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| **PROFESSIONAL/PASTORAL SUPERVISION** **Compiled by Andrew Ranucci – Soullife.org** |

**What is Professional Pastoral Supervision***This definition of Pastoral Supervision is taken from the website of the Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators in the UK.*

• **a regular, planned intentional and boundaried 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

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

• **Spiritually/theologically rich** – works within a framework of spiritual/theological understanding in dialogue with the supervisee’s world view and work

• **Psychologically informed** – draws on relevant psychological theory and insight to illuminate intra-personal and inter-personal dynamics

• **contextually sensitive** – pays attention to the particularities of setting, culture and world-view

• **praxis based** – focuses on a report of work and /or issues that arise in and from the supervisee’s pastoral practice

• **a way of growing** in vocational identity, pastoral competence, self awareness, spiritual/theological reflection, pastoral interpretation, quality of presence, accountability, response to challenge, mutual learning

• **attentive to** issues of fitness to practice, skill development, management of boundaries, professional identity and the impact of the work upon all concerned parties

**Professional Supervision is not:**

• **Spiritual Accompaniment** – for the sole or primary purpose of exploring the spiritual life and development of the supervisee(s). Aspects of this may arise in Pastoral Supervision but are not the main focus.

• **Counselling** – for the purpose of helping the supervisee(s) gain insight into their personal dynamics, or helping the supervisee(s) to resolve or live more positively with their psycho- social limitations. Aspects of this may arise in Pastoral Supervision and, if necessary, the supervisee(s) may be encouraged to seek counselling support.  
  
• **Line management** – for the purpose of addressing professional practice and development issues in relationship to the supervisee(s)’s performance and accountability (whether paid or voluntary) to her/his employer. Aspects of this may arise in Pastoral Supervision but are not the main focus.   
  
**The Nature of Professional Pastoral Supervision  
Professional Pastoral Supervision is a structured, contracted, regular and confidential meeting which facilitates and ensures adequate exploration of the matters in hand**…

* Led by a trained person who enables the boundaries of the supervision process to be upheld; safeguarding an approach that is comprehensive, professional and relevant
* Agenda is driven by the supervisee; supervisor supports and guides.
* Attends to the personhood of the pastor as it intersects with their ministry practice
* Is theologically and psychologically informed

“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 routines and daily practice.” *(Ryan, S (2004) Vital Practice. Portland, UK: Sea Change Publications.)*

Research with Sydney pastors show that Pastoral Supervision is useful and valued:

* For accountability and challenge
* For receiving practical advice and support
* To assist with examining ways in which personal and spiritual issues interfere with their ministry.
* To receive overall support and strengthening in their ministry.   
  (Lock, N (2014) Pilot Survey into pastors Attitudes towards Professional Supervision amongst Sydney Anglican clergy. Unpublished manuscript.)

Pastoral Supervision gives you the space and safe relationship to reflect on your pastoral practice, including the complexity of emotions experienced in your role. If these emotions are not processed in a healthy way, they can lead to growing stress, anxiety and ultimately burnout.

“A prerequisite to developing a critical reflective capacity is acquiring the ability to recognize, acknowledge and process feelings and emotions as integral aspects of learning from experience. Further, it is feelings that are often the trigger for reflective exploration, and by exploring one’s feelings, greater self-awareness and change in meaning structures occur.” *(TAYLOR, E. T. Transformative learning theory: a neurobiological perspective of the role of emotions and unconscious ways of knowing Int. J. Of Lifelong Education, Vol. 20, No. 3 (May–June 2001), 218–236)*

Interestingly, studies into the positive effects of Pastoral Supervision amongst Anglican Pastors in the UK showed that Pastoral Supervision led to lower levels of burnout and stress. (Leslie J. Francis and Douglas W. Turton)

The goal of Pastoral Supervision is to support pastors in their calling and help them learn from their pastoral experience in order to develop strategies for sustainable ministry. Pastoral Supervision

‘The deepest form of learning used in supervision is transformational learning which combines both personal and professional learning. In transformational learning, supervisees reflect critically not just on their experience, but on the way they construct their experience.... They learn from it and go back to their work with new insights and new behaviours. This is supervision at its creative best.’ *(Carroll, M. (2008) ‘Supervision and transformational learning’ in Psychotherapy in Australia. Vol 14, No 3, pp 38-45)*

Transformational learning is dependent on supervisors providing:

* the relationship and environment to enable supervisees to stay in optimal learning mode;
* a focus on experience as central to learning in supervision;
* critical reflection as the mode of learning involved.

Good supervision should result in action: changed ministry practice that arises from the discussion during the session. *(Carroll, Supervision and transformational learning, 40)*

Finally, Professional Pastoral Supervision is a Safe Holding Space

‘Supervision provides a safe, holding environment where, through wise conversation and creative attentiveness, individuals and groups can co create a deeper perspective and wisdom, that can lead to transformation.’ *(Holton, G (2010) Wisdom’s Garden: a Metaphor for Cross Professional Supervision Training in The Soul of Supervision, eds Benefiel, M & Holton G.)*