



South Western Synod

PASTORAL SUPERVISION

for our Ministers and Local Church Leaders

UPDATED October 2023

What is Pastoral Supervision in our Synod's Context?

“...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. Such an arrangement allows each person being supervised to give an account of their work, to explore their responses, review their aims, and develop their strategies and skills. Pastoral Supervision is practised for the sake of the supervisee, providing a space in which their wellbeing, growth and development are taken seriously, and for the sake of those among whom the supervisee works, providing a realistic point of accountability within the body of Christ for their work...”

Jane Leach &

Michael Paterson

*Pastoral Supervision:
a handbook*

2010, London: SCM Press, p. 1

In July 2020, Mission Council (acting for General Assembly) agreed that all active Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers should engage in pastoral supervision as a mandatory part of our roles. The resolution envisaged that all active ministers will be sharing in supervision by summer, 2023. In this the URC is following other denominations in appreciating that the pressures, challenges and joys of ministry and pastoral leadership can be supported and reflected upon in a host of informal and spontaneous ways; the chat with a friend over coffee or something stronger for example. But more organised and intentional spaces have been shown to be truly helpful. Forms of organised supervision have been fundamental across caring and counselling professions for many years. We want the benefits and gifts of such conversation to bless our Synod, churches and those who serve here. The Synod's [Discipleship and Service Committee](#) is charged with overseeing this provision. We have agreed that it should also be offered to our Local Church Leaders as well.

Hopefully, ministers will have already received relevant information about the URC's policy from the Secretary for Ministries. The official documentation is highlighted at the end of this summary sheet and is available on the Synod's website. Here is the essence of the URC's policy, adapted to fit our Synod's situation and provisions:

- [Individual ministers and local church leaders need to find your own supervisor.](#) The Synod will build up and hold a list of qualified potential supervisors we know about (many within the URC) to help you find someone suitable and available. [The latest list will be available from the Synod Office \(please ask for it via an email to Hilary Bradshaw at \[synodoffice@urcsouthwest.org.uk\]\(mailto:synodoffice@urcsouthwest.org.uk\)\).](#)
- For the conversations to be meaningful you need to feel in control of setting them up and responsible for their operation. This is, above all, about supporting, enhancing and encouraging your ministry and its fruitfulness amongst those with whom you serve. You may already have a regular conversation partner with whom you are reflecting. You may already be sharing in pastoral supervision of some form. Let our Moderator know and she will help you discern if what you already are doing fits with what the URC is asking of us now.
- These supervisors need to be recognised in some way so that we can all be confident that they can supervise helpfully and with care. [They might be people individually approved by the Synod](#), perhaps because of their experience or some other qualifications. We know that we have

ecumenical colleagues who might be able to help us as supervisors and who have undergone suitable preparation. Several people in the Synod have already embarked upon training to become pastoral supervisors as part of their ministry. In Cambridge, for example, Westminster College and Wesley House are collaborating to provide such training. We will be advertising training for anyone wishing to become a pastoral supervisor as and when we hear of it. If you have come across any suitable training, do please let the Synod know.

- We are hugely helped by our more recent experiences of developing worship and witness using Zoom and other means. Pastoral supervision can be face-to-face or it can be conducted online, or a blend of both. These create different experiences, of course, but all can be entirely suitable for our needs. You don't have to find a supervisor within easy reach of where you live if you're happy to work online.
- A couple of UK-wide organisations can offer you a supervisor in addition to any lists the Synod creates. Supervisors accredited by the [Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education \(APSE\)](#) or the [British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy \(BACP\)](#) would be ideally equipped to supervise you.
- When you have found a supervisor, please tell the Synod Moderator. As this requirement rolls out across the URC, we need to keep track of who is in supervision and who has not yet begun. We might need to be able to work through difficulties if a supervision relationship falters for some reason.
- **Confidentiality is fundamental to pastoral supervision.** This is not a secret way for the Moderator, or anyone else, to discover what you are up to or to judge your ministry. Supervision conversations must remain strictly confidential for you to feel safe and confident to share things that really matter to you. Only if a supervision reveals matters that raise safeguarding, legal or welfare concerns would supervisee and/or supervisor break this confidentiality and report to our Synod Moderator who may then consult with others as any of us would expect. Ordinarily, all that the Synod and URC will ever record is who is having supervision; not its content.
- Pastoral supervision for us must be a sacred space, enfolded in prayer and growing in trust. It needs freedom for you and your supervisor to work out the best format, venue, frequency and styles of conversation. Well trained supervisors will have the skills to shape and hold these appropriate spaces. **The URC asks that pastoral supervision sessions happen no less frequently than every two months, or six times a year.** Exceptions will be made for ministries where this regular pattern may not be possible (e.g. Armed Forces Chaplains and those already supervised through their ministry such as hospital chaplains). Again, in such cases, please always inform our Synod Moderator that you are receiving pastoral supervision.

Association of Pastoral Supervision and Education (APSE)

Their website has a superb "Find Supervision" page which gives details of many fully qualified supervisors you can contact directly – a real pastoral supervision goldmine!

www.pastoralsupervision.org.uk/home/find-supervision/



British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

Their website has a directory of potential supervisor you can search for by location. I typed in "pastoral supervision" to the search box asking me to enter the 'problem or specialism' I was exploring and was given 40 potential supervisors within 10 miles of my home in Bristol!

www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists

- You and your supervisor will enter into a contract or covenant which reflects a mutual agreement between you about the supervisory process and relationship. Most supervisors will have their own suggested format, although a model covenant that includes the flexibility for agreeing specific goals and ways of working is included in the URC guidance highlighted below. You and your supervisor need to sign three copies: one you keep, one your supervisor keeps, one you send to our Synod Moderator.
- **The core of each supervision involves you, as the supervisee, coming with an issue or experience arising from your ministry that you have identified ahead of the supervision.** This forms the heart of the conversation, with the supervisor helping to tease out and guide your own reflections and exploration. The goal is that you have the chance to voice what matters to you, maybe for the first time. Through guided and wise discussion, you can come to clearer understanding of the matter you've brought each time. That may include identifying options for your future actions and practice of ministry in context, it may highlight areas for new learning, the discovery of fresh ways of coping with something you find difficult, a deeper celebration of your own work and ministry and the ministries of others. There are many, many, possible outcomes. And, as supervision continues throughout the years, levels of trust and depth of reflection can grow and insights can broaden and build upon one another.
- It may well be that you identify your own further training needs as a result of pastoral supervision. These should be explored with your Synod Pastoral Advisor and/or our Moderator. Over time, such requests can also help to shape ongoing training and encouragement the Synod and wider URC offer.
- It has been agreed that all Synods will confirm that ministers are receiving supervision to the Secretary for Ministries every year (by 31st January). To enable us to do this, the Synod office will ask our Ministers, CRCWs and Local Church Leaders to confirm in writing every year that we are receiving pastoral supervision. So, supervision, like other aspects of our ongoing training and refreshment such as Education for Ministry phase 3 (EM3), is meant to become a continuing opportunity amongst us. **The URC's expectation is that pastoral supervision becomes a fundamental and basic part of our life and work together, not an occasional thing or something we abandon after a year.** That's why having the freedom to find a suitable supervisor is going to be so important. And, sometimes, we may find we need to stop with one supervisor and find another.
- **Costs.** Mission Council agreed that pastoral supervision should be funded jointly by local pastorates and the denomination. Funding will be in addition to the existing allocation for ministerial training (EM3 grants). **In our Synod we have agreed to remove any cost burden from local churches because we believe supervision is a priority as we care for one another, and because we want to avoid any financial constraints or complications. Synod Executive has agreed that, as from 1st October 2023, ALL SUPERVISION SESSION COSTS will be met directly from Synod funds.** Ministers and Local Church Leaders in supervision need simply to reclaim expenses using a normal Synod expenses form directly from the Synod Treasurer. You will need to include written receipts. **There is no expectation at all that ministers and local church leaders pay for supervision from their own pocket.** It may be, however, that some supervisors offer their services for free. Agreeing costs needs to be part of the initial arrangements and included in the covenant between you and your supervisor.

You will find the official URC guidance about Pastoral Supervision, including information that may be helpful to supervisors unfamiliar with URC ministry and local church leadership, on the South Western Synod website. We'll add more material here as things develop:

www.urcsouthwest.org.uk/synod/ordained-ministry/

P.T.O. for some personal reflections on Pastoral Supervision

from

Revd Neil Thorogood, convener of the Discipleship and Service Committee

WHY PASTORAL SUPERVISION MATTERS TO ME

Certainly other caring professions and callings make much use of supervision and have done for years. Being informed by good practice elsewhere never hurts. But I think there's plenty of biblical, ecclesial and theological justification for this development. Taking time out to reflect and be restored is woven into many biblical narratives. We see it in some of the rhythms of life Jesus adopted for himself and shared with the disciples: "He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two ...The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves." (Mark 6: 7, 30-32).

Kate Litchfield, in a book I have returned to many times not least as I helped people explore ministry at Westminster College, sums up ministry thus: "At the heart of all effective ministry is the nurturing of discipleship in openness to God, through prayer, Scripture, sacrament and a readiness to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit." (*Tend My Flock: Sustaining Good Pastoral Care*, 2006, Norwich: Canterbury Press, p. 20).

Jesus creates intentional space and attends to his friends amidst their witnessing. Litchfield notices that even those long in ministry remain disciples in need of nurture. My experiences of pastoral supervision have been good ones because I have needed such space and nurture. I have found ministry to be the deepest joy and blessing. I have found ministry hard at times, exhausting, confusing. I have had to deal with situations I felt ill-prepared for. I have worked with some incredibly fine people and some incredibly difficult people. For me, ministry is the greatest of privileges and also can be truly costly. Pastoral supervision offers a safe space into which I have found myself able to bring things I wanted to celebrate profoundly, and things I wished would go away. In supervision I have been enabled to voice for myself things I only dimly glimpsed, or had been ignoring. Out of these gently guided conversations I have discovered renewal and fresh hope.

Returning to local pastoral charge, I have also been struck by endings. When I was ordained in 1992 in Halifax we would regularly gather around a dozen URC ministers from within the District Council area. We ate together and talked. I found it a helpful community. I have also been blessed, often, to share in ecumenical gatherings of those involved in ministry. Such gatherings are less part of life now, at least where I am. That makes me value the intentionality of seeking out conversation partners that this sort of supervision shapes.

THE UNIQUENESS OF PASTORAL SUPERVISION TO ME

For me, the rich spiritual and theological focus of supervision sessions has been vital. I am used to supervisors offering that we begin and end with prayer, and sometimes with the Bible. They need sensitivity. Forcing a theological perspective that isn't at home with me and what I'm bringing can wreck the space. But that's part of what their training equips them with. There are connections here with spiritual direction, but key differences. I see pastoral supervision as more intentionally focussed upon my ministerial practices and the impacts of my ministry upon others even as it can connect with my personality, personal life experiences and spirituality. This is why the starting point in a pastoral supervision is not anything the supervisor might want to teach me, or anything the URC might want me to know or do or be, but something entirely from my experience of ministry. What is my ministry in this situation and what are the impacts of my ministry upon myself and others? How is my ministry faithfully serving Christ in the world, building up the Church and witnessing to the reign of God? In spiritual direction, I would expect the focus to be more consistently upon me; my walk with God, my obedience to Christ, my continuing faith journey, my prayers, my devotion to scripture. As Jane Leach and Michael Paterson put it: "Supervisors who are not constantly checking up on those they supervise, but are able to be a steady, reliable presence, are worth their weight in gold for they enable those with whom they sit in supervision to see their ministry both in its detail and in the perspective of the kingdom." (*Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook*, 2010, London: SCM Press, p. 11).

"Are you looking into *your* vision? Are you letting yourself be changed and shaped by what you see?"

(Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgement*, 2002, London: DLT, p. 110)