

National Conference for Clergy Life and Ministry Directors
Professional Supervision
July 2018

Br Damien Price cfc PhD

a. What is Supervision?

- Supervision is a 'walking with linked to our professional life.' It is a confidential thinking space. It is an ongoing reflective process.
- No one else can be fully in YOUR space. We all need a forum / a space where someone else is totally focussed on you and your professional story. The supervisor offers a mirror - to reflect what is happening for you. The supervisor - through their open ended questions / suggestions / 'coat-hangers' helps 'clear the image' in your mirror and will gently support and challenge you. In this space the supervisor and supervisee create a confidential thinking space to think through challenges and issues.
- Supervision is a non-judgmental space where the 'client' will name professional issues / questions / blocks / concerns that they are encountering.
- Supervision is **NOT** counselling. Often counselling implies that the client has a personal problem, a personal block that they wish to engage with.
- Supervision may mean that the client seeks some counselling at a later point.
- Supervision is a space for the 'throwing up of ideas - lateral thinking - brainstorming responses to or breaking open an issue.'
- Core to good supervision is the belief that the 'wisdom' - the 'answer' already lays within the client and the role of the Supervisor is to assist in helping the client name their wisdom.

b. Language: There may be value in discussing a different title for Professional Supervision. **Pastoral Mentoring** is a title that may be less threatening and accurately reflects what we are attempting to do.

c. What is Group Supervision?

- Group supervision has all the characteristics named above except that the focus is on the group dynamic identifying wisdom around common issues.
- Group supervision can take several forms. One approach is for each member of the group to name / identify an 'issue' and then the group discusses responses to it - shares their wisdom around it. Then - when ready the group may move on to another individual's issue. This process can take some time.
- Another approach is for the group to select ONE ISSUE and the group gathers and breaks that one issue open.
- The positive of Group Supervision is that it has a 'brotherly support element' to it. The negative is that - given group dynamics - sometimes a person does not claim the space to name their 'real' issue.
- Ideally - the group would have a 'professional support person or supervisor' to assist with the dynamic - to keep you on track etc and to balance group personalities.

The processes named above **ONLY WORK** when the issues raised are real - are issues that are genuinely of concern to the clients. The reality of the issues - is where the 'energy' for the work comes from. If this does not occur then the client is really only turning up to 'tick a box' and it is a waste of time for all concerned.

d. Homework - Supervision MUST be driven by the client's real agenda

- ✚ Key to effective Supervision will be the homework that the client does between sessions. In the course of our pastoral work day by day - we need to be self-aware - and work on our pastoral self-consciousness.
- ✚ As you engage in your pastoral practice a small 'question' or 'response' or 'idea' or 'concern' or 'reaction' will take place within you. You quickly become aware of it - and then 'file it' in the back of your mind. As soon as possible - possibly when you get back into the car - have a small note book and write your response / reaction / question down. This is what you bring to supervision. This is especially powerful and of use when the response or reaction etc occurs several times over the course of the month.
- ✚ Be especially aware when the 'reaction' appears to be out of proportion to the issue.
- ✚ Snikko!!
- ✚ The identification of PATTERNS of response can be of great value in supervision.
- ✚ You may have several 'issues' or questions to bring to Supervision - ONE of them will surface for you as being of more pastoral significance - trust your own wisdom here.

"I seem to be forever rushing from one crisis to the next and no one issue ever seems to get satisfactorily resolved."

"I am finding the Pastoral Council meetings so frustrating - there is a small group that dominate the conversation and the others can't get a word in."

e. Personality

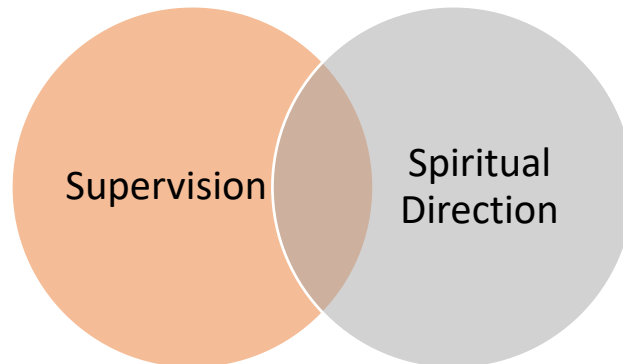
- As for all pastoral responses your own personality will be important in effective supervision. Some clients are naturally more intuitive - some more sensate - some more extrovert and others more introvert - ultimately these are merely the personal gifts we bring (and blocks to some extent) to gather the information needed for OUR effective use of supervision.

f. Other Reflections

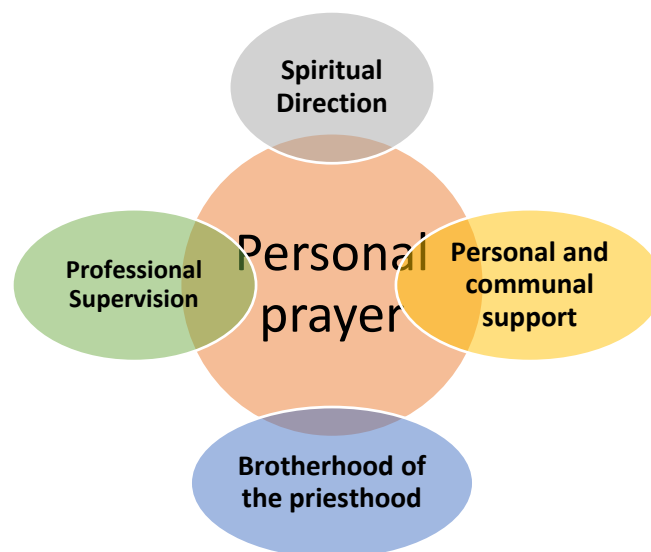
- ❖ It is important that supervision is NOT an intellectual discussion. We can TALK theology or Church politics till we are blue in the face!!! This is NOT what supervision is about. It is about blocks / issues of pastoral practice that are impinging on our person and our professional responses.
- ❖ Supervision is a cousin of Spiritual Direction. It is about accompanying another person to deepen their relationship with God, more peer to peer. There will be times when your pastoral practice has much to say to your own personal inner spiritual life. Both are vital for healthy priestly ministry. Questions like DISCERNMENT -

VOCATION - are personal and between yourself and your God; hence Spiritual Direction. Supervision is concerned with professional pastoral practice. Sure it has to have a 'personal' element to it - life is not dualistic.

- ❖ Sometimes it will be hard to know where Supervision begins and ends and Spiritual Direction starts! Don't lose sleep over it - it is the mentoring and 'walking with that matter.'



- ❖ Effective Supervision is like any skill - it takes time to be learned and mastered to be used well. Just as it takes time to learn the skills associated with meditation / centering prayer etc - so too does Supervision take time to become part of your pastoral skill set.



- ❖ **Mentoring.** Mentoring is where an experienced person shares their experience and expertise with a less experienced person e.g apprenticeship model. In the education sector mentors in schools for new first year teachers are commonplace.
- ❖ **Coaching.** Coaching is a skill focussed response to pastoral need. It is a cousin to Professional Supervision. Coaching has a forward planning thrust to it; a professional looking to the future and the skills associated with this journey. Coaching is normally short term- skill set - part of supervision but supervision is not part of coaching. You are coached to a specific target. Eg the skill in a Rugby lineout - the opportunity to practice - aiming for a certain point.

- ❖ Coaching is different from mentoring. It is to help the colleague to get really clear what they want to achieve. What is required is a structured conversation around their goals and how to achieve them. In both Mentoring and Coaching the colleague brings the agenda. Coaches COACH focussed on the skills necessary to achieve your goals. The emphasis is on the future and not the past.
- ❖ **Therapy / Counselling:** Therapy or counselling has the goal of healing past issues in order to progress into the future.
- ❖ Supervision runs the inner radar over your week / month and is sensitive to the 'blips' that ping and invite deeper reflection upon. Supervision is PERSONAL linked to PROFESSIONAL. Coaching focuses on a specific professional skill that you wish to master. One may call upon the skills learnt through coaching to more effectively engage in Supervision. Coaching will focus on the specific external skill. Sure the need for this skill will come from your pastoral practice but coaching will focus on it objectively - as an end in itself. Supervision goes into your personal professional engagement with the people and situations of your day.



❖ **General Comments:**

- a. Feelings are often an entry point - also be aware of depth of feeling.
- b. Feelings can be a doorway to another feeling which is a doorway to another feeling - there comes a time when you knock on the door of the 3rd or 4th identified feeling and the door opens to 'wisdom'.
- c. There is really no such thing as an unimportant 'throwaway line'!
- d. Don't open a can of worms unless you have the time and the skills to fish! (Price)
- e. Don't take yourself too seriously - sometimes it just is as it is. Be gentle with self!
- f. Self-awareness - ego aware - prayerfulness - life rhythm - consciousness - the Sacrament of the Present moment
- g. What is **YOUR** way of reflective practice that you might take to SD or PS? Going for a walk? Journaling? Meditation? Poetry?
- h. Problems solved over the whisky bottle are rarely really solved! (Price)

Alone - silo - bachelor - ego driven - patriarchy - power imbalance - power over - reactive - Messiah complex - dualistic (win-lose, right-wrong, black-white, in-out, saved-damned...), seeing the other as enemy, suppression, fear of sexuality, power of secrets, shadow side hidden and feared, busy, avoidance, image, focus on titles, shame, fear of vulnerability, male face it and solve it alone, no man is an islandWE ALL HAVE SKELETONS IN THE CUPBOARD - not just us but every human being!