

## WHAT IS SUPERVISION?

The Overview Brief is to examine what is Supervision by looking at:

1. Definitions of Supervision.
2. Some functions and methods that Supervision employs.
3. How does Supervision differ from some other modalities such as Spiritual Direction, Counselling, Training, Coaching, Theological Reflection, Mentoring and Accompaniment? It will address similarities and differences also.
4. Articulate what is good and what is bad Supervision.
5. Beginning a contractual relationship.

### So what is Supervision?

*At its simplest, Supervision is a forum where supervisees review and reflect on their work in order to do it better. Practitioners bring their actual work-practice to another person (individual Supervision), or to a group (small group or team Supervision), and with their help review what happened in their practice in order to learn from that experience. Ultimately, Supervision is for better-quality service.*

*In a relationship of trust and transparency, supervisees talk about their work and through reflection and thoughtfulness learn from it and return to do it differently. (Carroll, 2007)*

I would like to draw our attention to some key words that begin to define what Supervision is. It is a **reflective** process. It is not a **reporting** process (as in duty of care). It is not about marriage relationships or issues to do with one's hobby club, but something about workplace practice. It is about **what has happened**, so **it does not begin by designing the future** without a basis from past experience. Importantly, it is the **Practitioner** who **brings the issue** to another person (Supervisor) or a group. It is **not the Supervisor who brings the agenda**. Supervision is about **reflecting** on past experience but it does not stop with reflection. It moves to **review** what happened in order to learn from that experience. It is also a relationship of trust and transparency, so it is not a professional service provider to the client relationship where often the process is not known by the client. It is **not an adult/child** relationship but rather **adult-to-adult relationship**.

So, from the definition given we can begin to unpack some of the meaning from the definition by saying that Supervision is.....

<b>SUPERVISION IS ABOUT</b>	<b>SUPERVISION IS NOT ABOUT</b>
REFLECTING	REPORTING
WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST	BEGINNING WITH THE FUTURE
IMAGINATION FOR THE FUTURE	FANTASY FOR THE FUTURE
PRACTITIONER BRINGING THE ISSUE	THE SUPERVISOR SETTING AGENDA
HONESTY	DENIAL
ADULT-TO-ADULT RELATIONSHIP	ADULT-TO-CHILD RELATIONSHIP
LEARNING TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY	JUSTIFYING SELF

Having made a start in attempting to define Supervision, it is also true to say that there is unanimous agreement in the literature that there is not a universal definition of clinical supervision. Various authors spend a cumbersome process coming to a 'working definition' describing Supervision.

So, for us, it is important to have a working understanding of Supervision according to our field while staying connected to the wider world of professional supervision.

We can ask whether we need a separate definition in a Christian ministry context and further do we need separate or slightly altered definitions for our different ministry contexts. I think the answer is yes.

Before we get to that, I think it is important to look at the function of Supervision and various modes of Supervision.

Supervision comprises a number of functions; here are three according to Kadushin's model of Supervision.<sup>i</sup>

1. Educational (Formative)
2. Supportive (Restorative)
3. Administrative (Normative)

Proctor (1987) further defined them as Formative, Restorative and Normative, bringing the function into a pastoral context. This demonstrates the fact that Supervision must and should be adapted into our own field of ministry and particular context. In a Pastoral Supervision context the Normative deals with

managerial issues and boundaries within the Supervision session and beyond it. Restorative supports the supervisee through active listening, encouragement, feedback, assisting with connections to vision or sense of vocation, helping recovery of self that may have been lost in work. The Formative forms the supervisee's work through guidance on how to interpret or handle situations, encouraging growth and change, rehearsing new strategies or roles.<sup>ii</sup>

## **METHODS OF SUPERVISION**

Methods can vary, and some of them are:

1. Day-to-Day Supervision

This is the situation where the supervisee has access to the Supervisor in real time. This tends to be informal and often occurs face to face but can be over the phone, Skype or in remote situations via email.

2. One-to-one Structured Supervision

This is conducted on a regular basis with commitment to set aside a specific time with a suitable environment that facilitates deep listening and conversation and good reflective practice that enables the setting and monitoring of learning goals and objectives.

3. Group Supervision

The purpose of group Supervision is to provide a forum for facilitated open discussion and learning from each other's experiences. This can include case study discussions. Group Supervision is led by a clinical supervisor.

4. Peer Supervision

This is usually conducted between two or more experienced practitioners as a method of consultation, problem solving, reflective practice and clinical decision making. It provides a forum for sharing knowledge and experience and is to be used to complement more formal avenues of Supervision.<sup>iii</sup>

It is beneficial to articulate the meaning of words such as Spiritual Direction, Coaching, Pastoral Supervision, Mentoring, Monitoring, Accompaniment, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Theological Reflection, Leadership Training, Peer Support, Counselling and Mental Health Therapy.

Experts and professionals will dialogue, agree and disagree over the similarities and the distinctions of various disciplines. I think what is most important is that each of us have an understanding and a language for dimensions of Ongoing Formation that involve the reflective space. As there is a bevy of dimensions and processes it may be helpful to think more deeply about five terms, namely Pastoral Supervision, Theological Reflection, Spiritual Direction, Mentoring and Coaching, to begin our task.

## **Pastoral Supervision**

Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook is authored by Jane Leach and Michael Paterson for the work of APSE (Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators). (1) It refers to Accountability and Ministry in these ways:

*Effective Pastoral Supervision provides space for those in ministry:*

- *To be ourselves*
- *To admit tiredness, weakness, failure, disillusion, ambition, hope, confusion*
- *To be heard and to have our work valued*
- *To be challenged*
- *To examine the gap between our conscious intentions and our practice*
- *To allow God to work with us through honest interaction with one another*
- *To dream dreams and reconnect with our calling*

We are encouraged to review the structures of accountability in which our ministry is embedded by asking:

- *Who values what I do enough to listen to me regularly and without interruptions?*
- *Who gives me space to be truthful about what is happening in my ministry?*
- *Who do I trust enough to be challenged by what they say?*
- *In what context(s) am I attending to my vision and reconnecting with my sense of call?*<sup>iv</sup>

For some the word 'supervision' is problematic because it is taken to mean that someone beyond a person's control will be 'snooping', waiting for an opportunity to catch a person out.

Supervision in some ways is an unfortunate word. A Supervisor in the Tim Tam factory production line is looking for defects in chocolate biscuits on a production line or a school crossing Supervisor has a duty to ensure pedestrians stay under parent/child style direction. All must wait for the whistle and keep within the painted lines. These inferences are not helpful when we reflect on what is Pastoral Supervision.

In Pastoral Supervision it is the supervisee who presents the agenda. The principle is that the insight lies within the one presenting their own agenda and the skilled Supervisor assists by creating an environment for insight and understanding. Patricia O'Connell Killen in her chapter entitled *Assisting Adults to Think Theologically* outlines four distinct steps as follows. <sup>v</sup>

### **Theological Reflection**

1. Non-judgemental Narration of Experience. Adults must learn to say "I" to speak what they mean, in order to listen, to clarify, and to engage in what they bring to Supervision as their own experience rather than a perceived agenda of others. E.g. "The problem with my colleague is that she always ( ...)", rather than "When my colleague does this, I experience in myself a feeling of ( ...)". This leads to the second movement.
2. Identifying the Heart of the Matter. The heart of the matter is the issue, question, or wonderment that carries the most energy at the time of reflection, leading to a deeper and reverent space.
3. Structuring a Correlation. This is more characteristic of Theological Reflection but is a movement that often arises in Pastoral Supervision also. It is a way of constructing a conversation between the heart of the matter in our experience and a piece of Christian tradition. Tradition covers the entire treasure trove of Christianity; it includes Scripture, church history, doctrine, theology, lives of saints, popular devotions, etc. For example: When my colleague says this I feel that.. and so it leads me to a correlation with the Gospel scene which is the Canaanite Woman challenging Jesus.
4. The fourth step is Identifying New Learnings and Calls to Action. This step is most important to both Pastoral Supervision and Theological Reflection. O'Connor Killen makes the point that there is something about the psyche that the idea or insight that is the most significant, may precisely be the one first forgotten upon leaving the room or space because it alters one's habitual meaning-making interpretative

frameworks. To write down or articulate what will be different in one's approach and behaviour is a way of ensuring change and learning. Sheila Ryan in describing Supervision speaks about interrupting the psyche in its habit of remaining in a fixed meaning-making interpretative stance as outlined previously by Patricia O'Connell Killen. *Ibid.*

*Supervision interrupts practice. It wakes us up to what we are doing. When we are alive to what we are doing, we wake up to what is, instead of falling asleep in the comfort stories of our clinical routines and daily practice. The supervisory voice acts as an irritator interrupting stories (comfort stories) and facilitating the creation of new stories.*<sup>vi</sup>

The creation of *new stories* can be described as not so much fantasy (wish) as to what to do, but to imagine (intend) how the learning will be put into action. If a Supervisor has enabled a supervisee to do this, it can be taken as a sign of effective Supervision.

Another reference to this aspect of interrupting sleep is found in a saying of Jesus: *Beware, keep alert for you do not know when the time will come.* (MK 13:33). David Ransom writing about paradox as a new awakening in spiritual experience that demonstrates an interface with Supervision, writes:<sup>vii</sup>

*Spirituality awakens us: it is the dimension of our lives that works to awaken us and to keep us awake to the deepest currents and springs of life. Indeed, in one of his characteristic drawings, the cartoonist Michael Leunig once portrayed one of the clearest definitions of the spiritual life that I have come across. In his portrayal, he has his figure, eyes wide open, haversack over his shoulder, following his duck (a symbol of the soul for Leunig), on a journey of what at first looks like mountain peaks. But close analysis of the picture reveals the mountain peaks actually to be the noses of the upturned people that are asleep.... The spiritual person is the one who lives their life awake, while the rest of the world slumbers.*

This alertness is to be awake to what is within the deeper consciousness of the dreaming. *Core to good Supervision is the belief that the 'wisdom' – 'the*

*answer’ – already lies within the client and the role of the Supervisor is to assist in helping the client name their wisdom.* <sup>viii</sup>

## **Spiritual Direction**

Spiritual Direction is a one-to-one relationship between a Director who is trained and experienced in being awake to the movements of God, and the Directed. The Director through deep listening to the life experience of the Directed who seeks to hear, feel and know the movements of God, is able to reflect back to the Directed the issues that require further spiritual discernment. What is distinctive about Spiritual Direction is that the issues raised are the relationship between God and the Directed.

Another avenue for growth other than Pastoral Supervision is that of mentoring.

## **Mentoring**

Mentoring is when 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. Many dioceses provide a ‘Mentor Priest’ for a newly ordained priest or for a priest who recently migrated to Australia. An experienced mentor would listen to the experience of the mentored in order to understand what the mentored needs to know and ensures that best practice standards are maintained. Also, a Mentor would be looking for the areas that a first-year teacher or ordained minister would not normally know due to inexperience.

## **Coaching**

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 the goals and how to get their goals achieved.

Concerning Mentoring and Coaching, what is the same is that the colleague brings the agenda, but what is different is the response by the coach and by the mentor.

The coach assists the colleague to become really aware of what they want to work on and helps them to engineer the path for the future. The goal has an engineered, practical path, step by step. The emphasis is on the future and not

the past. In this way it differs from therapy, which has a goal of healing of past issues in order to progress into the future.

It's not focussed on the problem and on problem solving. Coaching is about getting really clear what the colleague wants and forming strategies to achieve the colleague's goals.

What is good and bad Supervision and what are the qualities and characteristics of good and not so good Supervisors?

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF SUPERVISION**

### **Some characteristics of good Supervision are:**

1. That it is regular as an accepted practice in the art of reflective thinking.
2. That the supervisee gains insights that become improved life and relationship skills and can recognise why this is so.
3. That the supervisee is able to work with what disturbs and not close down.<sup>ix</sup>
4. That the forum provides a space for non-judgmental listening.
5. That the Supervision does not become another mode which it is not, e.g. therapy or coaching.
6. That the Supervision is genuinely reflective of actual experience.

### **Some characteristics of bad Supervision are:**

1. Being absent or unavailable affects trust and the delivery of high-quality Supervision outcomes.
2. Being rigid such as setting rules without reasons or instructions without explanation. This can affect the experience of transparency, which is vital to good adult-to-adult relationship. This may affect outcomes.
3. Not having an agreed contract.
4. Not being sufficiently challenged.
5. The lack of active listening due to tiredness or unrelated stress.
6. Not providing enough time.

### **Some characteristics of not so good Supervisors**

1. The Supervisor does not seek professional Supervision for self.<sup>x</sup>
2. The Supervisor is not aware of cultural differences, such as power imbalance of authority figures.<sup>xi</sup>



3. The Supervisor does not have an integrated style of Supervision and so cannot adjust to the supervisee's differing contexts.<sup>xii</sup>
4. The Supervisor has not formed a working contract with the supervisee.
5. Telling instead of leading through reflective practice.<sup>xiii</sup>

### **Some characteristics of good Supervisors**

1. A good Supervisor also participates in Supervision in another forum.<sup>xiv</sup>
2. Keeps the supervisee safe and well by being aware of stress levels and ability to cope.
3. Acknowledges the current skills and experience of the supervisee.
4. Addresses the individual needs of the supervisee including learning style.
5. Acknowledges the supervisee as a person.
6. Provides positive reinforcement when new skills and knowledge are acquired to reinforce learning.
7. Develops a Supervision contract which clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the supervisory relationship.
8. Maintains confidentiality within the limits of the Supervision contract.
9. Ensures that feedback is provided in a positive way and addresses areas of further development clearly and unambiguously.
10. Acknowledges and manages factors that may influence the relationship, such as seniority, gender, culture, profession.
11. Provides a supportive, professional but friendly environment, free from any intimidation.
12. Conducts Supervision in the context of building a clinical team in which all members are accorded professional respect.<sup>xv</sup>

### **THE BEGINNING AND THE CONTRACT**

The experience of Supervision is founded on a quality professional relationship that is accountable, transparent and collaborative and so it is vital to begin the Supervision relationship well accordingly. A conversation about expectations between the Supervisor and the Supervisee can only enhance the quality outcome of Supervision for both.

An effective way to set out expectations from the very beginning is to discuss:

1. Perceived strengths of both parties
2. Current concerns or fears
3. Areas the supervisee would like to develop
4. How the supervisee learns best (recognition of different learning styles)

5. What level of support the supervisee currently feels they require
6. What the supervisee expects from the supervisory relationship
7. What has worked and what has not worked for the supervisee in Supervision in the past

**The Supervisor should also discuss with the supervisee:**

1. The frequency of one-to-one Supervision
2. Availability and willingness to be contacted as assistance is required
3. The best way to access advice on a day-to-day basis.<sup>xvi</sup>

**CONCLUSION**

*Pastoral Supervision is a relationship between two or more disciples who meet to consider the ministry of one or more of them in an intentional and disciplined way.*

*A regular, planned, intentional and boundary space in which a practitioner skilled in Supervision (Supervisor) meets with one or more other practitioners (supervisees) to look together at the supervisee's practice.*

*A relationship characterised by trust, confidentiality, support and openness that gives the supervisee freedom and safety to explore the issues arising in their work.*

*Is spiritually rich and works within the framework of spirituality/theological understanding in dialogue with the supervisee's world view and work.*

---

<sup>i</sup> Health Education and Training Institute NSW Government. *The Superguide A Handbook for Supervising Allied Health Professionals*. (Second Edition 2011) 8.

<sup>ii</sup> Jane Leach and Michael Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision A Handbook, Second Edition* (London: SCM Press, 2015), 21.

<sup>iii</sup> Health Education and Training Institute NSW Government. *The Superguide A Handbook for Supervising Allied Health Professionals*. (Second Edition 2011) 13.

<sup>iv</sup> Jane Leach & Michael Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision: A HandBook, Second Edition* (SCM Press 2015), 24<sup>iv</sup>

<sup>v</sup> Sheila Ryan, 2004 – from AAOS website- <http://www.supervision.org.au/what-is-supervision/>)

<sup>vi</sup> David Ranson, *The Paschal Paradox* (Strathfield: St Paul's 2009), 78.

<sup>vii</sup> Video interview Carey McIver Bec. Hons, Dip Ed, Facel, IOC Member. Coach and Spiritual Director

- 
- viii Damien Price, *National Conference for Clergy Life and Ministry Directors Professional Supervision* (July 2018)
- ix Peter Hawkins, *Supervision in the Helping Professions, Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 3.
- x *Ibid.*, 4.
- xi *Ibid.*, 6.
- xii *Ibid.*, 5.
- xiii Health Education and Training Institute NSW Government. *The Superguide a Handbook for Supervising Allied Health Professionals*. (Second Edition 2011) 29.
- xiv Peter Hawkins, *Supervision in the Helping Professions, Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 5.
- xv *Ibid.*, 25.
- xvi *Ibid.*, 17

## Bibliography

Bourke, Greg *Clergy Life and Ministry Newsletter* (May 2018).

Hawkins, Peter. *Supervision in the Helping Professions, Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000).

Leach, Jane, and Michael Paterson. *Pastoral Supervision A Handbook, Second Edition* (London: SCM Press, 2015).

McIver, Carey BEc. Hons, Dip Ed, FACEL, ICF Member. Video interview Coach and Spiritual Director (2017).

NSW Government Health Education and Training Institute. *The Superguide A Handbook for Supervising Allied Health Professionals*. (Second Edition 2011).

Price, Damien. *National Conference for Clergy Life and Ministry Directors Professional Supervision* (July 2018).

Ranson, David. *The Paschal Paradox* (Strathfield: St Paul's 2009), 78.

Ryan, Shelia. AAOS website- <http://www.supervision.org.au/what-is-supervision/> (2004).