be helped to work through issues such as dual relationships, and relational dynamics such as triangulation. Understanding the dynamics of relationships, particularly conflictual relationships, may help pastors manage those relationships, and manage themselves within the relationships, more effectively. Supervision can be an opportunity for clergy to grow an awareness of relationship dynamics, and discover how these truths sit within the Truth of God's goodness, his sovereignty and his work in the world.

This increased awareness can extend to the nuances of Christian language, and how it can be used to cover that which we wish to hide. Pastors and congregation alike will do this, and it is essential to be able to recognise and challenge that. It is important to be able to use appropriate language in this process to help them unravel and understand what is happening underneath the God-talk. A supervisor who can speak the language of Christianity, and who understands the added complexities of being a Christian who does not have it all together, can be invaluable to a pastor.

Sometimes it's lovely just to be able to go somewhere where it's safe to be open and honest. From the survey, R3 values "having a safe space and person to discuss issues and display emotions." R1 values the chance to "stop, reflect, talk and then reflect some more – in the midst of the work of ministry." He writes that "even the half-hour drive each way is fruitful, as it allows time to think."

For all of these reasons, supervision may be a way to extend the working life of clergy. Many work hard for years, even decades, before burning out, or 'having a breakdown'. This is a tragedy for themselves, for their families, and for their churches. R7 sees supervision as a way to 'evaluate my mental and emotional health'. It may 'help me last in my ministry and not burn out'.

Unhelpful supervision

Good supervision occurs in a supportive, collaborative and reflective environment. In contrast, poor supervision occurs when the supervisor does all the talking and gives lots of advice; does all the work in the session; takes responsibility for the supervisee's work and processes; and responds to the words but misses the feelings. (Paver, et al, 2001. p8).

When asked in the survey about unhelpful or problematic aspects of supervision, R3 reports "not meeting supervisor's expectation, but only once." R2 spoke of having been 'supervised' by two different (senior clergy). "One I found relatively easy to be supervised by, but the other, not. To some extent this was because the first (one) recruited me, while the second one came along some time later, after I'd gained experience and my own particular prejudices." In both of these examples of unhelpful 'supervision' there seems to have been little awareness of the collaborative, reflective nature of good supervision. It seems to reflect more the attitude of being the expert, giving advice and

correcting others, than an attitude of "How can we explore this together?" While we can learn much from those who have been there before, experts who give advice can be very disheartening, especially when the excellent advice turns out, for whatever reason, to be difficult or impossible to follow.

Reading the above comments about negative experiences of supervision, one might wonder if what was called supervision may, in fact, have been mentoring. A mentor is a senior, experienced person who is expected to solve problems and give advice. Whatever the process is called, there appears to have been a real disconnect between the parties involved. Ideally, supervision is much more relational and reflective than that.

What are the limitations of supervision?

Supervision of clergy will be no silver bullet for solving the problems of the Church (or churches). There are very real limitations of supervision:

- Variability in the quality of supervisors: One such limitation is the reality that the quality of supervisors varies. There is great skill in allowing the supervisee's story to develop, tracking the most immediate concerns/queries of the supervisee, and making comments that are specific to the material being presented. Without these skills, the supervisor may lose focus on the supervisee's concerns, effectively missing the real issues for the supervisee, and falling into the temptation to give advice (Roth and Pilling, p5). There is both skill and relationship in good supervision.

- Finding a "good supervisor": Alongside this is the fact that finding and accessing 'good' supervisors can be problematic. R7 lives in a large regional city and has thought about getting supervision, but "I don't know where to get suitable supervision." How much more of a problem is it for those in more remote areas?

- Time Pressure: Time pressures may be another deterrent to accessing supervision. A common theme from the survey was "something else would have to go" (R2). For some, time is a very real concern. One respondent travels two hours each way for one hour of supervision. For others, however, time may be more an excuse than a real issue. For them, one might ask, "If you are too busy to stop and reflect for an hour or so, are you too busy? Is your ministry sustainable?"

- Language of supervision: For many respondents, the language of supervision was problematic. R6 wrote, "That language is new and undefined. So pastors may not know what that means." Later, he wrote, "The word 'supervisor' conveys a meaning of; 'What are you doing? I'm here to check.' That is OK, but it doesn't communicate 'development.' One is forward-looking; one is backward-looking." R2 wrote, "As the Pastor of an independent church, I don't think anyone outside the church community should have a 'supervisory' role over me. I am quite prepared to accept 'supervision' by the local elders of the church, although perhaps this is more 'accountability' than supervision." Clearly, if clergy are to accept the idea of clinical pastoral supervision, some work needs to be done around the language of supervision, and the baggage that it seems to carry. Perhaps there needs to be a different name altogether.

- Over claims of supervision? Furthermore, it may be that more is being asked of supervision than it can deliver. If supervision does become mandatory as a result of the Royal Commission, then it may be seen, for example, as a vehicle to ensure that child abuse by clergy never happens again. It may, indeed, be given something of a policing role. In supervision, as in counselling, there are legal limits to confidentiality. This can present a tension between the supervisor and supervisee. Confidentiality is an essential part of the trust between the two, and trust is essential for any good work to be done. What happens, then, when the supervisor is concerned about some of the behaviour or relationships being disclosed by the clergy supervisee? What responsibilities does she/he have, and to whom? In cases of potential clergy abuses, it is likely that churches and denominations will need a range of strategies to deal effectively and appropriately with such behaviours; clergy supervision may be one part of the whole suite.

What to look for in a supervisor?

In the survey, answers to this question varied; however, some common themes emerged. According to survey respondents, a supervisor of clergy must, first and foremost, be Christian. They must have an "understanding of the Bible, church life and interpersonal relationships" (R1). R5 wants "someone who shares similar core convictions to me so that we're not on a completely different page." Full time ministry is complex and demanding; clergy are constantly being pulled between many competing demands from family, from the parish, from the denomination, from the wider community, and (perhaps worst of all!) from God. A clergy supervisor needs an appreciation of these complexities, and be able to help the pastor to manage him/herself in the various contexts in which they find themselves.

Further, some respondents want an experienced clergyman as a supervisor. R5 has sought out "someone who is an experienced pastor, … someone who has a track record of being a good, godly model of pastoral ministry" for supervision. R4 would look for "someone with more pastoral experience than me who could help me navigate the issues", while R6 would seek out "someone with pastoral experience, … someone that you believe could bring guidance and valuable insight, and had

confidence in." While an experienced pastor may well be a good supervisor, this is not necessarily the case; these comments perhaps reflect something of the blurred lines between supervision and mentoring.

Training in the skills of clinical supervision is also essential. (Paver, et al. 2001. p2). R3 identified "appropriately trained" as something to look for in a supervisor. This training would not necessarily be just theological; it would also, ideally, include training in skills of active listening, and an understanding of models of relationships and conflict. R1 wants someone who "understands interpersonal relationships". Typically, appropriate training and skills for supervision may be found in counsellors, psychologists, or social workers.

It may be helpful to find someone who is a little removed from the pastor. R7 would look for someone who "understands the ministry role, but who is also removed from my ministry area." This sense of being 'removed from my ministry area' may be locational, as in "not my church, not my town"; or it may be simply someone who can sit outside the situation and help the pastor reflect on the dynamics of what is happening, and the part she/he is playing in the process. R5 wants "someone separate to the ministry context, who understands and feels the pressures and demands that I face." There is a sense of being both 'inside' and 'outside' at the same time.

Among the responses in the survey were a number of immeasurables, such as:

"Wisdom, encouragement" (R4),

Someone "not easily surprised, accepting of emotions" (R3),

Someone "I can feel comfortable with and able to trust" (R5),

Someone "I feel safe with" (R7),

Someone "you can have confidence in" (R6)

Although hard to measure, these characteristics are crucial. Any supervisee must feel safe with, and able to trust, their supervisor, or the process will fail. As with counselling, effective supervision is as much about relationship as it is about the training and skills of the supervisor.

Conclusion

Vocational ministry is both very rewarding and very challenging. Many of the challenges and rewards occur across the 'caring professions'; many others are unique to clergy. This paper has explored the nature of the challenges of vocational ministry, and how supervision may be an effective and helpful support to such ministry.

As with any service that relies heavily on personality and individuality, supervision will have its limitations; it will not be the silver bullet to solve all the problems. It is important, if possible, to have a choice of supervisors, not just to give supervisees the best chance to find one that suits her/him, but also to facilitate movement between supervisors; it is often the case that supervisors are appropriate 'for a season'.

It appears that some work needs to be done to 'socialise' the concept of supervision in order to overcome resistance among many who do not receive it and are uncertain of what it actually is. It may be worth developing a term other than 'supervision', one that reflects the goal of supporting clergy rather than policing them. It is important to be clear about how supervision and mentoring are different. They both have a role to play in improving life and ministry outcomes for clergy, for their families, and for the church as a whole. However, while confusion exists between the two, neither will be used to best possible effect.

Clinical supervision is an integral part of counselling practice, improving counsellor competencies, and maintaining counsellor and client safety. Given the many similarities between counselling and vocational ministry, it makes sense to extend the benefits of regular supervision to clergy as well. Although some have had negative experiences with supervision, or may dislike the connotations of the word, those who do get regular supervision are very positive about it. Asked in the survey what is unhelpful or problematic about supervision, R5 replied, "I can't think of anything. It's great."

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