

PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION FOR CLERGY AND LAY MINISTERS

A RESOURCE FROM THE MINISTRY COMMISSION FOR THE 2017 GENERAL SYNOD

Prepared by Rev'd Canon Richard Trist
Dean of the Anglican Institute
Ridley College, Melbourne

BACKGROUND

Recent reports to General Synod have stressed the importance of regular accountability and leadership support for clergy and lay ministers. These have been described as “professional supervision”¹ and “formal mentoring and support”²

A number of dioceses are beginning to take this matter seriously by the establishment of professional supervision programs. These programs encourage church workers to undertake regular supervision for such reasons as:

- The implementation of a supportive, non-critical, and non-judgmental relationship to enable growth and development in ministry;
- The development of skills to enable clergy and parish workers to deal with the stresses of ministry;
- The review of vocations;
- The overall improvement of ministerial effectiveness.³

The programs have established processes including registration requirements for the approval of supervisors and the provision of financial support.

In spite of this however it is likely that many clergy and lay ministers across the Australian Church lack regular supervisory relationships.⁴ Even where such relationships are encouraged, issues of distance and finance may seem to be major obstacles, particularly for those in rural and regional areas.

¹ Anglican Church of Australia, *Faithfulness in Service: A national code for personal behaviours and the practise of pastoral ministry by clergy and church workers*, 2004, 16

² Anglican Church of Australia, *Viability and Structures Task Force, Report to General Synod 2014*, 47.

³ See <http://newcastleanglican.org.au/mission-ministries/professional-supervision-program/>, and <http://www.perth.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Policy-10.7-Clergy-Professional-Supervision.pdf>

⁴ The 2011 NCLS Leader Survey found that among senior leaders in Australian churches 7% did not have anyone with whom they could be completely honest. Another 22% indicated they had only one such person. Sterland, S. *Supportive Relationships: Personal Foundation 5, Factsheet 1.14006*. Sydney: NCLS Research, 2014.

How can the Ministry Commission assist the Australian Church to make progress on this matter and ensure our clergy and lay ministers are appropriately supported and supervised in their ministries?

TERMINOLOGY

In many occupations the term supervision is synonymous with line-management. However in professions with an emphasis on pastoral care the term is used to speak of a consultative relationship between an external supervisor and a worker, where the supervisee consults with their supervisor who is neither their trainer nor manager.⁵

As professional supervision becomes more of a norm for Christian ministers, there is a need for clarity as to how it is different from other activities such as counselling, spiritual direction, mentoring and coaching. The following table may help to clarify these differences:⁶

	Counselling	Spiritual Direction	Mentoring	Coaching	Professional Supervision
Focus	The person's well-being; their emotional and psychological state.	The faith journey; relationship with God.	Issues of formation and development of career.	The development of skills needed in the workplace.	The overall development of a person's work or ministry; becoming a more effective practitioner through reflection on practice.
Process	Undertaken by a qualified person whose approach is controlled by the ethical codes of a professional body.	Usually undertaken by someone trained in sensing the work of the Spirit in a person's life.	The passing on of knowledge and experience to a mentee; usually undertaken by an older and more experienced person.	The use of support and challenge to deliver performance improvement; not necessarily undertaken by a person with the same occupational background.	Undertaken by a qualified person who pays attention to issues that arise from the supervisee's workplace; the concerns of the institution and the ministry recipients are always kept in view.

⁵ The term is also used in Theological Field Education. In this context it may be referred to as 'formational' supervision with the supervisor referred to as a 'ministry mentor'.

⁶ Adapted from a table in the *St Marks National Theological Centre Graduate Certificate in Professional Supervision Students Manual*, page 11.

Approach	A professional relationship; short or long term depending upon the person's needs; regular meetings.	Usually more informal; a long term and on-going relationship.	Usually an informal relationship which is ongoing.	A short term activity with structured meetings; usually contracted.	A professional relationship with an annual contract where ethical and legal accountabilities are spelt out.
-----------------	--	---	--	---	---

Each of these modes of support are important and useful. Clergy and lay ministers may undertake different modes in the different 'seasons' of their ministry career.⁷

THE BENEFITS OF PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION

The benefit of professional supervision lies in its ability to bring clarity and focus upon the complex nature of parish or chaplaincy ministry. Authors Jane Leach and Michael Paterson utilize a three-legged stool model to explain its three tasks:

1. The formative task – an educative aspect which concerns the equipping of the supervisee with a greater knowledge of the issues they are facing in order to resource them for their work.
2. The restorative task – a supportive function which understands the challenges of the supervisee's work, and provides a place for the 'recharging' of emotional and spiritual energy.
3. The normative task – a quality control function which attends to issues such as boundaries and professional expectations.⁸

In a recent survey of clergy, 79% agreed that professional supervision had benefited them in their ability to undertake their ministry.⁹ Responses included the following:

[It] has helped me to 'stand back', see the big picture; [it] has helped me to deal with difficult situations and people...provided a sounding board and reassurance I am doing OK!

Given me tools for a different approach. Helped me to grow personally and professionally. One cannot harbor self-delusions, arrogance, theological infallibility...when one allows oneself to be subject to the insightful scrutiny of another.

⁷ For example, in the Diocese of Melbourne aspirants to ordination are required to have a mentor; ordination candidates a spiritual director and placement supervisor; and priests-in-charge are offered a coach. At different times they may be urged/required to see a psychologist or counsellor.

⁸ See Jane Leach and Michael Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook*, London: SCM Press, 2010, 62-65.

⁹ Personal correspondence with Archdeacon Arthur Copeman of the Diocese of Newcastle concerning a *Professional Supervision and Spiritual Direction Survey* of 39 clergy undertaken in 2013.

Provided personal strategies for particular aspects. Affirmed the approach I have taken in some matters and therefore affirmed my ability to be an effective minister. An opportunity to re-assess personal goals, work load and ministry direction.

TRAINING OF SUPERVISORS

Those dioceses which have professional supervision programs in place have generally relied upon supervisors trained in CPE, psychology or social work. Theological College training of supervisors for clergy and church workers in Australia is growing but still limited.

St Marks National Theological Centre offers a Graduate Certificate in Professional Supervision (Clinical/Pastoral).¹⁰ The course is undertaken over one year, with a second year of practice required for the supervisor's accreditation with the Australasian Association of Supervision (AAOS).

The University of Divinity also offers a Graduate Certificate in Supervision.¹¹ This is a one semester full-time, or three semester part-time, course run in conjunction with the Jesuit College of Spirituality and Stirling Theological College.

Moore Theological College, in conjunction with St Marks National Theological Centre, offers 2 units in Professional Supervision as part of the MA (Theol).¹² The completion of the two units covers the teaching requirements for accreditation and recognition as a professional supervisor by the Australasian Association of Supervision (AAOS).

Ridley College is undertaking a similar partnership with St Marks in 2018, as part of its Master of Arts (Gold Class) program.¹³ The supervision units may also be undertaken as a separate Graduate Certificate of Ministry.

DELIVERY

The key to the effective delivery of support across the Australian church is to ensure it occurs from the top down. If bishops and senior leaders do not see supervision as vital for their own ministry and learning, it won't be seen as important by others. As noted by Hawkins and Shohet:

The actions of the senior managers speak louder than their policy statements and it is important that they conspicuously exemplify the learning culture by, among other things, having coaching or supervision themselves and team coaching for the senior teams.¹⁴

¹⁰ See <http://www.stmarks.edu.au/rto-counselling/gcps>

¹¹ See <https://www.divinity.edu.au/study/our-courses/graduate-certificate-supervision/>

¹² See <https://www.moore.edu.au/courses/master-of-arts-theology/>

¹³ See <https://www.ridley.edu.au/theology-courses/ma-and-ma-gold-class/>

¹⁴ Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet, *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, Fourth Ed, Berkshire: OUP, 2012, 235.

In order to overcome the tyranny of distance e-Supervision may well be necessary. This mode of supervision is increasingly commonplace in other professions and guidelines can be adapted for its use within the church. These will include:

1. Specific training for supervisors in this mode of supervision.
2. Clear contracts on processes involved.
3. Clarity about the use of asynchronous and synchronous discussions.
4. Clarity about confidentiality and accountability.¹⁵

The effectiveness of this mode of supervision has been found to increase when an initial face to face meeting has already established the relationship.

FUNDING

Although finance may seem to be a factor precluding regular professional supervision, the 2013 survey of clergy in the Diocese of Newcastle found that 80% did not find cost an inhibiting factor. Most met their supervisor ten times over the year and most paid \$90 per session. Over half were willing to pay the full costs themselves rather than seek reimbursement from the Diocese or parish/agency.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

In the light of the increasing challenges facing clergy and lay ministers, and the heightened demand for the accountability of church workers, the Ministry Commission recommends that every Australian diocese takes seriously the benefits of professional supervision for its clergy and paid lay workers.

In order to achieve this the following steps are recommended:

1. An audit/ appreciative inquiry of what supervision/coaching is already occurring.
2. The development of some pilot projects particularly in rural and regional areas.
3. The support of General Synod by a motion put forward by the Ministry Commission.
4. The development of national supervision policies/guidelines.
5. A commitment to an ongoing audit and review process.

¹⁵ See Stretch, L.S., Nagel, D.M. & Anthony, K. (2012). 'Ethical Framework for the Use of Technology in Supervision', *Therapeutic Innovations in Light of Technology*. Vol. 3 (2), 37-45.

¹⁶ Some dioceses have utilized a three way partnership to fund regular supervision with the clergy/lay minister, parish/agency and diocese each contributing one third.