

# **Report to the Diocese of Lichfield on the evaluation of the experience of supervisees within the Diocesan Pastoral Supervision Scheme**

## **Report authors:**

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**Date: February 2023**



## **1. Setting the context**

The challenges and complexities of Christian ministry in today's society are well understood and acknowledged<sup>1</sup>. There have been significant societal shifts that have impacted on clergy ministering in a Church faced with declining numbers, social influence and economic stability. In Christian ministry, the patterns of relationship within church communities are often highly complex and, along with public concern about the integrity of other previously respected professions, priests are not immune to a loss of authority. Indeed, the Church's failure to respond with integrity to safeguarding scandals<sup>2</sup> has undermined confidence, and it can no longer count on an unquestioning presumption of trustworthiness. The poor psychological wellbeing of clergy has been highlighted by research<sup>3</sup> and it has elicited concerned response in many denominations<sup>4</sup>. Hudson<sup>5</sup> states that clergy often offer a twenty-four-hour service to those in need. Their homes are a point of contact for the homeless, and those with mental health issues and addictions. Clergy families are often in the community spotlight in a way that other families are not. Clergy tend to be introvert, so the more social expectations of the work can be challenging. Often, they are faced with unrealistic projections/expectation of others which create significant difficulties if they go unrecognised and, even in the self-aware, the painful experience of sometimes disappointing those they feel called to serve can take its toll. Many clergy struggle to hold appropriate boundaries and stretch themselves unreasonably; the practical and managerial aspects of the role can limit the space to nurture their own faith. Clergy hold a sense of vocation (call) and mostly are highly motivated, but the pressures can create a lack of congruence between the person and the role. The complexity of establishing boundaries is also present in the tension of forming close social relationships whilst holding a public role. Even with their fellow clergy, competitiveness can detract from supportive colleague relationships. This can lead to profound loneliness and isolation<sup>6</sup>. Whilst these factors make it a greater imperative for the Church to embrace the discipline of reflective practice, they are not the primary reason for it. Inherent in the call to ministry is a commitment to personal and spiritual growth, and pastoral supervision offers a valuable resource in the service of this vocation.

## **2. The need for pastoral supervision**

In response to supporting clergy in facing these challenges and in responding to various safeguarding reviews, some Christian denominations now require their clergy to be in regular pastoral/reflective supervision<sup>7</sup>. Within the Church of England, the 'Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing'<sup>8</sup>, which was made an Act of Synod in February 2020, has as its first recommendation a proposal that the Church of England take the initial steps towards, "*establishing a culture where some form of non-managerial pastoral supervision becomes accepted practice rather than the exception.*" The Church of England has been grappling with how to respond to that recommendation and to its Duty of Care, and has provided various forms of support either in-house or through organisations like St. Luke's for Clergy Wellbeing<sup>9</sup>. However, cost is an ever-present factor for a

denomination with over 20,000 active clergy<sup>10</sup> – with 500 clergy in the Diocese of Lichfield alone<sup>11</sup>.

### 3. What pastoral supervision is

The Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education (APSE)<sup>12</sup> defines pastoral supervision as:

- **a regular, planned, intentional and boundaried space** in which a practitioner who is trained and skilled in supervision (the supervisor) meets with one or more other practitioners (the supervisees) to look together at the supervisees' practice;
- **a relationship** that is characterised by trust, respect, confidentiality, support and openness that gives the supervisee freedom and safety to explore the issues arising in their work;
- **spiritually/theologically informed** – works within a framework of spiritual/theological understanding in dialogue with the supervisee's world view and role;
- **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 practice;
- **a way of growing** in vocational identity, role competence, self-awareness, spiritual/theological reflection, 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.

Within the UK, there are three main training organisations that provide training in pastoral supervision: Wesley House, Cambridge<sup>13</sup>; The Institute for Pastoral Counselling and Supervision in Nottingham<sup>14</sup>; and the Institute of Pastoral Supervision and Reflective Practice in Glasgow<sup>15</sup>. Each organisation trains pastoral supervisors to Certificate and Diploma level, with each course completed over a year (typically six, two-day workshops). After gaining substantive further experience as a pastoral supervisor, pastoral supervisors can then apply to be accredited by APSE. Courses typically cost around £1500 per person<sup>16</sup>.

### 4. What is the Lichfield Model?

The Diocese of Lichfield offers several modes of pastoral care to clergy and their families<sup>17</sup>. These include: Bishop's visitors; The Listening Ear service; Coaching; Mediation; Reflective Practice Groups; Rooting and Grounding Groups; Spiritual Direction; and various information-giving services. The 'Lichfield Model', incorporating the '*Skills for Pastoral Supervision*' training, was set up by the

former Bishop's Advisor for Pastoral Care, Sally Bubbers, as a viable diocesan scheme to offer individual pastoral supervision to the clergy in the Diocese of Lichfield, at a cost that could be tolerated by the budget constraints. There is a growing body of research, largely emerging from the Methodist Church<sup>18</sup> and other smaller denominations<sup>19</sup> around the benefits of a regular, planned reflective space for clergy. As stated before, the Clergy Covenant, issued by the Church of England, had specifically recommended pastoral supervision as a way of supporting clergy. Emerging from Covid, many clergy were exhausted and isolated<sup>20</sup>. Reflective Practice Groups had been tried in the Diocese of Lichfield, but there was a need for more flexible, individual support. There were nine pastoral supervisors working within the diocese but, with about 500 licenced clergy, there was not capacity or funding for everyone to have individual supervision with them; nor were there the funds to train enough supervisors to expand the service. However, the cost of one clergy person going off sick for six months is greater than the cost of the *Skills for Pastoral Supervision* training. The scheme had the support of Bishop Michael, the Area Bishops, Senior staff, Finance, and the CEO, Julie Jones. Revd Dr Jeanette Hartwell, Director of Ministry Training, and the training co-ordinator also gave their support. The pilot project launched the first cohort in March 2022. This has subsequently been evaluated (see Section 5).

The former Bishop's Advisor for Pastoral Care, Sally Bubbers, put together a proposal and budget to train lay and/or ordained for the ministry of pastoral supervision, which could provide individual support to clergy across the diocese in the form of individual pastoral supervision (a regular, planned, confidential reflective space). The *volunteers* would be trained by the diocese and then undertake to supervise three clergy for two years – for 10 sessions a year. They would be given consultant/oversight supervision for their work at a rate of 10 hours a year. They were covered for this work by the diocesan insurance and asked to undertake the Church of England's basic and foundation safeguarding training and basic Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

Dr Ruth Layzell and Margaret Bazley, who are the co-directors of the Institute of Pastoral Counselling and Supervision, were approached to design a six-month, practical course called *Skills for Pastoral Supervision* training. The aim of this course was to equip participants to offer pastoral supervision as a regular space for those in ministry to engage in reflective practice in relation to their ministerial work. The course was divided into two parts. During the first three days, participants were introduced to the aims and ethos of pastoral supervision, the qualities and conditions needed to offer an appropriate supervisory relationship and be taught a process for managing a supervision session. Supervised skills practice sessions in small groups enabled participants to practice and develop the skills needed to do so. Following those three days, in order to put theory into practice and to develop supervisory skills, participants set up and undertook four, one-hour sessions of practice supervision with supervisees provided by the diocese upon which they reflect with a trained

pastoral supervisor. During this time, and ahead of a fourth day of training, they completed an assignment demonstrating their understanding of the aims, purpose and process of pastoral supervision. Participants then returned for a further training day during which their competence to practise as a pastoral supervisor was assessed by the training team. *Participants were selected who already had listening skills.*

In summary, the course comprised:

- three days of training; four months of supervised practice with two supervisees each;
- a short-written assignment;
- and a practical assessment day in which they were observed delivering a supervision session.

The consultative supervisors also wrote a brief report. After the assessment day, pastoral supervisors were allocated a third supervisee.

The supervisees undertook a one-day orientation day entitled '*Introduction to Pastoral Supervision*' on how to use the reflective space offered by pastoral supervision, and to help supervisees to understand what pastoral supervision is and is not. This was also designed to support the fledgling supervisors during the four months of practice.

## **5. Evaluating the experience of pastoral supervision in the Diocese of Lichfield**

After ten months of being in pastoral supervision, as supervisees, with those who had trained using the *Skills for Pastoral Supervision* training, the Reverend Professor Peter Gubi, who is Professor of Counselling and Spiritual Accompaniment at the University of Chester, and who is an academic with previous experience of evaluating pastoral supervision, was asked to evaluate what the supervisees perceived to be the value and limitations of their pastoral supervision experience. Using the Gubi and Mwenisongole<sup>21</sup> method of evaluating pastoral supervision, the 21 supervisees who were supervised by those who had trained using the *Skills for Pastoral Supervision* training, were sent an online survey to complete. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with a range of statements that highlighted the benefits and limitations of pastoral supervision in published research<sup>22</sup>. The University of Chester granted ethical approval for the research. The response rate was 80%. All responses were anonymised by the research instrument, JISC. The results of the survey are found in Tables 1-4:

**Table 1. Self-perceived benefits of pastoral supervision**

<b>My Pastoral Supervision has enabled me to:</b>	<b>Agree</b>
Feel supported	100%
Feel less isolated in my ministry	94%
Gain insight into the way I think	88%
Process my feelings	94%
Gain insight into my way of being in the world	65%
Gain awareness of how I impact on others	53%
Respect difference better	41%
Have a better sense of self-care	94%
Have a better quality of pastoral encounter with others in my ministry	82%
Grow theologically	76%
Interact better with others in my ministry	88%
Grow as a human being	88%
Trust others more	29%
Experience my own vulnerability safely	71%
Negotiate and manage boundaries better in my ministry	81%
Deal with difficult pastoral situations more effectively	71%
Become a more reflective Minister/person	71%
Develop greater wisdom	76%
Build and affirm strategies that can be taken back into my relationships with my congregation (or in my work)	82%
Gain different perspectives on situations and people	76%
Gain self-preservation strategies for dealing with others' expectations	76%
Gain improved relationships within my work	59%
Improve my priestly skills	53%
Approach meetings more positively	76%
Manage situations in more helpful ways	82%
Discern better what God may be saying in certain situations	76%
Gain a clearer sense of my vocation	71%
Gain a better work/life balance	75%
Work better relationally in the local team	65%

**Table 2. Additional self-perceived benefits of pastoral supervision**

<b>I have found my Pastoral Supervision to be:</b>	<b>Agree</b>
A place of learning and support that can help to stop, or diminish, my cycle of feeling constantly drained	59%

A place for gaining a sense of well-being within the institutional relationships and within the Church community	53%
A place for gaining a sense of well-being within family and self	71%
A space for gaining self-awareness which is necessary in balancing a role that is called upon to model both authority and vulnerability	76%
A chance to share my experience and to feel less alone	88%
An opportunity to give and receive support and encouragement in the situation that I found myself, which can be taken back into my life and ministry	100%
A place where I have gained confidence to engage/explore my call or ministry purpose	76%

**Table 3. Self-perceived hinderances to pastoral supervision**

<b>I have found that my involvement with my Pastoral Supervision has been held back by:</b>	<b>Agree</b>
My difficulty in committing the time to attend regularly	18%
My difficulty in sharing openly with my Pastoral Supervisor	0%
My difficulty in making time to prioritise attendance	23%
The manner of facilitation	6%
The structured nature of the sessions	0%
The unstructured nature of the sessions	12%
Feeling unsafe	0%
The use of online provision	12%
Being sent (having to do it as a diocesan requirement)	6%
Poor facilitation	6%
Struggles with expectation	6%
A lack of prayer	6%
Too much prayer	0%
My sense of spiritual dryness	6%
Not being able to discuss my relationship with God	0%

**Table 4. Self-perceived opinion on pastoral supervision**

Has the use of online Pastoral Supervision provision been of help to you?	71%
Is regular monthly/bi-monthly Pastoral Supervision worth continuing with?	94%
Is Pastoral Supervision worth continuing to be funded by the Diocese of Lichfield?	94%

Additional qualitative comment from participants in the survey included:

“Pastoral supervision has provided a regular safe space for processing life, ministry, vocation and explore knowledge of how the self relates in the transpersonal context that I often find myself in.”

“I just want to say a huge 'thank you' to my pastoral supervisor for enabling our conversations so effectively and helping me feel less alone in my ministry! And huge thanks too to the diocese for getting this supervision off the ground - it is really essential I feel to have this sort of supervision.”

“I think it has worked so well because we have made a good connection which has enabled me to feel vulnerable.”

“I have really valued the meetings I've had so far. They have allowed me to reflect and consider my ministry. I have appreciated the flexibility of the discussions held within a 'formal' framework which has worked around me and who I am.”

“I have found the space provided by meeting with my pastoral supervisor to be so beneficial personally and within my ministerial role.”

“I have found the experience a vocational lifesaver.”

“This is the most brilliant thing the church has ever offered me in supporting my ministry and vocation. I think others are a bit shy of taking the opportunity up believing they don't need it or have time to "look under the bonnet" of their journey, with a view to a more authentic expression of vocation and ministry. This is the right time for me to be having such an in-depth process; it would not always have been so. Discerning at what stages of life/ministry pastoral supervision is best explored may be something to consider.”

“My past experience of pastoral support within the church structures has been patchy. The ‘success’ of encounters being determined by the level of wisdom, skill and openness of supervisors/counsellors. This time I have more than met my match in a wise and skilled reflective practitioner who is able meet me where I am and explore development with great understanding. I am in a better place now than I would have been without this timely process. Thank you.”

“I have found the pastoral supervision sessions incredibly helpful and well facilitated. Some weeks there have been clear issues I've needed to think through, and others it's taken a bit more thought to come up with a subject. However even on those weeks the act of thinking through a small issue has

opened up bigger questions and insights, and I look forward to the sessions every month!”

“It has been nothing but positive. It is great to have someone who simply listens without judgement.”

“Whilst zoom is a great tool, I feel that it can perpetuate the sense of isolation and I may have benefitted more if our meetings had been in person... an issue that I should have raised!”

## **6. Issues that people bring to pastoral supervision**

According to twelve of the pastoral supervisors who were trained in the *Skills for Pastoral Supervision* training, issues that were explored in pastoral supervision included:

Complexity:

- what are the priorities with diminishing resource?
  - in terms of personal resource,
  - manpower of volunteers and
  - finances within the church at parish and diocesan level
  - Trying to find balance on multiple fronts of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’

Ageing congregations:

- not coming back to jobs they previously had
- reduced capacity and
- reduced ability leading to amateurishness

Powerful volunteers:

- who have been in jobs or roles for many years
  - inability to be flexible around new requirements and change

Sense of unrealistic burdens:

- punishing personal expectations and pressures they put on themselves from within
- from the diocese
- from community and church
- too much work

Team dynamics:

- different ways of working
- either wanting too much or too little collaboration
- managing conversations within teams
- people claiming superiority because of experience in ministry when should be equal in team

- church teams not as confident as before and seeking more reassurance.

Training Incumbent and Curate relational dynamics;  
 First incumbent learning to deal with parishioners themselves  
 Issues contacting Diocesan staff – not responding to emails  
 Anger management  
 Time management  
 Lack of management training for managing people  
 Dual relationships  
 No one to delegate to  
 Isolation

However, the feedback that the supervisors received was that pastoral supervision is really appreciated; clergy are so grateful; they find it helpful; it is a valued space for building relationships, developing strategies that are helpful, and gaining personal insight.

## 7. Conclusion

Whilst pastoral supervisors who were trained in the *Skills for Pastoral Supervision* training have only undergone a partial training as a pastoral supervisor, and thus have not reached the standard to be accredited by APSE, nevertheless the research shows that some training in pastoral supervision skills is better than no training, and some support is better than no support.

Overall, the *Skills for Pastoral Supervision* scheme has been a huge success, with 100% of respondents feeling supported in their ministries. The scheme has also been cost effective for the Diocese of Lichfield.

However, the scheme relies on volunteers. We are aware that other pastoral supervision schemes (e.g. in the Methodist Church) also largely rely on volunteers, but this potentially undermines the ability of individuals to earn a stipend/salary from a vocation in pastoral supervision ministry, and arguably undermines (by today's standards of valuing) the value placed by the Diocese of Lichfield on the support of its clergy. Whilst this is an important initiative that enables dioceses within the Church of England to offer individual pastoral supervision, it is only a first step and must not be considered to be the final step in offering pastoral supervision to clergy.

## 8. Recommendations

On the basis of this research, we recommend to the Diocese of Lichfield that:

- They continue to support the *Skills for Pastoral Supervision* training as it is offered to other cohorts of interested participants;
- Financial support needs to be given to pastoral supervisors who have undergone the *Skills for Pastoral Supervision* training to further their

training towards upskilling and gaining accredited status with APSE in order for them to provide paid consultant supervision within the scheme;

- They expect the pastoral supervisors who have undergone the *Skills for Pastoral Supervision* training to engage in continuing professional development and access their own consultative pastoral supervision, which the Diocese of Lichfield will fund.

## References

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- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/centre-for-leadership-and-ministry-development/pastoral-supervision/> (Accessed 12/02/2023)
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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.pastoralcs.org.uk/professional-certificate-in-pastoral-supervision/> (Accessed 12/02/2023)

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<sup>19</sup> Gubi, P.M. & Mwenisongole, T.A. (2022). A pilot evaluation study of pastoral supervision provision in the Moravian Church (British Province), *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*. 25(2): 197-206.

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