



## Reviving the spirit: the gift of pastoral supervision



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# St Mark's Review

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# Editorial

Supervision—what’s in a word? Quite a bit, it would appear. Many people—and you may be one of them—have an almost allergic reaction to the word, or to the troubling notion of surveillance that it suggests. Is *pastoral* supervision, then, a recent addition to those humorous oxymorons such as *military* intelligence and *bureaucratic* efficiency? The answer is a resounding “No!” This special number of *St Mark’s Review* demonstrates that supervision—when understood theologically, biblically, reflectively and practically—is inherently pastoral.

The following articles provide a valuable introduction to, and discussion of, pastoral supervision and reflective practice. The writers share insights from years of experience in supervision and challenging personal reflection. All of the articles focus on the well-being of supervisees and those they serve. Some offer a brief history of the development of supervision and question the benefits of previous supervisory initiatives. Some raise issues related to the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. Other articles highlight Christological, Trinitarian, and New Testament perspectives. Another finds a powerful sixth-century precursor to the professional supervision of pastors. These diverse articles on pastoral supervision and reflective practice share insights on power balances and imbalances, the possibilities for positive change and transformation, and the importance of caring for yourself—and especially for your soul.

Peter Williams’ article, “The Door as a Metaphor for the Process of Pastoral Supervision—A Theological Reflection,” is a good starting point for any who are new to the field of pastoral supervision. Peter has been a supervisor in Clinical Pastoral Education for many years and now coordinates the supervision teaching and training at St Barnabas College. Peter begins with an inclusive description of supervision as “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.”<sup>1</sup> All members of church communities would benefit from such supervision. His metaphor opens the door to many insights into pastoral supervision and the importance of the supervisory relationship.

Geoff Broughton, Senior lecturer in Practical Theology, Principal of *Pastoral Supervision Australia* and the Australian associate of the UK *Institute of Pastoral Supervision and Reflective Practice* shares wisdom from his years

of supervising, teaching, training, and consulting on pastoral supervision in his article, "What is 'Pastoral' about Supervision? A Christological Proposal." Geoff's thesis—that supervision is pastoral—is drawn from the Christology of three quite different theologians: Martin Luther, Emil Brunner, and James W. McClendon. His overarching schema is that faith and faithfulness, hope and love, as located in the story of Jesus, extend and deepen existing concepts of competence, goals, and empathy. He also provides a succinct historical summary of professional supervision, providing the reader with a comprehensive context to this issue of *St Mark's Review*.

Don Owers' article is entitled: "If Supervision is the Solution, What is the Problem? Some Clergy-centred Concerns about the Proposed Introduction of Supervision." Owers, Ministry Development Advisor for the Adelaide Anglican Diocese, raises this question because many, including himself, have had negative experiences of supervision in the past. Owers realistically and critically address the issue of poor supervisor-supervisee relationships. He also shares times when his soul and role were out of alignment. He advances a convincing argument for the primacy of the well-being of the supervisee, with its consequent flow-on effect to those in their care. Don also explores the difference between professional supervision and pastoral supervision. He then offers us an extensive and informative definition of pastoral supervision from the *Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators* (UK).

Reflection lies at the heart of pastoral supervision. It is multidimensional and includes critical reflection, theological reflection, and especially self-reflection and soul-reflection. Self-reflection is fundamental for the supervisee, aided by a competent and insightful supervisor. Several papers focus upon this all-important aspect of pastoral supervision.

Cathy Thomson, Principal of St Barnabas College, offers a profound challenge to us in her article "Pastoral Supervision and Redeemed Embodiment." She advocates a pastoral supervision that is attentive to the body and embodiment. The redemption of our "whole self" becomes a possibility and is offered as a gift derived through our participation in the mystery of the Incarnation. Consequently, we are challenged to become the body of Christ in the world: a community that declares God's love, bears God's name, and so lives out the love of God in our ministries and our lives. Her sobering, extensive lament regarding the pervasive nature of child sex abuse in the church and her discussions related to the findings of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses*

to *Child Sexual Abuse*, sets the sinful backdrop to her advocacy for pastoral supervision as redeemed embodiment.

Damian Szepessy, New Testament lecturer at St Barnabas College, reminds us in his article, “Saint Paul’s Invitation to Philemon for Personal and Ministry Transformation,” that supervision in the New Testament is pastoral. Using Paul’s letter to Philemon, Damian contends that Paul, through critical theological reflection, encourages Philemon to see the dilemma of his runaway slave Onesimus in a new light. He suggests that Paul creates the theological environment in this letter that opens the door to the possibility of a transformational “ah ha!” moment for Philemon. In so doing, he invites us to reflect on “ah ha!” moments in our lives that have brought transformation.

Michael Paterson, Director of the UK *Institute of Pastoral Supervision and Reflective Practice*, distills key concepts from his new book, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. His article, entitled “Pastoral Supervision: Reclaiming the Soul of Supervision,” emphasises the centrality of this important dimension of supervision by mentioning “soul” in various ways some fifty times. He alerts us to concepts such as “soulful vision,” “soul work,” and “soul-priority,” all coalescing around the central concept of soul. He asks us to go deeper than reflecting only upon our thinking and feeling, and invites us to centre upon soul work, soul vision, and soul-priority in pastoral supervision. Why is there not a verb that springs to mind to articulate the content of the soul, in the same way as there is the verb “to think” in relation to the mind, and “to feel” in relation to the heart?

Gillies Ambler, retired Uniting Church minister and adjunct lecturer at St Barnabas College, in his article “Reflective Practice: Uncovering Foundational Values,” takes seriously the challenge to delve deeper into our soul (inner self) and so discover the foundational values that emerge through major life experiences. While other authors explore the importance of supervision and reflective practice through prose, Gillies, along with Michael Paterson, challenges the reader to include diverse genres, including poetry, artwork, and photography in their reflection. Through these creative genres, Gillies shares how his foundational values have emerged from his life experiences, particularly the death of his wife Sandra, when he was just 26 years old; falling in love with and marrying Wendy (1982), his ordination (1988), and the death of his son, Nigel (2001). He reflects on revelatory experiences, Scripture, and insights from significant others. He reminds us that reflective practice is central to the discovery of who we are and how we relate to others as we journey through life, as well as in pastoral

supervision sessions. He encourages and reveals ways for the reader to discover their own foundational values.

Andrew Cameron is the Director of St Mark's National Theological Centre in Canberra. In that role he has taken a close interest in the supervision training St Mark's offers through its vocational and educational training course, 10706NAT *Graduate Certificate in Professional Supervision (Clinical) (Pastoral)*. Focusing on the pastoral stream in this training, he offers supervisors and supervisees an ancient resource for supervision in his article, "Becoming 'Normatively Formed': a Contribution to Supervision from Gregory the Great". The work of this sixth-century pastor and pope suggests that the need for supervision is not new. Gregory reminds us of our mixed motives in ministry; attends to our daily practices in ministry; prioritises those whom we serve in ministry; and warns us not to lose our souls through ministry. Gregory's work shows how supervision can enable the integration of self and tasks to better form our moral selves, a work Cameron terms "normative formation." It is a process of growth altogether more interesting than some modern approaches to professional ethics.

These articles also highlight the importance of a positive relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Peter Williams, for example, addresses this in his section entitled "The Door of Collaborative Relationship." The supervisor assists the supervisee to see the meaning behind the issue. It includes helping them to discover and explore their underlying thoughts and their feelings. Michael Paterson realistically portrays the soul-damaging effects life experience can have on each of us, yet offers us insights into soul-transforming possibilities. Cathy Thomson and Don Owers highlight the dangers of going through doors into the darkness of sin and evil and the ensuing abuse of others. Andrew Cameron pictures an alliance between supervisor and supervisee to assist the supervisee's inner moral life. Their articles help us to reflect on the shadow side of life and those life-sapping experiences. Each article also encourages us to reflect on life-giving possibilities and consequently the way we can role-model and offer life-giving possibilities to others. They remind us that Jesus has come to offer us life in abundance (John 10:10).

All articles bear witness to a focus on empowering that enables the supervisee to be nurtured in ways that enhance the supervisee's well-being, and consequently the wellbeing of others. Cathy Thomson speaks about transformation through "redeemed embodiment." Damian Szepessy demonstrates how Paul empowers Philemon to welcome back Onesimus as a brother, not as



a slave. (How heartwarming, inspirational, and transforming is that!) Michael Paterson and Don Owers stress the importance of the transformation of self when soul, role, and context bring resonance and wellbeing. Geoff Broughton affirms the roles of faith and faithfulness, hopefulness and love (human and God's) in providing the context for transformation. Peter Williams provides illustrations from experience of transformation of the supervisee, as well as himself as supervisor, within supervisory sessions. Gillies Ambler affirms the transforming power of love, especially his experience and belief that love heals/transforms grief wounds. The "normative formation" in Andrew Cameron's article offers a vision for quiet, ongoing attention to those ways of being that we hope to become part of ourselves as Christian ministers and pastors.

There is conceptual richness, profound wisdom, rugged relevance, and soulful vision in these articles. Blessings as you explore. Hopefully these articles will challenge you to reflect on your pastoral supervision experiences, whether formal or informal. It is our hope that these articles will bring insights and transformation to your well-being, and enhance the way you contribute to the well-being of your community and society at large.

**Gillies Ambler**

## **Endnotes**

- 1 Jane Leach and Michael Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2015), 1.