

Pastoral / Spiritual Family Counseling Introduction

Helping people

with spiritual &/or emotional issues means

1. Listening

in a particular kind of way

2. Understanding

from the most relevant perspectives

3. Responding

meaningfully from a broad framework

How many times have you sat with someone in distress and wished you knew how to answer his or her questions?

How many times has someone come to you with a complicated emotional situation you wanted to work intensively with them but felt you just didn't have the skills?

Your pastoral training and experience have provided you with valuable skills. But perhaps...the psychological training to help people in distress, over a period of time, has not been part of your learning.

What goes on in the daily life of the pastor? First of all, the daily and Sunday liturgy is the staple of every pastor's life. The reading of the scripture and the celebration of the Eucharistic memorial is the central event of the parish. As a preacher at these daily liturgical gatherings the pastor tries to become God's vehicle. The pastor must let God do the work of feeding, guiding and consoling through him. Ministering in this way is not an easy task. As a pastor, must actively seek to listen to the word of God and rest with profound gratitude at the table of the Lord if he is to be healed by God and guide the healing of the faithful.

A wonderful part of being a pastor is the daily personal contact with families and individuals. The pastor shares their happy times – the births, the christenings, first communions, graduations and weddings. He is also present at the dark times of a family's life – the illnesses, the deaths and divorces, the family heartaches. The pastor is witness to all these moments, and he rejoices and grieves with the people, helping them rest in God all through their up and downs.

Along with a close connection to the lives of the parishioners, the pastor is the chief administrator, fund-raiser and superintendent. The spiritual merges with the mundane as he meets with advisory boards, contractors, investors, donors, the various church committees, and the school administration. This constitutes the bulk of the pastor's daily routine. If there is a financial problem in the parish or the school, or if there are building or repair projects in motion the pastor inevitably is strapped with the day to day decision-making and supervision. The pastor often devotes the majority of his energy to the mundane and hopes the Holy Spirit will guide the spiritual.

Then, of course, the pastor has his own personal and family needs that are very much like those of the community – weddings, funerals and life and death issues. He has his personal involvement with siblings and parents. Often a pastor, like myself, is a member of a religious community. This involves communal living with its difficult and enjoyable moments, and its demands on the pastor's personal time.

The many demands on the pastor's talents and energies limits the one-on-one work he can realistically negotiate. Sadly, the one area that is very difficult to engage in as a pastor is pastoral counseling. This does not mean that the pastor is not qualified to counsel. Pastoral ministry does not allow for the extended commitment needed for the counseling process to be effective. The pastor can see a parishioner one or two times to help focus a problem, but on-going pastoral counseling requires a tremendous time commitment on the part of the counselor and the patient. The average pastor does not have the time nor the energy needed become involved in on-going counseling.

Parishioners often come to see you because they lack something in their personal therapy. Religious questions arise in the course of the therapy, but some counselors feel uncomfortable with spiritual issues. It is interesting that in this day of renewed interest in

spirituality and the popularity of counseling, the pastor is confronted with the problem of not having the time to counsel, and the counselor is too often not familiar with spirituality.

This is where I see the tremendous value of the pastoral counselor. A spiritual man or woman who may have been in active ministry and has knowledge of diverse religious traditions and spirituality can be invaluable in the healing process of an individual. A person's spirituality is as important as his or her history and early upbringing, and can be a powerful tool in the therapeutic process. The process of healing involves the physical, emotional and mystical. It is the harmony of the three that fosters the unity of the person or what we often call psychological health.

Now, more than ever, the pastoral counselor is needed in our society. People are searching for happiness and meaning. They want to integrate their work and their inner lives. They experience the tremendous stress of today's work place. They struggle to care for their families and to devote the time needed to their spouses and children. Many people need to see a counselor because of past events or the inability to cope with the everyday tensions of life. We are beginning to see that spirituality and mental health walk hand in hand.

The pastoral counselor cannot do the work of the pastor. The pastor must be the stable religious figure present at the great moments of life. The pastor will teach, direct and give the comfort afforded by a particular religious tradition. The community will always rally around the pastor to focus and strengthen its communal life and spiritual identity. The pastoral counselor will work with the religious tradition of the individual to foster personal healing and integration. The work of the pastoral counselor can be in harmony with the work of the pastor, each giving strength to the other. If counselors are more pastoral the work of the pastor is more healing through the everyday touch and the daily prayer.

So remember 3 major things in your Spiritual Pastoral Counseling **Helping people** with spiritual &/or emotional issues means:

1. Listening

in a particular kind of way

2. Understanding

from the most relevant perspectives

3. Responding

meaningfully from a broad framework in caring.

Daily Answers to problems can be found spiritual reading of the Holy Scriptures.

The main key is let Jesus Christ be your guide. Don't ever be judgmental.