A Challenge to Church Leaders: The Necessity of Supervision for Ordained Ministers

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This article is an explicit challenge to church leaders and ministers of all denominations to take seriously the necessity of obligatory supervision for ordained ministers. To support this challenge, the author describes fundamental principles of pastoral care that found the moral demand for and benefits of the supervision of pastoral practice. Before offering practical suggestions on the implementation of supervision, reasons for the personal and institutional resistance to supervision of ordained ministers are depicted.

The absence of the discipline of self-exploration, awareness, acceptance, and humility is at best a recipe for inadequate ministry and at worst a formula for dangerous failures.

A couple of years before knowledge of the Roman Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal had become widespread, I wrote an article that criticized the master-apprentice model of supervisory education and addressed some of the theological, philosophical, and psychological factors that underscored the need for ministers to be in a supervisory relationship as long as they are in active ministry.[1] I take no solace in the belief that these scandals may buttress my claim, primarily because I do not hold to a minimalist view of ministry or the role of supervision. Supervision, especially of church leaders, may have reduced the sheer numbers of victims, but I am not sanguine that supervision would be the solution to the routine ills of sin and the corruption of the powerful in human life. While supervision may be preventative, in that it can help us do no harm, its goals are to further the minister's personal growth as well as to deepen and broaden his or her proficiency in pastoral care. Supervision is also an important relationship where one receives support and encouragement, renewing the minister's strength and desire to serve others.

Few would argue against personal growth and the further refinement of one's skills in ministry. We may agree on the ideals, but the absence of institutional support and structures for the supervision of ordained ministers[2] suggests to me that church leaders resist implementing this idea. This article is an explicit challenge to church leaders and ministers of all denominations to take seriously the necessity of obligatory supervision during the first five years after ordination and some form of supervision thereafter. To throw down the gauntlet, in what I hope becomes a public conversation, demands that I state my position. I begin by setting forth fundamental

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[1]Ryan LaMothe, "Rethinking Supervision of Ministry," *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 2002, Vol. 56, No. 2, pp.135-145.
[2]While I tend to refer to ordained ministers, I would include all publicly recognized ministers in my argument.

principles of pastoral care that found the moral demand for supervision of pastoral practice. Before offering practical suggestions on the implementation of supervision, recognizing that each church will have its own policies, I offer some reasons for the personal and institutional resistance to supervision of ordained ministers. Recognition of personal and institutional obstacles is the first step in overcoming them.

Supervision and Principles of Pastoral Care

David Steere contends that pastoral supervision involves "an extended relationship in which the supervisor and supervisee agree to meet at regular intervals for systematic reflection upon the concrete practice of pastoral care" for the sake of "personal growth in the pastoral role" and pastoral proficiency.[3] Generally, seminary students are obliged to be in supervisory relationships (*e.g.*., field education, Clinical Pastoral Education), because they are in the process of developing a pastoral identity as well as learning skills specific to this role. The institutional demand for supervision is tacitly annulled once they are ordained or within the first two years of practice. When supervision is understood primarily in terms of growth in one's pastoral role and proficiency, and when role and proficiency are things to be acquired and are, thus, implicitly seen as static,[4] it is entirely logical to believe that supervision is no longer needed once people are ordained. The absence of obligatory supervision shifts to a less onerous term, consultation, which connotes the individual minister's freedom to seek consultation and the freedom to accept or reject the advice given.[5] Consultation, unlike supervision, is less formal and lacks the weight of organizational obligation for the ongoing evaluation of one's ministry.

The tendency to base the idea of supervision on a master-apprentice, educational model of ministry means that supervision is associated, almost exclusively, with people who are beginners. A broader understanding of supervision can be achieved when the focus shifts to fundamental principles that found and inform pastoral practice. These principles move us away from the propensity to associate supervision solely with students and, I hope, away from the unconscious embarrassment some ordained ministers experience when submitting to supervision. Moreover, these principles undermine the views that knowledge and skill are static. While there are other principles, I confine myself to four–accountability, understanding, temporality–contexuality, and life-long learning. These principles emerge from theological anthropology and Christian traditions of care.

Accountability

Throughout the Judeo-Christian scriptures, there are numerous examples of people being held accountable for the consequences of their actions, especially those who were given authority and power. In *Matthew* 18:6-9, for instance, Jesus warns his disciples that it would be better to tie a millstone around one's neck and throw oneself into the depths of the sea

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[3]David Steere, "A Model for Supervision," in David Steere (Ed.), *The Supervision of Pastoral Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), p. 66. See also, Barry Estadt, "Toward Professional Integration," in Barry Estadt, John Compton, & Melvin Blanchette (Eds.), *The Art of Clinical Supervision* (New York, NY: Integration Books, 1987), p.7.

[4]LaMothe, *op. cit.*

[5]John Patton and Jay Warkentin, "A Dialogue on Supervision and Consultation," *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, 1971, Vol. 25, pp. 165-174.

than to be a stumbling block for those who seek to believe in him. Surely this cautionary tale would rattle any minister who takes his or her work seriously. While accountability is applicable to all human beings, in the sense that we are responsible as human beings,[6] those who are given greater responsibility are held to more stringent standards. The good of the individuals and the community depends on leaders being accountable for their actions.

We might agree that, eventually, we all will have to account for our lives before God and that this accounting includes our misdeeds. However, accounting for one's ministry need not be delayed to the hereafter and not all accounting refers only to one's errors. Accountability means that one is able to claim or take ownership of one's thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and actions in the here and now. At times, these thoughts and feelings may indeed be linked to a mistake, miscue, or mishearing. By being able to take responsibility for one's errors, the possibility of personal growth and pastoral proficiency is created. That is, we can learn from our mistakes, removing the need to deny or hide them. It is also true that claiming those thoughts and feelings that are not linked to error, but are instead more neutral and ambiguous, may deepen our understanding of a pastoral situation.[7]

The idea that we will be accountable to God for our thoughts and actions also implies that accountability is not a solipsistic venture. Granted, each minister is able to reflect and to take ownership in the privacy of his or her own mind, but the very reality of sin and the unconscious undercut any notion that accountability can be placed safely and solely in the hands of private reflection. The difficulty of self-reflection and knowing oneself reveals the fundamental limits of being human and the necessity of supervision. Scottish philosopher John Macmurray, for instance, noted that, "We know ourselves only as we appear to ourselves and not as we really are."[8] We are aware, yet mostly unaware of our motives, feelings, and desires and the reality of the unconscious in human life means that one cannot claim or own that which is by definition unconscious. Yet this does not absolve one of being accountable. The paradox is that acts of omission or lack of awareness does not deny one's responsibility and what I am not aware of I cannot claim. In practical terms this means that what I am unable to claim, I cannot know and use for the sake of helping the other.

Thus, knowing oneself and taking accountability for oneself, even if limited, requires the personal Other. Niebuhr stated, "We do not seem to know ourselves as selves in isolation but only in interpersonal society."[9] The "other" is necessary for my sense of awareness and, by implication, my capacity to own who I am and what I do. This is also echoed in Riceour's theological perspective on sin. He wrote:

> The consciousness of sin is not its measure. Sin is my true situation before God. The 'before God' and not my consciousness of it is its measure of sin. *That is why there must be an other, a prophet, to denounce sin.* No becoming aware of myself on my

[6]H. Richard, Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1963).
[7]See, William Arnold, *Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1982), and Pamela Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003).
[8]John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Humanities Press International, 1961), p. 149.
[9]H. Richard Niebuhr, *Faith on Earth* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 24.

part is sufficient, all the more because consciousness is itself included in the situation and is guilty of both lies and bad faith.[10]

The other as essential for my being accountable for my unsavory actions finds support in both Hellenistic traditions and scripture. For example, Tireseus, the blind seer, told Oedipus a story to open his eyes to what had been before him for years. And Nathan, the prophet, also by way of a story, moved David to accept responsibility for murder and taking Uriah's wife. Both men, for various reasons, avoided taking responsibility for their actions; actions that both knew, at some level, violated social codes. The Other made them face what was disturbing and painful. Most of us use rationalization and other defenses to blind ourselves to what is painful and disturbing about our ministry and, thus, we need others to help us be accountable.

In the realm of theological discourse, the Other as prophet is necessary to awaken us to our moral failures.[11] In philosophy, the Other humanizes my desire,[12] evokes the idea of infinity and mystery,[13] and is necessary for my freedom.[14] In the domain of psychoanalytic infant-parent research, the idea of the good enough Other is necessary for a child's developing sense of self as well as his/her capacities for self-reflection and empathy.[15] Philosophy, theology, and psychoanalysis support the dictum that in human life the Other is essential for awareness of my thoughts, feelings, and actions as well as my capacities for accountability, freedom, empathy, and compassion. Personal accountability, then, is inherently social, which undermines any facile claim about the privacy of one's ministry.

Accountability in ministry includes being able to give *account for* one's assessments and actions to another person who is able to make judgments and to offer another perspective. This does not imply that we are merely to defend our actions. Rather, we are to provide good reasons for what we have done or intend to do. These good reasons must come from the Christian community's traditions of care as well as from the human sciences to the extent that they inform one's ministry. These traditions provide us with the theories, practices, and aims of care. To give account, then, requires knowledge of the tradition and reflective use of the tradition(s) of care in providing reasons for the interventions one makes on behalf of others.

People might argue that ministers can use tradition and provide "good" reasons for their care in the privacy of their offices, but they would be only partially correct. The Other person, in the form of a supervisor, is necessary for two reasons. First, human beings are masterful in providing "good" reasons for even the most egregious actions. A supervisor can reveal the self-deception, rationalization, and denial embedded in "good" reasons.

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[10]Paul Riceour, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1974), p.282.

[11]Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990).

[12]See Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York. NY: Charles Scribner, 1958), and Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1977).

[13]Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

[14]John Macmurray, *Conditions of Freedom* (London: Humanities Press International, 1949).

[15]See Peter Fonagy and Mary Target, "Playing with Reality: Theory of Mind and the Normal Development of Psychic Reality," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 1996, Vol. 77, pp. 217-233; Peter Fonagy and Mary Target, "Attachment and Reflective Function: Their Role in Self-organization," *Development and Psychopathology*, 1997, Vol. 9, pp. 679-700; Donald Nathanson, "From Empathy to Community," The Annual of Psychoanalysis, 1997, Vol. 25, pp. 125-144.

Second, the supervisor, who is likewise steeped in traditions of care, provides another perspective, offering his or her own "reasons" for what would be effective pastoral practice. Multiple perspectives broaden and deepen our knowledge, which is crucial for effective ministry.

The principle of accountability implies a moral demand, courage as a virtue, and an ethos that holds ministers accountable in fact. An ethical ministry is tied to the *action* of: a) placing oneself in relation to an other who will help me claim what I unconsciously or consciously wish to keep private, b) providing sound reasons for one's care of others, and c) being open to other perspectives. Courage is required because being vulnerable-being open to learning about oneself in relation to an other-is, at times, a painful, humbling, and discouraging process for human beings. The ethics and courage associated with the principle of accountability are not simply the sole responsibility of individual ministers. Rather, the principle of accountability is inextricably yoked to communal ethos, traditions, and structures that insure ministers be accountable *in fact*, not simply in principle.[16]

Understanding

Accountability is the foundation for the second principle of pastoral ministry, understanding. To understand means to be able to grasp the meanings, motivations, needs, and desires of others in a given situation. Since human beings are incredibly complex creatures, understanding them is always incomplete. In the context of ministry, I identify four features of being able to understand the other person and situation of care. First, the theological traditions of care carry forward "prejudices"[17] in the forms of concepts and modes of care that inform our assessments and interventions. We cannot understand others without being grounded in the communal discourse and tradition that undergirds community, communication, and practice.[18] In other words, to understand a particular ministerial situation from a theological perspective requires knowledge of one's tradition and its meanings, rules, roles, codes, beliefs, values, *etc.* Seminary education is designed to help ministers *begin* to appropriate the depths of the traditions of care. Ordination does not confer knowledge of one's tradition. Moreover, one's tradition of care is neither a static body of knowledge, nor some thing that can be fully grasped by an individual minister—no matter how intelligent or educated. Tradition and forms of knowing, which are derived from tradition, are fundamentally social and not individual.[19]

An added difficulty is the reality that "knowing" the tradition is only part of the challenge in ministry. The effective application of the tradition to concrete situations is also difficult and never complete, in the sense that

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[16]Richard Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1996).

[17]Hans Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (David Linge ed. and trans) (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976).

[18]Kenneth Gergen, *Realities and Relationships* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[19]Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1999). Since I mention Lyotard and Gadamer it seems appropriate to recognize that both realized that tradition and knowledge could be used to subjugate or depersonalize others. While this is an important area to address, I implicitly suggest that supervision is one way to confront totalitarian narrative knowing—the use of traditions of care to fulfill one's own ends to the detriment of the equality and freedom of others.

other theological renderings may be applicable, if not more helpful. Moreover, any theological interpretation does not exhaust the surplus of meaning inherent in human interactions and dilemmas.

A second feature of understanding includes the minister's subjectivity. During the last fifty years, various schools of psychoanalysis have continually pointed to the importance of the analyst's subjectivity in being able to understand the patient and the interaction between them. Cooper-White[20] has applied this to ministry, arguing that there is much wisdom to be gained from a minister's awareness of his or her subjectivity—thoughts, feelings, beliefs, *etc.* The minister can broaden his or her understanding of the other and the interaction, if she or he has some grasp on who she or he is and is aware of her or his thoughts, feelings, and desires. This awareness provides greater freedom and flexibility because the minister can begin to discern how to make use of his or her subjectivity for the sake of the other.

Since self-awareness is not static, it demands a disciplined approach. Disciplined subjectivity involves the practice of attending to and accounting for one's thoughts, feelings, and fantasies as well as discerning how they are or are not part of the context of care. While disciplined subjectivity is a skill that can be acquired it is neither developed nor maintained in isolation of others. I would add that disciplined subjectivity includes cultivating curiosity and savvy ignorance. It is all too common for human beings to make assumptions, to believe one knows, and the result is that we miss being surprised or fail to recognize new meanings. A disciplined subjectivity means that the minister is curious and this curiosity can only result from an acknowledgment of one's ignorance. This kind of ignorance is more of a hermeneutics of suspicion[21] wherein the minister handles the tension between knowing and not-knowing as she or he interprets and deconstructs manifest meanings.

Disciplined subjectivity is inextricably yoked to the third feature of understanding, which is the minister's willingness to surrender to the other person (or persons). What I mean by this is one's willingness to be open to or moved and shaped by the other's subjectivity.[22] It is in this willingness that a minister is open to learning from the other person with the aim of understanding him or her. To surrender also implies being open to correction and perspectives as well as experiences that differ from one's own. Having said this, surrendering does not mean abdicating one's views. Rather, it means being able to create space to hold other perspectives in tension. Creating this space helps "us to rid ourselves of the habit of always hearing only what we already understand."[23]

When ministers refuse to surrender to the other, one often discovers what Niebuhr[24] called the totalitarian tendency–the belief that my view is *the* correct one. Niebuhr put it this way: "We cannot understand (others) without occupying a standpoint, and there is no greater barrier to understanding than the assumption that the standpoint we happen to occupy is

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[20]Cooper-White, *op. cit.*
[21]Riceour, *op. cit.*
[22]Emmanuel Ghent, "Masochism, Submission, Surrender," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 1990, Vol. 26, pp. 108-136.
[23]Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1971), p. 58.
[24]H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1941).

a universal one."[25] The totalitarian tendency not only forecloses the minister's subjectivity, it also undermines the capacity to comprehend the self-revelation of the other. This foreclosure of the minister's subjectivity is usually accompanied by corrupt use of the tradition of care.

Surrendering to the other, being moved by the other's subjectivity, means being able to contain the fear and anxiety associated ignorance, ambiguity, and mystery. From a theological perspective, surrender—openness to the truth of the other—is closely linked to the concept of revelation. Revelation implies the willingness to surrender to God-Can act of trust and grace—and in the process one comes to know, in part, God's self-disclosure. Similarly, we come to know and understand the other by surrendering to his or her ways of being in the world.

In *1 Peter* 3:8, compassion is a characteristic of a disciple of Christ. To be compassionate, which is the fourth attribute of understanding, requires the three other features of understanding (tradition, subjectivity, surrender), for without them compassion becomes shallow sentimentality. I believe most ministers desire to be compassionate in their ministry, though we often fail. Every failure to be compassionate is a moral failure, reflecting some refusal to be accountable, to know the tradition of care as it applies to the needs of the other, to know oneself, and to surrender to the other's experience. Compassion, as a component of understanding, does not imply agreement, which suggests the real possibility of being able to be compassionate to one's enemies, to the radical other. This simple, yet profoundly difficult truth is overlooked whenever ministers, because of fear and anxiety, avoid being compassionate to those who are deemed unbelievers, sinners or enemies.

There are countless times after graduation and ordination when we fail to understand others and ourselves because of our weariness, fear, anxiety, hostility, anger, and hatred. There are times we fall short because we do not seek other perspectives, whether that is due to time constraints, hubris, or denial. We need the "other" as supervisor to help us develop and maintain disciplined subjectivity. We need the other to helps us grasp the depth and breadth of tradition and the complexity of our own subjectivity in order to deepen our understanding of the parishioner and the ministerial context. In a supervisory relationship of trust, we derive some of the courage and confidence needed to face those fears that foreclose our ability to surrender, to be open and to be compassionate to the strange other. Just as important, the supervisor offers his or her understanding of the minister, which is a necessary support for the burdens of keeping confidentiality and caring for others. Put another way, the supervisor's compassionate understanding of the minister can serve as a time of rest and renewal.

Temporality and Contextuality

These four features of understanding—tradition, subjectivity, surrender, and compassion-are subject to the principles of temporality and contextuality.[26] Temporality refers to the changes that take place in each ministerial situation and in ourselves. Certainly over time many ministers become quite skilled at their work, but they are still bound by time. In other words,

[25]H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), p.13.

[26]See Donald Capps, *Giving Counsel* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001).

regardless of how skilled someone is, there are moments when, for whatever reasons, we do not grasp who we are, what we are doing, or what is going on. It is an illusion to believe that "experts" have it—accountability, understanding, and compassion-as if "it" is not bound by the vicissitudes of time. I know in my ministry (pastoral counseling) a great deal can take place within a fifty-minute session. One minute I am attentive and can partially understand what is taking place and a few minutes later I am distracted. In one session I am empathic and the person feels understood, and in the next session I unwittingly miss what the person is trying to communicate. Is my distraction simply a common human struggle to listen? What did the person say and what was going on in me (and between us) that gave rise to my missing an important aspect of her experience? Am I more attracted to the person in the first session and annoyed by the person in the second session? This suggests that no matter how much experience and skill I have gained over the years, I continue to need the other to help me be accountable, to explore communication, and to understand myself-in-relation-to the other.

The dynamic nature of ministry is also manifested in the multiple and changing contexts ministers confront. Pastoral ministers can be assured that ministry is not predictable, which, for some, may be one of its allures. The day may begin with someone calling about her child's refusal to come to catechism, followed by a visit to the hospital, an appointment with a couple preparing for marriage, a woman revealing that her husband beats her.... Even specialized ministry, like pastoral psychotherapy, deals with the rich and varied realities clients bring to each session. Multiple contexts highlight the complex and changing nature of ministry, the limits of one's knowledge and skill, and the need to have the support and assistance of a supervisor to deepen our understanding and improve our proficiency in caring for others.

Lifelong Learning

The principles of accountability, comprehension, temporality and contexuality direct us to the final principle, namely, lifelong learning. The idea of lifelong learning has been taken up by many professional organizations. Physicians and psychologists, for example, are required to provide evidence of their ongoing education. Members of these organizations realize that skill and knowledge are dynamic. Likewise, pastoral ministry is an art and discipline wherein ministers can continue to learn to improve their skills and knowledge. Naturally, lifelong learning can take many forms (*e.g.*., conferences, classes, research, *etc.*). The form advocated in this article is supervision. By placing oneself in supervision, a minister is invited to continue to learn (and re-learn) about the traditions of care and its application to a ministerial situation and to discover more about himself or herself and how to make use of oneself in caring for others. The minister is an artist of sorts as she or he seeks to use the palette of tradition and subjectivity in caring for others. As artists it is vital to recognize that learning does not cease after the structured program of seminary education.

Granted, learning is work, but we often forget or overlook the pleasures that come from gaining a novel perspective or developing a new skill. A vital ministry is one where there is openness to the new. Supervision is one forum where ordained ministers can receive the support, encouragement, and help to experience the pleasurable work of learning something new

about themselves, others, and traditions as well as experience the gratification of honing their skills.

In summary, accountability, understanding, temporality and contextuality, and lifelong learning are principles that serve as the foundation for the moral requirement supervision of pastoral practice. Unlike the view that associates supervision with neophytes, these principles point to the necessity of supervision for any person actively engaged in public ministry.

Recognizing and Overcoming Resistance to Supervision

When individuals or communities resist something new, it is usually a manifestation of fear and anxiety. There is, in other words, a perception, conscious or unconscious, that there is not enough safety to risk doing something different. There are many institutional and individual reasons for the absence of pastoral supervision of ordained ministers. While I separate institutional and individual resistances, they are in fact interconnected.

Institutions and communities are conserving systems and slow to change. The language, tradition, and rituals of communities provide stability and security, which is necessary for interpersonal communication. Too much change evokes anxiety associated with disorganization, danger, and insecurity, all of which obstructs interpersonal communion. Too little change reflects the abrogation of freedom for the safety of predictability and certainty. The result is stagnation and emptiness. The task for competent leaders is navigating between the shoals of too much change and stasis.

More often than not, communities resist being confronted by situations and persons who seek change. For example, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Gandhi advocated change and were targets of hostility and violence. Resistance does not mean that communities do not change. Rather, communities (and individuals) change as long as there is an illusion of staying the same.[27] Thus, I would expect that institutions would resist the idea of supervision for ordained ministers because it conflicts with current ideas, practices, and beliefs. The introduction of supervision would entail addressing challenging questions. How does this alter our understanding of ordination? How do we select and train supervisors? Who trains supervisors? How do we avoid dual-role relationships in supervision? How frequently should ministers be supervised? Who would be responsible for overseeing supervision of ordained ministers in light of our polity? How do we institute a policy that requires supervision? How would we handle noncompliance? Who would pay for supervision? Who should be supervisors and what education would be involved? These and other questions reflect the difficulties of instituting a new structure and ethos. Underlying these questions may be a form of resistance associated with perceived institutional costs in time, energy, and money. But these are usually merely manifest reasons for deeper resistances associated with reigning ideologies and the desire for privilege, power, and prestige.

Institutional resistance is inextricably linked to individual motivations for avoiding supervision. Perhaps the single most common motivation for avoiding supervision is the fear of being vulnerable. It is ironic that ministers tell people that it is okay to be vulnerable, to seek help, to admit need,

[27]Phillip Bromberg, *Standing in Spaces: Essays on Clinical Process, Trauma, and Dissociation* (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1998).

to rely on others, and yet many of us, men and women alike, tend to avoid taking our own advice. With regard to supervision, one must be able to be open to correction, open to showing our work to an other. We must be willing to depend on others to deepen our knowledge (self and tradition) and improve pastoral proficiency. In principle this is easy, but in practice it is difficult for three reasons. First, we fear being vulnerable because we might discover that we are not as competent as we believed or we might confront an aspect of ourselves that we prefer to remain hidden in the closet of our unconscious. Avoiding supervision, then, may be a way to preserve our self-esteem, while avoiding our shadow side. A second and related reason for one's avoidance of supervision is our ego ideal. Jesus Christ, for Christian ministers, is the ideal we hold for being and for doing ministry. Seminarians are encouraged to identify with Christ, to configure themselves to Christ, to incarnate Christ's love and compassion in their ministry. To be vulnerable, to open oneself up to supervision can mean encountering the pain of disillusionment. We are not nearly as good, virtuous, Christ-like, or skilled as we secretly believe. Of course, we may also wish to avoid public acknowledgement of our mistakes. Finally, guarding one's self-worth is often accompanied by the fear of the supervisor's rejection, disappointment, or disapproval. Many of us may have grown up with a sense that if we fail, the other person will leave us or disapprove of us. To protect ourselves from this, we tend to become perfectionists and perfectionists tend to resist supervision.

Closely associated with avoidance of vulnerability is hubris. It may be inevitable that selecting and training people to fulfill leadership roles in churches contributes to an elevated view of oneself. Of course, ministers would abhor this idea and practice because of the scriptural admonishments about pride. Rational and public pronouncements of servant-leadership and equality aside, there is a good deal of pride among the ranks of ordained ministers. I would venture to say one could scratch any ecclesial institution and find rationally justified and codified clericalism. To submit to supervision is an antidote to pride and a step toward humility.

The perceived loss of power and prestige may be another reason for resistance. While ministers may not "feel" powerful, they retain a great deal of informal and personal power that is derived, in part, by institutional and social recognition, and by the fact that they symbolically represent God and church. Even though most churches have some institutional checks on the minister's power, a great deal of power is unchecked because public ministry is largely private. Naturally, this is not absolute. Churches can and do defrock ministers who harm others, but this happens in only a small number of cases. Generally, ordained ministers exercise a great deal of power in those situations where ministry is private and where failures can escape correction. For example, a minister who visits a person at home or meets with a parishioner in his or her office exercises a great deal of unchecked power. In other words, she or he is not required to account for her or his interventions. His or her ministry is not scrutinized or evaluated. Those professions, few though they may be, that require some form of supervision implicitly provide a check on the professional's power, though this does not mean problems will not emerge.

To submit to supervision is to share power with others. It is shared because I am asking for help and I need the supervisor to deepen my understanding and proficiency. Submitting to supervision means accepting

the limits of my knowledge and skills and this public acceptance and accountability represents a restraint on one's power.

In those ecclesial milieus where the ordained minister is tacitly believed to be an expert or to have some special knowledge and power, there is a certain amount of prestige that appends to the minister's role. Indeed, clericalism is the exaggerated form of privilege and power. In Western culture, clerical status is often inextricably joined to the values of self-sufficiency, independence, and individualism, which contribute to an overly privatized view of one's ministry and greater difficulty in asking for help. Examples of this can be seen in some comments I have heard from ministers who reject the idea of supervision. Supervision would somehow diminish their status, though this is not what they say. Instead, comments are made about whether supervision is really necessary, or some have said that there is not enough time or that there are already too many demands on them. To submit to supervision is not only a check on one's power, because one is being asked to be accountable for one's ministry, it also invites humility. The minister in supervision, in other words, goes against cultural beliefs in self-sufficiency, independence, and individualism by acknowledging his or her limits and need for others for correction and ongoing learning. The minister who seeks supervision does not confuse privilege with personal status. Rather, she or he is saying that the privilege of being a minister requires being open to learning and correction.

Each of us, reflecting on our own institutions and experience, can probably come up with a variety of motives for avoiding the work of supervision. Knowledge or awareness of resistances, however, is not identical to change or conversion. Change is also dependent on the will, or intention, which is allied to action. This action can be an individual one, wherein a minister decides on his or her own to seek supervision. I have known a number of ministers who have done this. I believe, however, that we need to change the culture of ministry so that intention and action are communal. To do this means establishing conversations that not only move us beyond individual and communal resistances, but also toward the development of plans or visions. Toward this end I offer a modest proposal.

Proposal

Since each ecclesial polity is distinct, I offer some general ideas about developing policies regarding supervision and issues of training. These ideas are provisional and directed toward beginning a conversation among those responsible for the care of the church's ministry.

One of the first steps is to gather lay and ordained alike to begin discussing the topic of supervision. This first step represents the principle of collegiality, but more importantly, it is a method for introducing something new. Establishing a conversation can be helpful in identifying resistances as well as overcoming them. Moreover, it can be helpful in creating a climate where ministers view supervision as an opportunity to learn and gain support. An open discussion is also a step toward developing a policy that will be accepted and supported by those who will have to implement it.

In terms of a policy, there must be a rationale for supervision that is linked to the theological mission of the community of faith. This article and my earlier one are examples of providing sound reasons for the necessity of supervision of ordained ministers. Naturally, each community will

develop and articulate its own rationale. The policy must also address a number of practical questions. For example, what are the requirements for supervision once people are ordained? I suggest that newly ordained ministers be in twice monthly supervision during the first five years of their ministry. After that, supervision should be once a month for those in full-time ministry. Another question is financial. Individual ministers should pay for their own supervision, but their income should reflect the cost of supervision. An alternative option would be to fund supervision though continuing education monies, but that fund should reflect the cost of supervision.

There are also questions of confidentiality, selection of supervisors, and administration of the program. I believe in strict confidentiality in order for ministers to have the safety and trust necessary to address their most challenging thoughts and feelings. All supervisory notes and evaluations, then, are privileged unless the minister is harming parishioners or himself or herself. The supervisor will submit only an annual report, to the office that administers the program, verifying the dates the minister attended supervision for the calendar year. It would also be important that supervisors of pastoral care not be in the minister's direct chain of command. If the supervisor is my boss or has some control over assignments and promotions, then I will certainly be less inclined to be open and honest.

The question of who does supervision raises additional questions. What are the requirements for the selection of supervisors? Can supervisors be from other Christian denominations? Should supervisors be only ordained ministers? In my view, supervisors must have at least five years of ministry experience, have been in supervision, possess a master's or terminal degree, and have training in the theory and practice of supervision. At present, I am aware of only one seminary (Louisville Presbyterian Seminary) that offers a certificate in supervision, which means that fulfilling this requirement will mean the development of training programs for supervisors in pastoral ministry. I add here that supervisors themselves should be in supervision. As to the second question, I see no reason not to make use of qualified supervisors from other religious traditions. A skilled supervisor will not impose his or her religious perspectives on the other person. Rather, the supervisor seeks to understand the other's tradition and to facilitate his or her use of the tradition in caring for others. The same reasoning applies to those qualified supervisors who are not ordained.

Someone may raise a question about those ministers who are in rural settings. Supervision does not necessarily have to be face to face. Those in rural areas can set up appointments with supervisors that will be conducted via the phone or internet voice systems. While this is not ideal, it can be effective.

An important aspect of any supervision is the relationship. Ministers can select from a list of supervisors that their institutions compile. It is the responsibility of the individual minister and his or her supervisor to discern how they will work together and the goals for supervision. There are also occasions when a minister may wish to change supervisors. This may be because the minister believes she or he is not benefitting from his or her supervisor or he or she recognizes that some other supervisor has skills and experience she or he wishes to learn. Ministers who change supervisors frequently need to work with those to whom they are accountable for the sake of discerning what issues need to be addressed. In addition, I think it

would be beneficial for ministers to evaluate their supervisors so that the person administering the program is able to obtain feedback on the skills and effectiveness of supervisors.

Finally, there is a question of discipline. How do we handle ministers who resist supervision? Of course, this should be left up to each church. In my view, ministry is a privilege and not a right simply because one is ordained. This privilege means, in part, adhering to the moral principles established by each ecclesial community. Naturally, we all fail to meet these in one form or another, which is why all of us are in need of forgiveness, grace, and mercy. Having said that, the continued and pervasive avoidance of moral requirements for pastoral practice, in this case supervision, indicates that the minister should not be involved in ministry.

There are without doubt numerous questions and obstacles to face when moving toward and developing new programs. In other words, to found and institutionalize supervision of ordained ministries are challenging tasks that require committed and motivated church leaders. These suggestions only begin to point toward the horizon of a supervised ordained ministry.

Conclusion

Several years ago Herb Anderson, a prominent pastoral theologian, spoke to the student body at Saint Meinrad School of Theology about pastoral ministry in the 21st century. One attribute that Dr. Anderson addressed was theological humility, which is necessary for living in a pluralistic society and world. Pastoral humility is not something that is secured in the privacy of one's own thoughts or reflections. It is nurtured and maintained by a disciplined and careful examination of one's practice of care in relation to an other. We are creatures who need others to learn and grow throughout our lives. Ministers in the 21st century must first concede that knowledge and skill are not static. The context, the unconscious, and human limitations are factors that undercut any ideology of mastery. This recognition and the principles of accountability, understanding, temporality-contexuality, and lifelong learning support the idea that growth in the knowledge and proficiency of care is dynamic and in need of the wisdom and supportive understanding of others (in this article, supervisors). These attributes of human beings and ministry are the foundations for establishing structures that both invite and demand supervision of ordained ministry in the 21st century. ✠