

Paper H3

Pastoral supervision – update and emerging principles

Ministries committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Paul Whittle moderator@urceastern.org.uk
Action required	Discussion, and feedback to committee.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To brief Mission Council members on the emerging principles of a scheme for pastoral supervision for all ministers in the United Reformed Church and to invite feedback.
Main points	A definition of pastoral supervision, seven further working propositions, and some issues to address in implementation.
Previous relevant documents	Past Case Review, learning group report, particularly 24 th recommendation.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators, training officers, Methodist Church, Baptist Union of GB, Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No impact from this paper but the introduction of a scheme will have considerable financial consequences either at local, synod or Assembly level.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The Methodist Church is already introducing a scheme for their ministers and will expect URC ministers having responsibility for Methodist churches to have some kind of supervision.

Introduction and purpose

1. The ministries committee has established a working group to explore the requirement for ministers of the URC to have regular pastoral supervision and how such a scheme may be introduced. The working group comprises Sam Elliot (Elder and member of the ministries committee), Deborah Baird (Training and Development Officer, East Midlands Synod), Kate Gartside (Retired Minister and Pastoral Supervisor) and Julian Sanders (Minister), supported and advised by the Secretary for Ministries.

2. The group conducted an initial period of high-level consultation during the summer. The intention was to be as open as possible, capturing a wide range of ideas and views without prejudging the outcome, and include internal URC stakeholders, ecumenical partners and specialists in pastoral supervision.
3. The group met in September to review feedback received and discuss the key issues, principles and dilemmas that were emerging. This paper seeks to summarise the feedback and discussion, and sets out a series of propositions we would like to test with the ministries committee, Mission Council and others over the coming months.
4. **NB:** This paper uses 'ministers' to refer to both ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers and makes no distinction between the two regarding the type of pastoral supervision each will require.

Themes

Defining pastoral supervision

5. Through our work so far we have been guided by the Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education (APSE) description of what pastoral supervision is and is not. It is "a regular, planned, intentional and bounded space in which a practitioner skilled in supervision (the supervisor) meets with one or more other practitioners (the supervisees) to look together at the supervisees' practice".
6. It is a confidential and trusting relationship, spiritually and theologically rich, psychologically informed, contextually sensitive, based on personal practice, and a process of growth. The full description is attached at appendix X.
7. We were indebted to the Revd Simon Walkling, the Moderator of the National Synod of Wales, for his thoughtful reflection on the "restorative, formative and normative" functions of supervision. Supervision should enable ministers to "offload some of the stress of their work" and look after their health and wellbeing (restorative); to learn and develop through reflecting on their practice and that of others (formative); and to be attentive to accountability and ethical working (normative).
8. Michael Paterson, the Director of the Institute of Pastoral Supervision and Reflective Practice, speaks of pastoral supervision "encouraging a conversation between soul, role and context". We felt this was a helpful and evocative way of describing supervision to those new to the concept.
9. Proposition one:
Pastoral supervision in the URC will draw on these definitions and reflections in defining its own view of 'what pastoral supervision is'. The final proposal will include a clear definition of pastoral supervision as required by the URC.

Expectations and reception

10. A number of responses suggested that ministers may be reluctant or anxious about pastoral supervision and urged us to be mindful of the need to ensure “buy-in” from ministers.
11. Nonetheless, we were encouraged not to be pessimistic. If the Church agrees and there is clarity about what pastoral supervision is and the value it will add, then there will be acceptance.
12. Indeed, a lively discussion on the ministers’ Facebook page suggested this was needed “sooner rather than later”.
13. Proposition two:
There is an appetite across the denomination for pastoral supervision, but a final scheme will still need to be mindful of building trust and buy-in from ministers.

Supervision and accountability

14. We acknowledge that the name “supervision” can have its drawbacks. For those who are not used to the concept of ‘pastoral supervision’ it can imply an equivalence with a professional ‘line management’ relationship.
15. We heard about professions, like social work, where this is an important element of professional accountability. The Methodist system also retains a hierarchical element to its supervision, with e.g. some District Chairs supervising Circuit Superintendents, who in turn supervise Circuit Ministers.
16. At least one response suggested that we should consider introducing this sort of hierarchical accountability to the URC’s pastoral supervision scheme. We felt this went beyond our remit from the ministries committee and did not align with practice in other denominations or in pastoral supervision more generally.
17. Proposition three:
Pastoral supervision in the URC is not intended to replicate a professional management relationship. Whilst issues of practice, development and accountability in relation to the minister’s local church and synod will arise, they are not the main focus.

Group supervision

18. Although we have assumed throughout that pastoral supervision in the URC will be a one-to-one relationship between supervisee Minister and supervisor, we have heard about other models:
Group supervision – groups of two or more are supervised together, with the help of a trained facilitator
Peer supervision – supervisees meet together in a group without a facilitator to explore issues together.
19. Although group-based supervision may be a more efficient way to use supervisors, it has practical drawbacks. Assembling appropriate groups of ministers would not be straightforward. Groups can reinforce existing bad practice or lead to ministers not being open or trusting.

20. That said, these methods are felt to be valuable in their own way and may be particularly appropriate for certain contexts. For now, however, we will continue to develop a scheme based on one-to-one supervision.
21. Proposition four:
Pastoral supervision in the URC will normally be conducted on a one-to-one basis between supervisor and supervisee.

Feedback, Reporting and confidentiality

22. We would envisage supervision to be confidential between supervisor and supervisee, with some specified exceptions relating to safeguarding, legal and serious wellbeing issues.
23. Clearly, however, it is important that synod moderators receive some form of feedback. At a minimum they need to know that pastoral supervision is taking place - we would expect ministers to be meeting a supervisor roughly every six to eight weeks. They also need to be equipped to respond to any concerns or needs arising from the supervision.
24. We feel this would be best done through a process of annual reporting, which would include the minister reflecting on their own training and development needs to be pursued with the local church and the synod.
25. Proposition five:
Pastoral supervision will be confidential between minister and supervisor, with certain specified exceptions. A regular report should be submitted to the synod moderator to ensure both that supervision is taking place, and that any relevant needs that arise can be addressed.

Resourcing

26. The main resource required for a denomination-wide scheme of pastoral supervision is a good supply of appropriate supervisors.
27. How this might be defined is not always clear. The Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education offers an accreditation scheme, but in practice only a small number of trained supervisors apply for and attain this standard.
28. We have considered how important it might be to have supervisors who already understand the work of ministers. While some pre-existing knowledge may be desirable, suitably qualified and well-briefed supervisors should be able to apply their professional skills to any context.
29. Overall, it seems right to prioritise identifying trained and skilled pastoral supervisors, rather than restricting ourselves to what may be a relatively narrow field of those experienced in supervising ministers. In any case, the capacity of supervisors is likely to be a central obstacle.
30. To tackle this, the Church should seek to identify those within the denomination who may be gifted in this area and may be interested to receive training. We are,

however, mindful of the issues of commitment and workload that relate to all areas of church life.

31. Proposition six:
Pastoral supervision in the URC should prioritise using trained professional supervisors from a variety of backgrounds, rather than relying on those already within the Church. The URC should also seek to increase capacity in this area by identifying ministers and lay people who might have the requisite gifts to become supervisors.

Funding

32. Ministers have an allocated budget for training and development (£350 reduced from £700 several years ago). A supervision scheme will ultimately need to be resourced from local churches. A partnership approach between the local church and the denomination may be the way forward.
33. Proposition seven:
Pastoral supervision should be funded jointly by local churches and the denomination.

Interaction with existing appraisal and review

34. We have been asked how a scheme of pastoral supervision would work alongside existing processes such as Ministerial Accompanied Self Appraisal (MASA).
35. There may be a view that existing appraisal schemes do things that supervision might not, such as reporting to synod and explicitly identifying training and development.
36. The group felt that pastoral supervision can and should accommodate these elements, and that more regular and structured supervision is likely to eliminate the need for periodic self-appraisal.
37. Proposition eight:
Pastoral supervision should become the principal way of ensuring ministers reflect on their practice, feed issues back to synod moderators and identify development needs. It should therefore replace MASA and any similar requirements.

Implementation

38. A detailed plan for implementation of the scheme will need to be developed at the next phase of our work. Some other practical issues not previously mentioned here have already been identified, however. **The group would welcome further ideas, suggestions and views on these and any related issues.**
39. **Training for supervisees** – We will need to identify ways in which pastoral supervision can be introduced to ministers, as well as ways in which they can be supported and trained to make the most of supervision. This could be done through synod training days, at EM2 and, for new ministers, through the Resource Centres for Learning.

40. **Briefing for supervisors** – Supervisors who come from outside the denomination need to be briefed appropriately. This will probably require some bespoke material to be produced, drawing on existing resources, such as the Marks of Ministry.
41. **Contracting** – This does not refer only to a transactional agreement between supervisor and supervisee, but to a covenant that reflects a mutual agreement between the two about the supervisory process and relationship. The group suggests that the denomination should have an agreed model contract for ministers and supervisors that includes the flexibility for agreeing specific goals and ways of working. In practical terms, the group’s current expectation is that ministers will be asked to set up and manage their own supervision, perhaps from a list of suggested supervisors.
42. **Constituency** – There will need to be a clear definition of who will be expected to receive pastoral supervision. Suggestions include those on the list of active ministers, all those “in pastoral charge”, chaplains, Synod Moderators and Ministers in Special Category Ministry posts. Generally retired ministers are not expected to be included, nor are lay preachers. We need to ensure different model of ministry are also considered and included – for example, Southern Synod would expect their Local Church Leaders to receive pastoral supervision.
43. **Making it mandatory** – Currently the group suggests that the requirement to undertake pastoral supervision should be included in Terms of Settlement.
44. **Phased implementation** – More thought is needed on the specific process for introducing pastoral supervision, but the group anticipates the need to phase in the scheme in a structured way. It may be appropriate for newly ordained Ministers to form part of the initial cohort.
45. The Group has already received valuable advice and background from APSE. As these emerging principles are refined further, we intend to discuss with them the practical implications of our proposals - advice and support - especially ‘making supervisors’

Conclusion

46. Mission Council is asked to comment on the conclusions reached so far, and in particular on the propositions advanced and the practical issues identified.
47. Following this discussion, the group intends to again consult synod moderators with a view to refining the emerging principles into specific, detailed proposals in the New Year.

H3 Appendix:

Pastoral supervision is:

- a regular, planned, intentional and bounded space in which a practitioner skilled in supervision (the supervisor) meets with one or more other practitioners (the supervisees) to look together at the supervisees' practice
- a relationship characterised by trust, confidentiality, support and openness that gives the supervisee freedom and safety to explore the issues arising in their work
- spiritually/theologically rich – works within a framework of spiritual/theological understanding in dialogue with the supervisee's world view and work
- psychologically informed – draws on relevant psychological theory and insight to illuminate intra-personal and inter-personal dynamics
- contextually sensitive – pays attention to the particularities of setting, culture and world-view
- praxis based – focuses on a report of work and /or issues that arise in and from the supervisee's pastoral practice
- a way of growing in vocational identity, pastoral competence, self awareness, spiritual/theological reflection, pastoral interpretation, quality of presence, accountability, response to challenge, mutual learning
- attentive to issues of fitness to practice, skill development, management of boundaries, professional identity and the impact of the work upon all concerned parties.

Pastoral supervision is not:

- spiritual accompaniment – for the sole or primary purpose of exploring the spiritual life and development of the supervisee(s). Aspects of this may arise in pastoral supervision but are not the main focus
- counselling – for the purpose of helping the supervisee(s) gain insight into their personal dynamics, or helping the supervisee(s) to resolve or live more positively with their psycho-social limitations. Aspects of this may arise in pastoral supervision and, if necessary, the supervisee(s) may be encouraged to seek counselling support.
- line management – for the purpose of addressing professional practice and development issues in relationship to the supervisee(s)'s performance and accountability (whether paid or voluntary) to her/his employer. Aspects of this may arise in pastoral supervision but are not the main focus

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