

## **Clarifying the Roles of Pastoral Care & Counselling Within the Care Ministry of the Church.**

**Peter Janetzki M.Soc.Sc. (Counselling) - 1998**

Through out history the church has been strategic in offering care and help not only to its parishioners but also to those in need in the community at large. There are six metaphors that are used in the New Testament to describe the church and its relationship with Christ;<sup>(1)</sup> 'The shepherd' is the foundational image of pastoral care. Pastors are the under-shepherds, which places them in the front line of people who are approached to relieve people from their hurting.<sup>(2)</sup> There is little doubt that the care offered by churches and pastors has had a positive impact upon people and within the community. However, reports over the past decade from North America indicate that there is also a negative side. These reports have indicated that up to 37% of pastors\* have engaged in sexual activity with members of their congregation,<sup>(3)</sup> and for 83% of these pastors these inappropriate relationships started in the counselling context.<sup>(4)</sup>

These gives rise to questions such as;

- Is counselling an intrinsic part of the care ministry of the church?
- What is the difference between counselling and pastoral care?
- What is the place and role of counselling within the church?
- What is a model that will enable Pastors and Lay People to identify the appropriate role/level in which they should function?
- What are the issues that Pastors and training institutions need to address if Pastors are going to include counselling as part of their ministry?

The care ministry model is a model that seeks to answer these questions.

This model builds on the concept of a continuum (with general helping skills and none to minimal training progressing to counselling with specific training and preparation) which is evident in models by Crabb, Tan, Crawey, and Hosick.<sup>(5)</sup> However it differs in that it involves two continua.

The first, 'Differing Roles Continuum' portrays the commonality of active listening skills used by both pastoral care and counselling (represented by the overlap). It also portrays the difference in focus and context which takes place as one moves from pastoral care into counselling. The overlap is the acknowledgment that the more advanced levels of pastoral care share similarities with the introductory levels of counselling. There is a point at which the context changes from a care relationship into a therapeutic relationship. This is a significant indicator of the change from a pastoral care role into a counselling role.

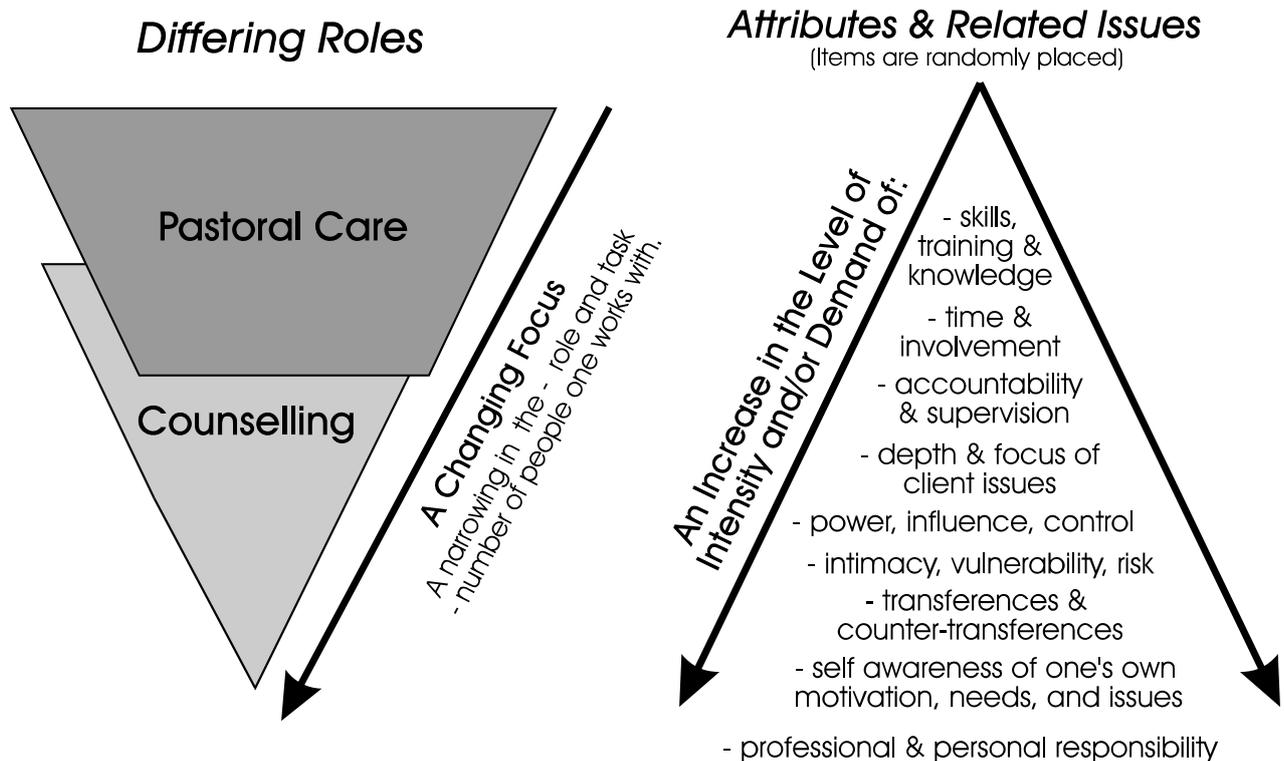
The second, 'Attributes and Related Issues Continuum' reflects the different level of attributes and training required and includes a number of issues which increase in intensity, demand, and importance as one moves from pastoral care into counselling.

---

\* Throughout the paper the term "pastor" is used to cover pastors, clergy, ministers, both ordained and unordained. However the concepts within this paper could be applied to anyone who is acting in pastoral capacity by being in a clear leadership role, (this could include others such as elders, deacons, treasurers, ministry leaders eg. choir directors and youth leaders, and Sunday school teachers.)

The continua are placed in parallel to highlight their inter-relatedness. As the focus narrows, in terms of context, role and task, the converse happens with the required attributes and related issues.

## The Care Ministry Model



### **The Care Ministry Model showing the Differing Roles Continuum, and the Attributes and Related Issues Continuum.**

The model highlights a number of issues that need to be addressed (especially if one is going to move into a counselling role) to ensure the care ministry within the church is more effective and reduces the potential harm to pastors and their parishioners.

#### **Issue #1. An awareness of the difference between pastoral care and counselling.**

The most significant difference between these two roles is the context and purpose of each. For pastoral care the context is primarily the spiritual well being of the individual. Thomas Oden states that the “shepherd metaphor conflates several helping images: birthing, nurturing, feeding, guiding, and healing. In all of these it connotes radical responsibility for others”.<sup>(6)</sup> Similarly Eugene Peterson perceives that the task of pastoral care involves assisting people to develop, grow, and mature spiritually in spite of the difficulties of life. Helping them be connected with God and the worshiping community primarily enables this to occur.<sup>(7)</sup>

Counselling has a narrower focus. Dan Allender describes it as, “an intense, highly focused interaction that allows one person to put aside the formalities and expectations

of a “typical” friendship in order to focus on one’s life (or marriage, or group) and to wrestle with the impediments to growth ... The context is based on the supposition of change. Clients come because they want to see change in their lives. Few friendships are based solely on the intentionality of change, nor should they be.”<sup>(8)</sup>

Counselling is a contextual relationship that primarily exists for a therapeutic purpose with the intentionality of change, growth and development. Whereas the context of pastoral care is primarily about the spiritual well being of the individual, with the purpose of the helping act being either healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling.<sup>(9)</sup>

### **Issue #2. Self-awareness of one’s own limitations and motivations.**

A second issue is the awareness of one’s own limitations in regard to their training and experience, so that appropriately timed referrals occur. It is important to note that pastoral care doesn’t stop after a referral. Counselling should not be seen as competing or negating pastoral care, in fact the two can and should function beside each other. However the one who is seeking to help can not fulfil both roles simultaneously. Regular contact should be maintained after the referral as the person in need is entitled to have a pastor who knows them and cares for them in a way which a counsellor is unable.

Added to this self-awareness is the ability to examine one’s own motivation for serving in this ministry. Pastors are in significant positions of power and influence, more so than other professionals, because they possess “spiritual authority and privileged access to people’s homes.”<sup>(10)</sup> This power can lead to one using the helping relationship to meet their own need of worth, value, identity, intimacy, or some sort of personal gain, in a subtle way. Hence the examination of motivation must go beyond the espoused beliefs, to examining unstated beliefs. It must be a recurring process throughout the ministry life of the pastor.

### **Issue #3. For the counselling role one requires appropriate gifting and further training.**

It is easy for pastors to claim that God has called them into a counselling ministry. Yet throughout the Scriptures it is clear that those God calls, He equips. This leads to questions such as; ‘Does this person have the gifting which will complement further training?’ ‘Are they willing to pursue further training or do they perceive that they have what it takes already?’

In reference to training of pastors for counselling Hosick says, “The training of pastors cannot teach about the depth and breath of human dynamics”.<sup>(11)</sup> Taylor identified that the vast majority of pastors are confronted with counselling cases that require depth therapy from a skilled professional psychotherapist.<sup>(12)</sup> Consequently training for an effective counselling ministry needs to include knowledge about specific issues, counselling skills, strategies, processes, ethics, supervision, and self-evaluation skills.

**Issue #4. Those in the counselling role need to be able to clarify their role and set appropriate boundaries.**

Role clarification and boundary setting is probably the most critical issue for all pastors and especially those who are involved in a counselling ministry. Unlike professional counsellors it is difficult for pastors to have clear delineation between their professional responsibilities and their private lives. Church life is referred to as a ‘family’ and the pastor is the primary figure intrinsically involved in most, if not all, facets of this ‘family’, which leads to the enmeshment of the professional world and private world for many pastors. This enmeshment highlights the extreme importance of role clarification and boundary setting for both pastors and the parishioners.

The best way to illustrate role clarification is to think of each specific role that the pastor has to perform as a hat. Some of these roles are; Shepherd, Leader, Intercessor, Teacher/Preacher, Counsellor, Confessor, Disciplinarian, Mentor, Administrator, Supporter, Friend, and Brother or Sister. Often pastors are expected to wear all of these hats and perform them equally well. (These expectations come from parishioners, church leaders, church hierarchy, and in some cases from the pastor themselves)

For a pastor wearing the counsellor hat clarification needs to take place at two levels. First they need to be clear and intentional about which hat they are wearing in any given situation. Second they need to assist the parishioner in understanding the role in which they are functioning at that time. To fail to do this can lead to destructive outcomes for both the pastor and their parishioners. For example a parishioner comes to the pastor, and in their mind they see the pastor as wearing the hat of confessor, and discloses a confidential matter, assuming that confidentiality will be maintained and respected. However the pastor sees the situation as the parishioner needing a listening ear and later that evening sees no problem with sharing the information with the church leaders as an issue of prayer during the leaders meeting. Consequently the pastor, out of care and concern, unintentionally violates the parishioner because there has been a lack of intentionality in clarifying roles and boundaries.

Another aspect of clarity is the awareness that functioning in the role of counsellor excludes one from functioning in some of pastoral roles. The counselling and psychological professions are clear about the ethics of dual roles. Consequently for them being a counsellor excludes them from entering into an intimate relationship with a client. Similarly for a pastor, wearing the hat of counsellor excludes and limits them from functioning in some roles with the parishioner concerned, in particular friend, and disciplinarian. Not accepting these appropriate boundaries opens the door for spiritual abuse, as well as other ethical violations.

Intrinsically related to boundary setting is confidentiality. Born points out “Parishioners are entitled to control any information they disclose in the relationship and that their disclosures do not become identifiable anecdotes during Sunday sermons. Parishioners can expect that confidentiality applies to informal settings like homes and the local supermarket as well as offices and social functions at the church.”<sup>(13)</sup> Drawing on codes of ethics from some of the counselling and psychotherapy associations one can identify two key issues that apply to those who counsel in the care ministry of the church. (i) Clients are informed of all relevant details including the purpose, goals, techniques, record keeping and limits of confidentiality prior to the commencement of the

counselling relationship, and (ii) the release of any information or material to others only occurs with the prior expressed consent of the client. In essence any disclosure (even with identifiable information removed) within the context of the church is not only unwise but unethical if prior consent has not been obtained.

**Issue #5. Those in the counselling role need to be able to identify and manage transference and counter-transferences.**

Dr Archibald Hart states, “Just as surgery produces blood, therapy produces a closeness that can easily be mislabelled ‘love’. The competent therapists recognises these feelings as a by-product of therapy and is trained to deal with them.”<sup>(14)</sup> Dr Hart believes that the transference and counter-transference dynamic is one of the main sources of church-related sexual affairs.

Pastors are often the object of transference (that is when a parishioner projects onto them unmet feelings, needs, desires, hopes and dreams, and unresolved issues that belong to the parishioner’s past). Those entering a counselling ministry must be trained in the dynamic of transference and counter-transference (when the counsellor projects their unmet feelings, needs etc. that belong else where into the relationship). This training most include three facets.

1. Recognising and identifying transferences and counter-transferences,
2. How to deal with both transferences and counter-transferences, (especially referring procedures),
3. How to protect themselves and their families.

If a counselling pastor desires to utilise these transferences as part of the healing process, they would require to have undertaken specific training and clinical supervision in psychodynamic therapy.

**Issue #6. The implementation of appropriate accountability and support structures including clinical supervision.**

A number of writers have suggested that those in the pastoral ministry function as ‘de-facto’ community health workers who have had a lack of training and support.<sup>(15)</sup> There are two primary levels of support required for those in the helping ministry, especially counselling roles: accountability and clinical supervision. Unfortunately the words, accountability and supervision invoke images of authority, power, control and fears of rejection, inadequacy or being instructed to do more and to work harder.

Accountability is about monitoring structural and individual issues to enable the care ministry to operate with integrity and to ensure that appropriate care and support are given to both the carers and their recipients.

Clinical supervision is an essential part of the counselling role as it provides a safe place in which the counsellor can evaluate their practice, be extended and developed, deal with transferences and counter-transferences. The end result should be a form of quality assurance and protection for both the counsellor and clients. Those functioning in the counselling role need to engage in ongoing regular supervision. This is best provided outside the structure of the church and denomination, and by a counsellor who is trained in supervision skills and processes.

## Summary

The incorporation of modern clinical counselling practice into the care ministry of the church requires churches and pastors to be clear about the differing roles of care, and the boundaries and limits of each of these specific roles. If a pastor is going to move from a pastoral care role to a counselling role the issues of motivation, self-awareness, appropriate training, role clarification and boundary setting, accountability, supervision, transferences and counter-transferences must be addressed. In particular the issue of role clarification and boundary setting is of critical importance. A pastor who undertakes any level of counselling must consider the impact that the counselling relationship has on the other pastoral roles they will need to perform. A pastor allowing one's self to be in a therapeutic relationship intentionally or by default exclude themselves from functioning in other pastoral and personal roles in relation to that particular person.

Greater expectations and legal responsibility are being placed upon both the counselling profession and ministry. The need is for the church to address the difference and distinctions of pastoral care and counselling and the issues that underpin these ministries. Unfortunately the church in Australia lags behind the developments that have taken place in the USA which hopefully time will rectify.

## References

1. Radmacher, E.D. (1978). What the church is all about: A biblical and historical study. Chicago: Moody Press. p. 221-315
2. Peterson, E.H. (1997). The business of making saints: An interview with Eugene H. Peterson. Leadership. 28(2), p.22
3. Blackmon, R. (1985). The hazards of ministry. Ph.D dissertation. Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary. Cited by Dr A. Hart taken from lecture audio-tape 1987. Pastors are people too! Focus on the family. 20(3), p.15
4. Kie Vining, John. (1998). Sexual ethics in care-giving. Carer and counsellor 8(3), p 33
5. Crabb, L.J. Jnr. (1980). Biblical counselling. In G.R. Collins (Ed) Helping people grow. Santa Ana, California: Vision House, p.165-168.  
Tan, S.Y. (1991). Lay counseling: Equipping Christians for a helping ministry. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, p.82-87.  
Crawey cited in Taylor, D.A. (1996). Pastoring pastors: Future directions for effective supervision as perceived by church pastors from a main-stream Christian denomination (a pilot study). M.Soc.Sc. Dissertation held at QUT Brisbane., p.8, 9.
6. Hosick, J.H. (1995) Understanding differences: the boundaries between pastoral care and pastoral counselling. Atlantic Baptist magazine. November 1995.
6. Oden, T.C. (1987). Classical pastoral care vol 1: Becoming a minister. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books. P 43.
7. Peterson (1997), p.22.
8. Allender, D. (1997). The special gift of a Christian counsellor (part 2). Carer and counsellor 7(4), p.40.
9. Clebsch, W.A. & Jaekle, C.R. (1967). Pastoral care in historical perspective. New York: Harper & Row Pub. Inc. They define pastoral care as consisting "of helping acts, done by *representative Christian persons*, directed toward the *healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled persons* whose troubles arise *in the*

*context of ultimate meanings and concerns.*" (p. 4) which has become the widely accepted definition of pastoral care within the Christian church.

10. Born M., ed. (1996). Why does he hug us so tightly?: Sexual abuse in ministerial relationships. Melbourne: YWCA, p.2.
11. Hosick, J.H. (1995)
12. Taylor, D.A. (1996). Pastoring pastors: Future directions for effective supervision as perceived by church pastors from a main-stream Christian denomination (a pilot study). M.Soc.Sc. Dissertation held at QUT Brisbane., p.9.
13. Born (1996), p. 6.
14. Hart, A.D. (1995). Transference: The tie that blinds. Carer and counsellor 5(1), p.3.
15. Court, J.H. (1997) What do Christian counsellors do and why? In W. Wilkie (Ed.), Papers from the Christian Counselling and Ministry Network Conference April 25-26, 1997. (pp. 29-35). Brisbane: Christian Counsellors Association Queensland. p.30.