

# Group Pastoral Supervision

## The Task of Group Supervision

Group Pastoral Supervision is a regular and disciplined reflection space for pastoral supervisors (the supervisees) to consider their supervision practice fully with the support of a trained supervisor.

The primary focus of group supervision is to support pastoral supervisors to grow and develop in their supervision work. It is a joint endeavour between supervisees and supervisor to attend to themselves (person) their practice (role) and develop understanding of wider related and impacting issues (system). By so doing the quality of Pastoral Supervision practice can be enhanced and transformed.

Whilst one's personal discipleship and ministerial life are intertwined with how pastoral supervision practice is exercised and experienced, the supervisor's role is to support the supervisees to consider these issues only in so far as they impact on those (people/issues) with whom they exercise pastoral supervision. Therefore it is crucial to establish expectations, boundaries, and processes for review for supervision.

Pastoral supervision is not personal therapy or spiritual accompaniment/direction. If this is understood then the boundaries and efficacy of these different interventions will be taken up most effectively.

## Purpose and Structure of Group Supervision

The purpose of group pastoral supervision is to enable pastoral supervisors to reflect on their practice (Acts 13.2; 14.26) and role. Key is the observation of, and adherence to, appropriate boundaries. As indicated above, equally important is the distinction between the *person*, their *role*, and the *system* in which the pastoral supervisor works. As such, the pastoral supervisor reflects on her/his frames of reference, contextual issues, hopes and fears, systems and organisational matters, interpersonal dynamics, management and people skills, and it is a setting for encouragement.

Group pastoral supervision is regular and offered by someone who is outside the supervisees' own context, certainly not in the same Deanery. Preferably the meetings will be for 2½ hours, about six times in the year, and the supervisees come prepared for each meeting. It is the responsibility of the supervisees to use group supervision to maintain accountability, self-care and good practice.

The Director of Mission and Ministry (DMM), Canon Dr Neville Emslie, oversees the supervision programme and will contact pastoral supervisors to help them secure a good group pastoral supervisor. The DMM is available to speak to all pastoral supervisors about their supervision needs, [nemsle@diocant.org](mailto:nemsle@diocant.org)

## Who Should Have Supervision?

The Bishop of Dover wishes her licensed clergy to be in regular *pastoral supervision* to support them in their ministerial role, and in *spiritual accompaniment* to support them in their relationship with God.

In conjunction with registered and experienced Supervisors the diocese has begun to train Pastoral Supervisors and to establish processes so that, initially, all Incumbents new to post or new to the diocese will be offered a pastoral supervisor.

We hope to be in a position to provide all Incumbents with pastoral supervisors within the next 12 months. Further, Incumbents will receive supervision training so they are better equipped to offer supervision to their ministry team and training curates.

All those who trained to be pastoral supervisors will be in supervision themselves.

### **Supporting the Supervisors**

Group Supervision is offered to all Pastoral Supervisors who have been trained by the diocese. These will consist of up to five people plus the Supervisor for a two-hour session. Initially, Group Supervision will take place termly, i.e. three times per year and will be offered by a trained Group Supervisor.

### **Supervision in the Local Context**

A number of Incumbents in the diocese have received supervision training by virtue of being a Training Incumbent of a curate.

As many of our parishes exist within a larger construct of a multi-parish benefice, or a large parish that includes former smaller parishes, many benefices and parishes contain a ministry team or staff under the oversight of a Team Rector or Vicar. These teams often consist of stipendiary and non-stipendiary priests, priests with permission to officiate, Readers, Authorised Lay Ministers, and other lay ministers. We will be developing the supervision programme so all Incumbents have good supervision skills appropriate for oversight of ministry in their own context.

### **Key Supervisory Capabilities**

1. Capacity to establish a supervisory relationship and attend to appropriate boundaries.
2. Capacity to listen, reflect, question and hypothesize.
3. Capacity to assess supervisee issues, negotiate and define appropriate objectives and track progress.
4. Capacity of supervisor to self-reflect and understand and use own experience.
5. Capacity to observe organisational/institutional processes as they are invested in the supervisee and supervisor relationship.
6. Understanding of conscious and unconscious factors at play.
7. Capacity to communicate with the supervisee, open up thought and give and receive feedback.
8. Capacity to make appropriate interventions.

9. Where appropriate, an understanding of roles taken up in groups, teams and organisations.
10. Awareness of, and ability to, reflect on issues of difference including in the relationship with the supervisee.
11. Capacity to understand and manage beginnings and endings in depth.

### **Supervision Contract**

Each supervision relationship is unique; it is the only context in which these particular people work together. In group supervision there is the scope for greater complexity, with rich and varied viewpoints and learning. The supervisees' experience and understanding of supervision may differ, so they need to clarify what they are doing. If they don't, there can be confusion and disappointment. A contract is the best safeguard.

A contract helps establish the relationship. Negotiating a written contract is an important step in the setting up of group supervision. It can be a learning experience and a model, clarifying each person's commitment. It supports the effective use of time.

A contract provides a framework and sets ground rules for the shared task. It provides for evaluation (are we doing what we agreed to do?) and can be re-negotiated and adapted to meet needs.

Significant things to consider in negotiating a group supervision contract:

1. The purpose of the supervision.
2. What each person expects the process of supervision to be like.
3. What each person expects a supervision session to be like.
4. What the roles and tasks of the supervisee will be in this relationship.
5. What the roles and tasks of the supervisor will be in this relationship.
6. How and when the supervision will be evaluated.
7. The working details:
  - a. What preparation will be done.
  - b. The working format of the session – e.g. how it will begin and end.
  - c. How material will be presented [e.g. orally, written, voice or video recorded].
  - d. What records will be kept and how material will be disposed of.
  - e. The frequency, day, time and length of sessions.
  - f. Starting and review dates and the proposed duration of the contract.
  - g. Agreement about cancellations, regularity, punctuality, interruptions.
  - h. Evaluation.
  - i. Confidentiality [what might lead the supervisor to wish to break confidentiality? What would he or she do? See also (d) above.]
  - j. What to do if there is conflict, or if one participant has a complaint.
8. How payment will be arranged, if relevant.

Not everything suggested here will be written into the contract but discussing it helps to clarify both parties' expectations. Sometimes it may clarify for one or other person that the relationship is not likely to work.

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