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IS PASTORAL COUNSELLING DIFFERENT?

Ministers are counsellors too! Pastoral counselling has been in existence since before the beginning of the Christian tradition of pastoral care and concern for congregational members; however, a real emphasis on the psychological training of ministers for counselling has developed only during the past 25 years.

Pastoral counselling by ministers has recently come of age as a specialized field. As parish ministers have become more aware of the nature of the needs of members of their parishes and the possibilities offered by new knowledge in the field, they have demanded more training. Seminars have begun to emphasize a psychological understanding of man and his behavior and have begun to put this on a par with knowledge of the Bible or the history of Christianity. Many seminaries are offering supervised clinical experience in hospitals, mental institutions, and special treatment centres. A few schools are offering training at the doctoral level in pastoral psychology. Within the past few years the American Association of Pastoral Counsellors, a professional group for ministers skilled in this area, has been formed.

SIMILARITY TO OTHER EMPHASES IN COUNSELLING

Howard Clinebell, from his own experience as a pastoral counsellor, offers seven techniques for pastors (1966). These include using supportive methods, improving relationships, utilizing positive personality resources (in addition to reducing negative factors), coping with the present and planning for the future (rather than exploring the past), confronting the reality in one's situation, increasing the constructiveness and creativity of behavior (as well as of feelings and attitudes), and dealing directly with the dimensions of values, ultimate meanings, and relationships. Few present-day counsellors would seriously challenge any of these points. Even the last point, that of dealing directly with values and ultimate meanings, is referred to in conventional textbooks. Brammer and Shostrom, for example, devote a chapter in *Therapeutic Psychology* (1960) to the problem of counselling about values, and refer to the job of pastoral counselling as a special area of application. If pastoral counselling is different, the differences must lie in another direction.

DIFFERENCES IN PASTORAL COUNSELLING

Four major differences suggest themselves: the setting for pastoral counselling, the nature of the referral, the concerns expressed, and the crisis situations faced.

1. The setting for pastoral counselling is within the framework of the Church, but not necessarily within a specific church building. Pastoral counselling is often most effective when it is *not* in the minister's study or in any part of a church. It might be in a hospital room, lounge, or coffee shop. It

might be in a prison, training school, or military base. It might be within the home of a parishioner or stranger, in a bar or on a park bench. It is where there are people singly or in groups. To gain the setting the minister has an advantage over other counsellors: he has ready access to homes and places where there is crisis and distress. He represents the Church to those he meets. He need not use special words nor be dressed in special garb; he makes Christianity live for the persons present.

2. Most people seeking professional psychological help tend to go first to their clergyman or family doctor. Herein lies another part of the uniqueness of the minister as a counsellor: people come to him first. When people are in need or face a crisis situation, their first thought is often of the minister. In other cases the minister is called upon to refer the parishioners to appropriate community resources. This places a demand upon the minister to know available resources, and requires training to enable him to recognize the type of referral that would be most appropriate. While skill in referring is an important part of any counsellor training, it is even more crucial to the minister as a pastoral counsellor.

3. A third area of difference is found in the concerns expressed during counselling. Attitudes toward life and death, sin and salvation, religion, deity and spiritual matters are more often expressed to ministers than to other counsellors.

An interesting comparison could be made between a pastor in a church setting and a high-school counsellor in a school setting. It is probable that many school counsellors would not be working with students who had recently suffered the loss of a parent, brother, or sister. On the other hand, the average minister works with dozens of such family situations every year. The dynamics of grief frequently involve a long, drawn-out process, and the problems associated with it are seldom resolved within the first year after death. Few high-school counsellors are in a position to handle problems involving grief and many would become quite anxious facing situations of this type. Grief does not necessarily call for intensive depth counselling, but does demand a continuing interest and concern in the family circle.

4. A final area of difference lies in crisis counselling. An illustration of such a crisis situation was the tragic explosion at the Indianapolis coliseum during a "Holiday on Ice" show. A propane gas tank exploded during the main event injuring hundreds and killing 57 at the scene.

A minister friend of mine, upon hearing of the tragedy, went to the scene. He, along with four other ministers and chaplains from the police and fire departments, worked through the night notifying the next-of-kin by calling ministers in their home cities. As families arrived, the ministers took turns walking with them as they attempted to identify the bodies. It is doubtful if any counselling psychologist could have worked as well or as effectively as these pastoral counsellors did during the wee hours of that morning.

Clinebell summarizes the types of counselling done by clergymen in the following categories: a) depth counselling or pastoral psychotherapy which he calls healing, b) supportive and crisis counselling which he classifies as sustaining, c) educative, short-term decision-making, and pre-marriage counselling or the contemporary expression of a guiding pastoral ministry, and

d) confrontation, superego, marriage, and existential counselling which he calls the reconciling category.

IMPLICATIONS FOR A UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Does the fact that the minister operates in a different setting with somewhat different emphasis change the nature of the training he must have for pastoral counselling? Can such training be offered in a secular university setting?

Everyone who enters a counselling program brings his own unique experiences differing from those of other persons in that program. For the minister this includes a theological education and training with emphasis upon ethics and values. In addition theory and practical knowledge of counselling both normal and abnormal personalities are essential to any counsellor. But the seven points suggested by Clinebell as important in pastoral work should be included in supervised practicum experiences for all counsellors.

Programs should be geared to the needs and future expectations of each individual student. The person who intends to go into a junior college counselling situation should have experience working with the type of people he will meet in such a setting. A person going into an elementary school to do counselling must have some experience in counselling with children during his training. For a minister, clinical experiences should be provided dealing with the types of people and the types of problems that he will most likely face as he assumes a counselling role in his pastorate.

In counsellor education, a special seminar could be provided for ministers. This seminar should focus upon problems common in a pastoral setting, exploring the relationship between theology and psychology. In universities that require a thesis for a master's degree, the topic could be related to the work of the minister as a counsellor within a local church or larger community setting.

Another excellent training device is a pastoral counselling center. Here pastoral counsellors and ministers in training could see a wide variety of clientele who have been referred to the center by ministers throughout the city. Weekly or bi-weekly seminars could be held in such a setting with actual cases presented. A wide variety of consultants could be used including doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and others in the helping professions.

All this training could be made readily available, even within a secular institution, and many ministers are going to secular schools of higher education to obtain advanced degrees in counselling. Counselling psychology programs could be even more helpful if they included a person or group committed to work with ministers in developing pastoral counselling skills.

CONCLUSION

The minister is in a unique position because of his background and training, the role or position he holds in a community, the nature of the expectations that people have of him, the ongoing relationships that he has with many people in the congregation and in the community, and the natural contact that he has with people in times of crisis.

The resurgence of ministerial interest in helping people through the

psychological counselling process is gratifying. Ministers have an important contribution to make in the counselling field. Their experience can contribute to others whose concerns are different. At the same time, non-theologically trained counsellors have a wealth of experience to share with parish ministers. Together both can grow.

REFERENCES

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A PROPOS DU COUNSELLING PASTORAL!

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Le ministre du culte est certainement dans une position privilégiée quand il s'agit du counselling et cela, à cause de sa formation et de ses études, la place de choix qu'il occupe dans le milieu, ce qu'on attend de lui, ses bonnes relations avec les gens, et ses contacts faciles et naturels avec les familles et les individus, surtout en temps de difficulté.

Nous assistons à un renouveau dans ce domaine où de plus en plus on fait appel au counselling psychologique. Les ministres du culte ont sans aucun doute une contribution importante à apporter dans le monde du counselling et leur expérience devrait profiter à plusieurs, même si quelquefois les buts diffèrent. Il est également vrai d'affirmer que les conseillers qui n'ont pas une formation théologique pourraient rendre de fiers services aux ministres du culte.