



Jed (not his real name) gave me a call a while ago. "I'm not sure what exactly all this supervision business is about," he said in a gravelly tone, "but I keep hearing about it. My senior seems to get a lot out of his, and my denomination's really pushing us to get a supervisor. I did a bit of a google search, and your name came up. Can you tell me more about it?"

In the wake of the recommendations made about professional/pastoral supervision in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, more and more pastors are asking questions like these. Some resentfully, expecting micro-management or surveillance, or cynically, assuming a tick-a-box approach to risk management.

Others are curious or eager; looking hopefully at the support mechanism counsellors and health professionals use to stave off burnout, cope with team conflict and trauma, and keep their cups full as they pour out in the service of others.

But what is this supervision, really, anyway? The Royal Commission may declare that "each religious institution should ensure that *all* people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders [and lay personnel], have professional supervision with a trained professional or pastoral supervisor who has a degree of independence from the institution within which the person is in ministry." (*Final Report: Recommendation 16.45*, pg 58.)

But how is that supposed to help? And isn't it expensive? Honestly, Krystyna, it's just one more thing to add to the to-do list - what am I supposed to *not* do instead? Sleep?

It's true that "supervision" in some contexts can mean micro-vision, a "they'll tell me what to do" approach (e.g. the intern counsellor who is *only* allowed to work *because* the clinical supervisor takes all legal and ethical responsibility for their practice). But that's *not* what we're talking about.

I don't need a supervisor ... do I?

SUPERVISION OR "SUPER"-VISION: AN OBSERVATION

BY KRYSTYNA
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In this context, professional pastoral supervision is more about developing your own "super" vision. Tapping into the big picture, getting a "God's eye" view of your ministry, through a relationship between two or more disciples who meet to reflect on and deepen the ministry of one (or more) of them in an intentional, focused, informed and knowledgeable way.

Imagine - two dear colleagues, sitting side by side, quietly praying and reflecting on the deep questions of life and ministry together. The sense of trust, peace (and occasional snark and laughter and tears), the joy of being fully known, and having a safe place to get things off their chest. Being able to confidently and confidentially ask for challenge, get creative about insights and solutions, and bring questions or discuss doubts without fear of judgement, or shame, or rejection.

It's a warm-hearted, Spirit-enabled space set apart for the one seeking support, providing a genuine point of accountability, transformation and strengthening for their work as chaplains, ministers, spiritual directors, pastoral counsellors or carers or youth workers. So they can *keep* showing up for the people they love and serve for the long-term.

Professional supervisors create a place for pastoral workers and helping professionals to offload, gain refreshment, and gather different perspectives on their ministries.

We might consider together how they are coping with the complexities, stresses, and strains of ministry and how they could recharge. (Between governance and budgets, conflict and trauma, the inner and outer critics, never-ending to-do lists and admin needs, plus looking after family along with the community - there's always something to talk about!)

We might delve into the standards and boundaries around our work:
What's the policy for caring for this person?
What's the ethical thing here?
How do I manage confidentiality?
When is it okay for me to turn my phone off and not even look at my emails?

We unpack what they're doing about the day-to-day business of the Kingdom and disciple-making, honestly examine how they're showing up in that (or not), and who God might be calling them to become for themselves, for their families, and for His people.

How is God renewing their mind, their heart, to be more like Jesus?
What vision does he have for them personally as well as collectively?
How are they getting that vision out of their hearts and into their relationships and activities?

Supervision *can* be about learning, and goal-setting, and developing skills, especially for new and emerging leaders. But it's *not* a place where you will be told what to do. (If that's what you're after, go find yourself a line manager or maybe a mentor).

It's not a place to heal from past hurts (therapy is... though honesty compels me to admit that healing can still happen incidentally in the supervision space).

And it's not necessarily about reviewing your diary and debriefing what was in it and how you felt about it.

It's a safe place where you can reflect on your experience with questions like:

What is my particular difficulty in working with this person/ congregant/ client?

If I was willing to risk telling someone about what *really* concerns me about my pastoral work, what would that be?

What could God provide (through my supervisor), that I need, to help me work more effectively in this particular situation?

What do I need to tell or offload to someone so that I can work more freely with these people God's given me?

Is there anything I want to celebrate or feedback to my supervisor from previous work we've done together?

God, is there anything you do *not* want me to bring to supervision?

I love supervision. It's a place where we live out Hebrews 12 - throwing off everything that hinders or entangles, running the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus so that we do not grow weary or lose heart.

It's the privilege of bearing witness, asking tough questions with grace and boldness, collaboratively creating a creative, explorative, reflective space where we can lean into the Spirit, talk about what's in our hearts, and be deeply seen by another.

We do it so we can better see God's collaborative work and vision for leaders and their people and their community, for the sake and glory of His Kingdom; showing up for the people we love and serve more meaningfully, effectively, and sustainably.

Jed* thought that all sounded pretty good, and signed up; we've now been working together for over a year. What do you think - when will it be time for you?



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