



Jed (not his real name) gave me a call the other week. "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 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, more and more pastors are asking questions like these. Some with undertones ranging between resentment towards expected micro-managing or surveillance, or a tick-a-box cynicism about its use for risk management.

Others with curiosity or eagerness about the same service 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? It's all very well and good for the Royal Commission to declare that "each religious institution should ensure that *all* people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, 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?

Well, imagine for a moment. 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 place to

I don't need a supervisor

I'm a pastor, not a counsellor!

AN OBSERVATION
BY KRISTYNA
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confidently and confidentially ask for challenge, get creative about insights and solutions, bring questions or confess doubts without fear of judgement or shame or rejection.

That's what professional pastoral supervision is all about. It's a relationship between two or more disciples who meet to consider, reflect on, and deepen the ministry of one or more of them in an intentional, focused, informed and knowledgeable way.

It's a warm-hearted, Spirit-enabled space set apart for the one seeking support (with an eye to themselves and the people they love and serve), providing a genuine point of accountability, transformation and strengthening for their work as chaplains, ministers, spiritual directors, pastoral counsellors or carers or youth workers.

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 stresses and strains of ministry and how they could recharge.

(Between budgets and finances, conflict and trauma, the critical internal and external voices, never-ending to-do lists and administrative demands, while balancing the needs of family along with the needs of the community - there's always something to work on!)

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 that person?
How do I manage myself?

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 think of it as 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 and be deeply seen by another person.

We do it so we can better see and enact God's collaborative work and vision for a leader and their people and their community, for the sake and glory of His Kingdom.

Professional pastoral supervision is a place where we can discover new things about ourselves and God and our ministries, so we can keep fixing our eyes on Jesus while showing up for the people we love and serve more meaningfully, effectively, and sustainably.

So Jed thought that all sounded pretty good, and is planning to start next week. What about you?



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