SERVING THE FLOCK SAFELY

The Report & Recommendations of the Safe Ministry Task Force

The Episcopal Diocese of Albany, June 2013
The Safe Ministry Task Force

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This report and the work of the Safe ministry Task Force are dedicated to the Glory of God and to The Rev. Mary-Marguerite Kohn, Rector of St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Ellicott City, Maryland, and Ms. Brenda Brewington, the parish administrative assistant, who died at the hands of a homeless person at their church on May 3, 2012.

Mother Mary Marguerite was ordained to the diaconate in June 1993 and ordained to the priesthood in May 1994. She came to the Diocese of Albany in 1996 as priest-in-charge of St. Luke’s, Mechanicville, a position she held until 1999. Mary Marguerite will always be fondly remembered by the people and clergy of the diocese who had the privilege of ministering to God’s people with her.
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Preface

Formed in the wake of the murders of a priest and a parish employee in the Diocese of Maryland by a mentally ill man in 2012, the Safe Ministry Task Force was charged by The Rt. Rev. William Love, Bishop of Albany, to develop guidance and recommendations to enhance the personal safety of priests, deacons and lay ministers serving the people and parishes of the Diocese of Albany.

This means all of us. Though our urban parishes no doubt encounter a greater number and perhaps a wider variety of individuals unknown to the parish, there is no community whose population does not include the mentally ill and emotionally wounded. And those who minister in isolated rural settings are among the most vulnerable to physical attack, manipulation or other inappropriate behavior.

Turning immediately to other dioceses for guidance, and then to public and private agencies for useful models, the Task Force’s first discovery was that surprisingly few organizations, within or outside the Church, have published comprehensive guidelines for safely serving the emotionally disturbed or mentally ill. While we have met a good number of seasoned clergy, social workers and therapists who are well-equipped to meet these and other related challenges, few of them had been heretofore invited to share their wisdom and expertise with the Church.

Our report, then, includes material gathered from a variety of sources, surveying a variety of issues. As not all parishes face precisely the same challenges or enjoy the same resources, not all of the recommendations included here are universally applicable. The Task Force therefore recommends that this report be read and its recommendations appropriated at the local level, where demographically similar parishes can collaboratively discern its faithful implementation.

Finally, these recommendations should in no way replace, supersede or compromise those policies dictated by Safeguarding God’s Children, Safeguarding God’s People or any other program of this Diocese and the Episcopal Church.

1. The Rev. Mary-Marguerite Kohn, Rector of St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Ellicott City, Maryland, and Ms. Brenda Brewington, the parish administrative assistant, were each shot to death at the church on May 3, 2012. Their assailant later shot and killed himself.
I. The High Cost of Serving Strangers & the Higher Cost of Turning Them Away

Though the primary goal of the Task Force was to ensure the safety of our people, Bishop Love implored us to remember that one of the primary ministries of the Church is to hold her door open to strangers-- an undertaking inherently, inescapably charged with risk. While it might be possible to construct buildings, install security systems and implement policies which successfully insulate our ministers from physical danger, we can fully achieve that goal only by isolating them from Christian ministry.

In that sense, a preoccupation with safety is dangerous to the Church. “Those who are well have no need of a physician,” Jesus said, “but those who are sick” (Luke 5:31). The moment we convert the “hospital for sinners” into a citadel for saints we forfeit our mission. Estranged from the pain, suffering and sin of the world, the Christian community inevitably becomes alienated from Jesus. Isolated from ongoing, meaningful contact with strangers, the Church becomes a club; and then, one generation later, the “hospital” becomes a hospice. There is no finer way to deflect the challenges of evangelism than by committing ourselves to the project of keeping our community “safe”; and it must be said that the mantra, “Let’s keep our community safe,” is sometimes a euphemism for “Let’s keep our community homogeneous.”

This is a death wish. As Jesus made himself physically present and susceptible to the crowds who stretched out their hands for healing, we cannot shrink from strangers without losing—or, possibly worse, warping-- our identity. To be Christ to the world is, by definition, to be vulnerable to the world. And those who have met the lost, the broken and the isolated people in our communities tell us that there is no experience which does more to grow us in faith, to mature us in charity, and to expose to us our own desperate need for the redemptive work of Christ in the world.

But that coin has another side: If our ministers do not feel safe, they will not serve. They certainly will not serve with confidence, probably not with generosity, and probably not for long. Moreover, many of the strangers whom we hope to serve are seeking refuge from the madness and chaos of the world, and if our churches feel unsafe to them, then we are denying them the sanctuary they seek.

The mentally ill and emotionally unstable need exactly what our ministers need: an environment where appropriate boundaries are secure and their safety is reasonably assured. Our task, then, is not to eliminate all risks from ministry, but to responsibly minimize the inherent dangers of outreach, by reintroducing the theological virtue of charity and the cardinal virtue of prudence.
II. Creating a Safe Environment

A safe environment sets our people free to practice compassion, and this begins with our making our physical space secure.

Visitor Control

1. Choose One Door. Most churches and parish halls have multiple outside doors, and on Sunday mornings it may be necessary to keep several of them open. No unlocked outside door, however, should be left unattended. This is inhospitable and it is unsafe. (One of our delightful discoveries was that excellent hospitality is highly conducive to safety, and a serious concern for safety never need communicate unfriendliness.) Carefully review the number of open doors on Sunday morning and how they each are used, and then reduce their number to the bare minimum possible.

On days other than Sunday, that number ought to be reduced to one, and that door never left unattended. In many parishes, that door should never be left unlocked. Controlling the point of entry is vital to keeping your space safe. Post signs at every other door, directing visitors to the door though which you have decided to channel traffic. Do not choose a door which allows entry to an isolated part of your building as it will often fall to the parish secretary or administrative assistant to watch this door. Situate and arrange (or technologically equip) this person’s office so that he or she is able to see who is outside the door before they enter. In many parishes, the installation of cameras, monitors and video recording equipment is advisable. In some situations, the installation of electronic locks is advisable. Though they demand a substantial investment, motion sensor alarms, video monitors and intercoms are absolute necessities in some parishes. (It is always a good idea to invite the local Police Department to inspect your facility, review your practices and make suggestions.) We strongly recommend that any person responsible for allowing strangers into any urban church with high levels of visitor traffic have immediate access to an alarm button, triggering the church’s alarm system and automatically signaling the police.

2. Greet each visitor personally. Again, good hospitality yields a secure environment, and poor hospitality invites danger. We recommend that each person who enters the building be asked to sign a guest register. This expectation should be relaxed for no one—not even regular visitors of the Rector or other staff who enter frequently. The formality need not be coldly imposed; it is an expectation that can be warmly invited. Though some will no doubt find it a tedious imposition, none will find it more repelling than persons who enter the church with ill intentions.

When greeting strangers, politely ask what or whom they are seeking, and then see that they are personally escorted to the person or place they name. Allowing people to disappear into the building is unsafe for them and others. In any parish of size which entertains more than one or two visitors a day, name tags should be given to visitors, and all staff should be trained to politely usher any person without a name tag back to the reception area.

Internal Area Security

1. Reduce the physical scale of your responsibility. Any wing of the building which is not in use should be inaccessible. Any room that is not in use should be locked, including classrooms, storage areas and even mop closets. Fuse boxes and all other sensitive
apparatus should remain locked at all times. Every door and window should be locked anytime the building is vacant, and this includes interior doors, file cabinets and storage spaces. If the church owns a ladder, hide it inside and lock it.

2. All interior doors must have windows. Hiding your ministers behind an opaque barrier puts them and those they serve at risk.

Personnel Security

1. Never leave any minister or staff member alone in the building. Schedule volunteer activities, projects and staff hours so that no person is ever in the building or on the grounds alone.

2. Women should never exit the church alone, especially after dark; but no individual, male or female, should be abandoned in the church after dark. When dismissing an evening event, see that your guests (and you, or the person responsible for locking the door) walk to the parking lot in groups.

Exterior Security

1. Secure your doors and windows. Exterior doors should be locked with deadbolts. Deadbolts should have a minimum one inch throw and the strike plate should be anchored to the door frame. All sliding doors and windows should have anti-slide locks. All ground-floor windows should have blinds or curtains, and these should be closed when the building is vacant. Shrubbery and other potential blinds should be removed from the vicinity of doors and ground-floor windows. The hinges of exterior doors should not be accessible from the outside.

2. Eliminate hiding places outside. Anyone approaching or leaving your building should enjoy a deep, wide and unobstructed field of vision, eliminating all possibilities of surprise. Your property lines should be well-marked by fences, short walls or greenery—but it is vitally important that none of these boundaries be more than 36 inches in height. Tree limbs should be pruned to at least six feet above ground level. If your signage creates a barrier behind which someone might hide, then elevate your signage on tall posts. Secure access to your roof. Make sure that each and every entrance to your space, all sidewalks and parking lots are well-lighted. We strongly recommend the installation of motion-sensor lighting in these areas.

Key Control

1. Control your keys. Churches are notorious for multiplying and distributing keys. If you have any doubt at all about who now possesses keys to your building, then change your locks immediately. Develop a key control policy and vow never to depart from it. Make one person and one person only responsible for the distribution of keys, and charge this person to keep an accurate record. Every time a key is unaccounted for, you must change your locks. Do not distribute keys to anyone to whom you cannot trust your building or your people. Do not distribute keys to anyone until you have determined that aggregating meetings and events is impossible (i.e., scheduling as many activities as possible concurrently reduces the number of keys necessary). Mark all keys: “Do not duplicate.”
Other Building Security Considerations

1. Do not keep cash on the premises. Deposit all offerings immediately after counting.

2. Develop a building security checklist. When your physical plant is closed at day’s end, someone must be responsible for seeing that the building is left secure. See that this assignment is made for every day and evening that the building is open, and equip the person with an appropriate check-list. (NB: the parishioner who closes up the church after an evening event need not be responsible for securing the whole plant, if the sexton or other staff has previously discharged these responsibilities.)

3. Finally, the very best way to keep your building and grounds safe is to reinvigorate your commitment to local outreach. The more decidedly we own the life of our neighborhood as our own, the more our neighbors will own us as their own. A church known to love her neighbors and to care for the vulnerable will win the jealous devotion of many—including some of those who might otherwise be tempted to victimize the parish or her people.
III. Selection and Retention of Paid and Volunteer Staff

That old adage that “charity begins at home” is also true of safety. The first step in ensuring the safety of staff, parishioners and others receiving the ministry of the church is careful screening of both paid and volunteer staff. Faithful adherence to the screening protocol outlined in the “Safeguarding God’s Children” training required of all clergy, wardens, vestry and staff should be a minimum standard for all staff and volunteer selection.

The following steps for careful screening are outlined in that training:
1. Use of a standard application form.
2. Conduct a face to face interview.
3. Reference checks via telephone or personal interviews.
4. Completion of sexual offender registry checks.
5. Completion of criminal background checks.
6. Informing applicants that you take the safety of all persons seriously.

It is recommended that Rectors and Priests-in-Charge regard all work done in and for the church (excepting temporary contractors) as ministry and therefore all staff - both paid and volunteer – as ministers under his or her jurisdiction. Since no individual has a legal “right” to a ministry, the Rector or Priest-in-Charge is unimpeded in exercising any and all discretion necessary to ensure the safety of all in making staff selection and retention decisions.

Canon III.9.5 of the Episcopal Church speaks directly to this authority:
Sec. 5. Rectors and Priests-in-Charge and Their Duties
(a)(1) The Rector or Priest-in-Charge shall have full authority and responsibility for the conduct of the worship and the spiritual jurisdiction of the Parish, subject to the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, the Constitution and Canons of this Church, and the pastoral direction of the Bishop.

(2) For the purposes of the office and for the full and free discharge of all functions and duties pertaining thereto, the Rector or Priest-in-Charge shall at all times be entitled to the use and control of the Church and Parish buildings together with all appurtenances and furniture, and to access to all records and registers maintained by or on behalf of the congregation.

IV. Meeting with People You Don’t Know

It should go without saying but we cannot afford to leave it unsaid: sorting human beings into the categories of “clean” and “unclean” is antithetical to the gospel. The very last thing we should want to do is to stigmatize those with mental or emotional difficulties, or to encourage anyone to think of them as posing a threat to our community. Though mentally ill and emotionally unstable persons can present us with a unique set of challenges, we found that the practices we should adopt with them belong to the same set of disciplines that should guide our interchanges with any parishioner.

1. Allow no one to remain unmet. This is especially important on Sunday mornings and other community events, when your weekday protocol for channeling persons to a receptionist becomes impracticable. Train your staff and lay leaders to recognize when a parishioner is engaging with someone whose needs exceed their ability to respond, and do not leave anyone isolated with a distraught person.

2. The courtesies you would offer and the precautions you would take with a parishioner of the opposite sex make a sound baseline for welcoming any stranger. Do not isolate yourself—do not allow any staff member to isolate him- or herself—with a stranger. When privacy is called for and a door must be shut, see that someone else is stationed near enough to hear and respond to sounds of distress.

3. Maintain good physical boundaries. You need not hesitate to offer a warm handshake to anyone you meet, but do not assume any further physical familiarity than that. Even a hand laid harmlessly on a shoulder will be interpreted by some as an overture and by others as an act of physical aggression. By the same token, politely decline any tokens of physical affection beyond a simple handshake. Some traumatized or violated persons have lost all sense of appropriate boundaries, and they need our help in this regard.

4. Arrange the room in which you meet with visitors to allow a generous physical space between you. Do not make anyone feel cornered, and do not allow yourself to be boxed in. If your chair is situated near the door without in any way blocking the door, and your guest’s chair faces the door, then both parties should feel safe.

5. Develop a good directory for referrals. Every minister and staff member of your parish should have a list of telephone numbers for homeless shelters, hospitals, mental health outreach services, food pantries, Travel Aid and other emergency assistance agencies. See section VII of this report: “Community-Based Ministry” for practical advice on how to establish and use such a directory.

6. Do not give cash gifts to visitors seeking temporary assistance. Prohibit your staff from doing so as well. Consider establishing a church voucher system with local merchants for food, medicines or other temporary essentials in lieu of cash. You and your staff should be extremely reluctant to give special gifts of any kind to any one you serve in a ministerial capacity. Such gifts are notoriously subject to misinterpretation and frequently give birth to enormous expectations, crushing disappointments and, sometimes, violent resentment.
7. Develop a policy for disbursing emergency assistance and adhere to your policy. In ministry, of course, exceptions must be made, and if our devotion to policy begins to trump our love of neighbor, then our policies are in need of purging. But it is important to remember that one feature of compassion is consistency. When people begin to perceive inconsistencies in our responses to them, their sense of trust will be shaken. For some, this will amount to a betrayal. For others, this will amount to an invitation to manipulate us. Be extremely careful not encourage anyone to think that they are being offered privileges denied to others, and faithfully guard them from any expectations which you are unprepared to satisfy indefinitely.

8. If and when a conversation’s emotional pitch begins to spike, use your voice and your body language to lower anxiety. Do not communicate defensiveness; do not feel obliged to answer an agitated person’s every complaint. Give the person plenty of space, give them your ear, and then turn the conversation toward referral. If and when a conversation’s emotional pitch begins to make you feel unsafe, terminate the conversation. Open the door and remove yourself from the room. Politely, firmly tell the person that you are unable to assist them further today and invite the person to follow you to the outside door. Refuse to be coaxed into an argument. Do not be coerced by guilt into extending the conversation. If your refusal excites any hostility, then you and your staff should not hesitate to call the police.

9. It is perfectly appropriate to expect all persons to observe appropriate boundaries, and that includes the mentally ill and emotionally distressed. The gospel implores us to favor the weak, and compassion demands that we suffer with those who suffer, but it is wrong to allow the weak to hold the rest of community hostage to their infirmity. Quite apart from the injustice this visits upon the community, it is uncharitable to the weak. We do no one any kindness by indulging his or her worst; we practice love when we urge our friends toward healing and growth. Love demands immense patience; patience of a depth that can only be supplied by grace. But if and when persons demonstrate that they cannot or will not observe appropriate boundaries, it is perfectly appropriate to tell them that they cannot return to the community until they are able to function appropriately within the community for which you are responsible.

10. Invest the time and effort to train your staff and lay ministers in these practices.
V. Interpersonal Safety

Our need for safety awareness - like our ministries - extends far beyond the walls of our church property. Consequently our personal safety depends upon our skills and awareness as we interact with those we serve in a wide variety of settings. Some of the safeguards and advice which follow are borrowed from other human services and mental health professionals who share these same concerns for interpersonal safety without compromising the effectiveness of their ministries. Although not all of the safeguards are necessary in all circumstances, they should be carefully considered as you anticipate the settings in which you conduct your ministry.

Preventative Measures for Personal Safety³

Observe the Individual
1. Do they appear to be irrational?
2. Are they pacing or over anxious?
3. Are they mumbling or swearing?
4. Any other signs of agitation or confusion?

If the Person Appears Impaired
1. Alert a colleague of your concerns
2. Ask if anyone is available to sit in, at least until you assess the situation.
3. Leave the door open during the session, if there are others around who could come to your aid.

Use Your Judgment
1. If you see a potentially dangerous situation and you can’t feel safe, use your judgment and cancel.

Home or Community-Based Outreach
1. Learn about the area before you go.
2. Go with a team member.
3. Make first appointments for early in the day. Day-light hours are safer until you know the area and the individual.
4. Be specific about appointment time.
5. Make sure your car has gas and is in good working order.
6. Park your car in a lighted or accessible area.
7. Dress appropriately-no jewelry.
8. Make sure your mobile phone is working and pre-programmed.
9. Call to alert the family you are on the way.
11. Be observant of the building or house.

³ Adapted with permission from “Personal Safety in Clinical Practice,” (a power point for training for mental health clinicians), Phil Quinn, Ph.D. and Ray Mason, South Shore Mental Health, Quincy, Massachusetts.
12. Listen before you enter a house or apartment.

**When to be concerned:**
1. Street lights are out or the area appears too dark.
2. You can’t park close enough to feel comfortable.
3. A gathering of strangers or teens that cause concern.
4. Your instinct tells you it may not be safe.
5. Always pay attention to your surroundings and trust your instincts

**During the visit:**
1. Remain constantly aware.
2. If the person or persons you scheduled the visit with are not available, LEAVE.
3. Be clear about who you are and your purpose. Don’t allow for confusion.
4. If there is too much activity, other people, or a party LEAVE.
5. If you see unsafe items, weapons, or drugs-LEAVE.
6. Control where the meeting takes place.

**Defusing Skills**
1. Listen, reflect their anger for them
2. Remain non-defensive and supportive
3. Acknowledge their anger
4. Apologize
5. Agree with the truth
6. Invite criticism
7. Allow your client extra space

**Behaviors to Avoid**
1. Don’t challenge or demand that they “calm down”
2. Don’t touch
3. Don’t give ultimatums
4. Don’t block exit
5. Don’t get into a staring contest
6. Don’t show fear
7. Do not turn your back on a person who appears angry or unstable

**Some Common Sense**
1. Don’t see clients in isolation.
2. Pay attention to your own feelings and trust them.
3. End the session if you have real concerns.
Ten Tips for Crisis Prevention

A crisis can be defined as a moment in time when an individual loses rational, and at times even physical, control over his or her own behavior. This can be very challenging and anxiety producing for those responsible for intervening. Due to the chaotic, unpredictable nature of a crisis, it is vital that staff stay calm and proceed with a plan.

These crisis moments do not sprout into being without roots; there are almost always warning signs that let you know an individual’s behavior is escalating. By following the tips listed here, you can often intervene before the crisis becomes dangerous.

1. Be empathic.
Try not to judge or discount the feelings of others. Whether or not you think their feelings are justified, those feelings are real to the other person. Pay attention to them.

2. Clarify messages.
Listen for the person’s real message. What are the feelings behind the facts? Ask reflective questions and use both silence and restatements.

3. Respect personal space.
Stand at least 1 1/2 to 3 feet from a person who is acting out. Invading personal space tends to increase the individual’s anxiety and may lead to acting-out behavior.

4. Be aware of your body position.
Standing eye-to-eye and toe-to-toe with a person in your charge sends a challenging message. Standing one leg-length away and at an angle off to the side is less likely to escalate the individual.

5. Ignore challenging questions.
When a person in your charge challenges your authority or a facility policy, redirect the individual’s attention to the issue at hand. Answering challenging questions often results in a power struggle.

6. Permit verbal venting when possible.
Allow the individual to release as much energy as possible by venting verbally. If you cannot allow this, state directives and reasonable limits during lulls in the venting process.

7. Set and enforce reasonable limits.
If the person becomes belligerent, defensive, or disruptive, state limits and directives clearly and concisely. When setting limits, offer choices and consequences to the acting-out individual.

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4 Taken from CPI Info Capsule Ten Tips for Crisis Prevention, © 2009 CPI (reprinted 2010) with permission from The Crisis Prevention Institute, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
8. Keep your nonverbal cues nonthreatening.
The more an individual loses control, the less that individual listens to your actual words. In these circumstances, more attention will be given to your nonverbal communication. Be aware of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice.

Remain calm, rational, and professional. Your response will directly affect the person’s behavior.

By following these tips, you will have the best possible chance of providing for the care, welfare, safety, and security of everyone involved in a potential crisis situation.

Principles for Effective Verbal Intervention

Remain Calm.
Remember, the verbally escalating person is beginning to lose control. If the person you're intervening with senses that you're losing control, the situation will escalate. Try to keep your cool, even when challenged, insulted, or threatened.

Isolate the Individual.
Onlookers, especially those who are the peers of the verbally escalating person, tend to fuel the fire. They often become cheerleaders, encouraging the individual. Isolate the person you're verbally intervening with. You will be more effective one-on-one.

Keep It Simple.
Be clear and direct in your message. Avoid jargon and complex options.

Watch Your Body Language.
Be aware of your space, posture, and gestures. Make sure your nonverbal behavior is consistent with your verbal message.

Use Silence.
Ironically, silence is one of the most effective verbal intervention techniques. Silence on your part allows the individual to clarify and restate. This often leads to a clearer understanding of the true source of the individual’s conflict.

Use Reflective Questioning.
Paraphrase and restate comments. By repeating or reflecting the person’s statement in the form of a question, you’ll help the individual gain valuable insight.

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5 Taken from CPI’s Human Services Series “Principles for Effective Verbal Intervention,” © 2002 CPI (reprinted 2010) with permission from The Crisis Prevention Institute, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Watch Your Tone of Voice.
Any two identical statements can have completely opposite meanings, depending on how the tone, volume, and cadence of your voice are altered. Make sure the words you use are consistent with voice inflection to avoid a double message.
VI. An Understanding of Pastoral Counseling

In the examination portion of the service for ordination to the priesthood the Bishop provides instructions to the ordinand, including, "Now you are called to work as a pastor, priest and teacher..." (BCP 531) These three ministerial areas have unique tasks and purposes. The ministry of teacher is clear, defined as one who instructs; priest, can be defined as one who provides absolution, blessing and consecration. However the role and function of pastor is more complicated. A dictionary definition of pastor is as follows, "a minister or clergyman with reference to his flock; one having spiritual care of a number of persons." For the purposes of this writing the ministerial tasks of pastor will be understood as: spiritual direction, pastoral care, and pastoral counseling.

As a pastor, whether in the ordained ministry or serving in a pastoring role of a lay person, the above three ministry tasks are performed many times in the course of daily life and work. Often while pastoring the flock one moves in and through these tasks without even recognizing which of the tasks are being performed or with no understanding of any difference between the three. Christian spiritual direction is "an interpersonal relationship in which we learn how to grow, live, and love in the spiritual life" and "involves a process through which one person helps another person understand what God is doing and saying." Hence spiritual direction is not meant to be a form of counseling. In an online teaching regarding pastoral care, Al Heneger, Chaplain of the University of Arkansas Medical Center (www.pastoralreport.com) provides the following definition: "to give watchful attention to or be concerned about the feeding, well-being, and growth of the flock." He further notes pastoral care ministry as concerned with: sustaining, guiding, healing and reconciling. Thus the focus of pastoral care is not the provision of counseling or psychotherapy.

Our parishes often become God’s front door. As we live and minister in a post Christian society, persons who walk into the church building for the first time, or approach us as proclaiming believers walking in the world, are often seeking answers. These seekers frequently bring with them the hurt, pain and disease of the world. Parishioners who have sat in the pews of our churches for years will have times of brokenness and disease which require pastoral care. The most important tasks of pastoral care are to: obtain the facts about the situation; listen for details and feelings (including a definition of the problem and the background of the current situation); and help to empower and assist the supplicant in seeking a resolution. Many times, one who ministers in pastoral care will be the first person to whom an individual comes with their concerns, and thus function as the “front door” to a way of resolution.

Pastors are generally not licensed as physicians, therapists, psychologists or any other health, or mental health care professional. David Benner has described Pastoral Counselling thusly: “Pastoral Counselling involves the establishment of a time-limited relationship that is structured to provide comfort for troubled persons by enhancing their awareness of God’s grace and faithful


presence and thereby increasing their ability to live their lives more fully in the light of these realizations." While it is true some of us do possess the corresponding professional licensures for these and other helping professions; in the role as pastor we are not and should not function in these professional capacities. As pastors it is very important to be clear about our role in the lives of those to whom we minister. Blurred roles and boundaries often become unhelpful and thus do not achieve the end goal of resolution and health desired by the supplicant or you as pastor.

I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and serve as the Commissioner of Mental Health in my county. I possess the professional skills to provide mental health assessment and treatment. I also serve as a parish priest and am strong in pastoral ministries. On a Sunday morning, a month or so ago, a parishioner approached me to talk privately. She confided in me, that the previous night her young teen daughter had attempted to hurt herself. This child is a member of the congregation and was at home with dad preparing to come to worship at the next service. I immediately began to obtain information about the situation; learned the child had not yet been evaluated by a mental health professional and that this was not the first time she had attempted self-harm. The child and family were not yet engaged in any therapy. As a Mental Health professional, I could have made the decision to have the child and family come to worship, meet with the girl and evaluate her risk of self-harm. However, I chose not to do so. Why? Because I am her pastor. I am meant to be her pastor and not her therapist. Instead, I provided information to mom, about where the local Behavioral Health Crisis Center is located, spoke with father on the phone, and instructed them to immediately bring this girl for evaluation. I then prayed with the two adults and instructed them not to bring this girl to worship today; but to care for her in the best way possible to connect her to the appropriate care. The parents followed these directions, had her evaluated, worked with the crisis staff in developing a safety plan and called me later in the day to provide a summary of what had transpired. I also assisted them in linking to a child therapist.

In this situation, I sought information about the situation; assisted the parents in defining the problem; provided spiritual support; linked the family to a service which could provide what was needed; and assisted in placing the child and parents on the road to a resolution and healing. Since that day, the parents provide me with updates on how they are doing, and I provide them with spiritual encouragement and prayer. I continue to be their pastor.

As pastors, we need to assess the problem and determine whether or not it is best resolved via pastoral care and/or spiritual direction alone or if counseling is also needed. Yes, we can provide pastoral counseling for our flock which is a ministry very different from professional counseling.

Several years ago, shortly after being ordained to the priesthood, I was contacted by a couple having some marital difficulties. In our first meeting I made it very clear that I was meeting with them as their pastor and not as a therapist. I told them my involvement in this pastoral counseling role would be brief and that I would meet with them for no more than three times. In our first meeting I assisted them in defining the problem which prompted the call to me with an urgent request to meet. We discussed some immediate interventions they could employ to reduce

the stress in their marital relationship and reached agreement to end the behavior causing conflict. I also provided them with contact information for the Episcopal Counseling Services and we prayed together. I met with them a second time to check in. They hadn’t yet called the Counseling Service, but had employed the interventions planned in our first meeting and felt less stress in their relationship though they both continued to experience emotional hurt and pain. I strongly asked them to agree to contact the Counseling Service for an appointment, and I reminded them we would meet one more time as we had planned at the outset. By our third meeting, the couple had been to the Counseling Service for an appointment, and were continuing to work toward the resolution of their difficulties. In this third and final meeting we reviewed the vows of Christian marriage and Biblical Instruction regarding the marriage covenant. I provided more intense prayer, support and encouragement. I do not know how many times they met with a professional counselor, but they did reach a resolution of their concerns and are contently married to this day. I continue to be their pastor.

This example provides an illustration of the power of well-defined pastoral counseling. The role, purpose, and duration of meetings were made clear; the problem was defined; immediate and long term interventions were developed; a linkage to professional care was provided; and the pastor’s role to focus on the spiritual concerns and solutions was preserved. Pastoral counseling can be the “spark” to ignite a motivation to change. To achieve this, a pastor needs to: listen attentively, maintain a nonjudgmental attitude; be compassionate & caring; and treat the supplicant with respect. (Stone Chapter 1)9

Parish ministry is diverse and multi-faceted. No clergy person would have enough time to provide for the many needs of the flock on his/her own; there simply are not enough hours in the day. As pastors we provide more than pastoral care and counseling - we are also teachers, preachers, spiritual directors etc. Consequently pastors become vulnerable to the risk of over committing themselves. Having clarity regarding the purpose and role of pastoral counseling can aid in guarding against the temptation to try and resolve every situation which comes before us. We are all engaged in a life-long process of transformation; therefore our problems are never completely resolved. The role of pastoral counseling is to assist in the initiation of change. Much of the time pastors are approached by persons seeking help in crisis situations. The pastor can thus play a pivotal role in initiating discussion and definition of the problem while also offering the ministry of Word and sacrament. Pastoral counseling differs from professional counseling. Professional counselors are trained in psychotherapy techniques, understand transference and counter transference; often work in settings with clinical supervision, follow a professional code of ethics and have clear assessment, treatment and termination processes. Professional counselors have fee structures for services (and in NYS are covered by most health insurance plans). Psychotherapy (professional counseling) in all its forms: individual, couple, group and family are considered to be medical treatment. Pastoral counseling is rooted in Word and sacrament, is not evidence-based psychotherapy, is not medical treatment and needs to be well defined by the pastor. (Brushwyler 1999) 10

9 Stone, Howard W., Brief Pastoral Counseling, Short Term Approaches and Strategies; Chapter 1, Augsburg Press. © (1994).

Pastors must be clear that professional and pastoral counseling have different purposes and interventions. Pastoral counseling is not a substitute for professional counseling. When we as pastors are clear about this difference we are better able to set the boundaries for our flock thus creating better results which honor the Lord. When supplicants do not proceed with professional therapy services the pastor can explore with them the obstacles to doing so. Therapy takes a strong level of commitment and energy to change - some people are not yet at that level of readiness to change. The role then of the pastor is not to substitute pastoral counseling for professional counseling but to instead encourage and assist in motivating the supplicant to change. Other barriers may exist to the pursuit of professional counseling i.e. co-pay costs, insurance limitations, transportation, accessibility of appointments etc. In these situations a pastor may refer to someone to assist in the overcoming of these obstacles or serve as an advocate in navigating the system.

One of my parishioners is plagued with chronic physical pain and experiences diagnosed depression. He is engaged in professional psychotherapy services, however is not always able to have the necessary funds for co-pays. As his pastor I have assisted in the payment of his co-pays through discretionary funds, and have aided him in obtaining transportation for appointments. As his pastor, I provide him with prayer, sacraments, encouragement, and some concrete means to engage in professional services. I know and he knows I am his pastor not his therapist.

All roles in our lives need well defined boundaries and clarity. In defining these roles we are able to care for ourselves and others in ways that bring about health. Health and healing are concrete signs of the presence of kingdom. God has uniquely gifted each of us with the spiritual gifts to provide ministry and grow His kingdom. When we take on more than the role we are called to and divinely equipped for - we are not honoring the Lord or the people whom he entrusts us to pastor. May we all work to responsibly pastor our flock in ways which encourage and build up the Lord’s kingdom through our own ministries and the abilities of those professionals trained to provide treatment.
VII. Community-Based Ministry: Sharing Resources

Resource Directories

While the challenge of helping individuals struggling with mental or emotional issues may seem to require only a very narrowly defined type of assistance (medical, psychiatric, or counseling), all those in need require a broad range of resources. Their general needs do not diminish while dealing with emotional distress, and their problem-solving skills may be taxed to the limits. They often turn to clergy, presuming that we have more resources and are charitably inclined to help. There is an old definition of evangelism as “one beggar informing another about where bread may be found.” Even if we are not considering the Eternal Good News of salvation, most clergy are called to share some more limited good news for the relief of pressing and distressing problems faced by those who turn to us for help—with financial, medical, emotional issues, or for resources addressing sheer subsistence. But not even the largest parish possesses the resources to adequately address all those needs. We cannot “go it alone.” “Solo service” is both unwise and unnecessary. We need to refer those in need to appropriate local agencies for some small, concrete, but critical bits of good news for those in need.

How do we do so? It is very helpful to have a Directory of Sources and Resources. This may be a booklet, a computer file, or even just a notebook of information about the help available from public or private sources in your area. Such a guide includes—but is not necessarily limited to—resources such as:

- Hotlines
- Community Action Agencies
- Departments of Social Services (by county)
- Family and Individual Support Groups. Examples are Catholic Charities, La Leche League.
- Addiction and Recovery Support Groups. (Twelve Step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, including Christian groups such as Celebrate Recovery or Christians in Recovery; County Drug and Alcohol Abuse Clinics)
- Animal Services such as SPCA or shelters
- Bereavement Support
- Hospice
- Respite Care Providers
- Disaster Relief, such as Red Cross offices
- Early Childhood Resources (Head Start)
- Emergency Clothing services
- Dental Services (especially those which accept Medicaid)
- Education support, such as Literacy Volunteer Groups, Cooperative Extension Programs which often are associated with colleges and universities; Migrant Education programs.
- Employment and Entrepreneurship (Temporary work agencies, Job Corps Centers, Executive Service agencies, Business skill coaching volunteer groups)
- Food: Food pantries, meal programs, and nutritional services for special groups such as nursing mothers and infants)
- Free or Low-cost providers of items such as clothing, furnishings, school supplies
- Health and Medical Services: Family Planning agencies (especially those providing alternatives to abortion), Community Health Centers or Free Clinics, Palliative Care services, Hospitals, Emergency rooms, Support groups for special problems such as cancer, AIDS, diabetes; Smoking Cessation support, eating disorders,
Housing: Homeless shelters, Emergency housing, Weatherization and Energy services, Habitat for Humanity, special programs to assist with heating costs
Legal Aid Societies and support
Mental Health Associations (National Association on Mental Illness) and Clinics offering special care for mental illness issues.
Services for Seniors (Meals on Wheels, County Offices on Aging, Senior Programs, Alzheimer's Associations and support groups)
Rehabilitation Support Services
Youth (Big Buddy programs, Boys and Girls Clubs, Scouting)
Places to Volunteer (Networks, museums, historical societies, service groups)

If you possess such a guide or Directory, give thanks to God (and those people who were God's instruments in creating it). Even though it is a reference guide, take the time to get acquainted with it. Above all: Use It! Keep notes of information which should be added, or corrections and updates you discover. They will help in future editions. All such publications are works in progress.

What if your community has no such Directory? You may be called to initiate the making of one. If this is your situation, here are some suggestions based on experience:

Don't Re-Invent the Wheel. If even a partial list of resources is available, ask for it and use it.
1. Consider at least the following:
2. Ask other clergy, especially those with significant service ministries.
3. Raise the question of creating a directory with clergy associations.
4. Ask social service agencies; they may have their own versions, or such information may be "oral tradition" held by experienced social workers.
5. If you must, start with the telephone directory (and internet search engines, although they require some work to focus on your specific locality). Use the categories listed above, and others which arise.

Once you find it out, Write It Down. Your writing does not need to be pretty or literary or even in complete sentences. It just needs to keep a record of the information which is useful to the people you serve. Write down your information, including:
- the Agency with Contact Information (Address and Phone, Person to ask for)
- What they Offer (most will address a range of needs with defined resources)
- To Whom they Offer it (some will address children or seniors, women or men, and so on)
- Requirements for receiving aid (There may be income restrictions, residency requirements, etcetera.)

Once you have it in writing, Pass it On. For some of us, this is challenging because we suspect—or know—that our information is incomplete, possibly subject to error, and probably not presented in a polished way. We may be reluctant to let others see our preliminary product. But these sorts of directories are always preliminary and in process. They are continually in need of correction and updating, as well as being incomplete—and the fastest way to address this need is to Pass it On to others who are ministering and serving so they can not only use it but improve it. Have the courage to Be Imperfect!

Network! At the risk of turning a perfectly good noun—"network"—into a hackneyed verb, I suggest using the Directory and the information it contains to connect with those secular and sacred folk who are ministering in your community. Do not wait until you need a community
resource to become acquainted with the people and agencies offering help and the services they provide. Be proactive in reaching out to them and creating opportunities to network. This supports the concerted use of resources, creates an atmosphere of cooperation, and serves to keep information up to date. Networks may include:

- **Clergy Associations.** Such associations thrive on shared purposes of ministry. Some include a set of email links.

- **Email links.** Linked mail lists allow sharing of resources to address needs which no single church can afford, and they help to alert clergy to unscrupulous individuals who may seek to exploit and abuse those who are providing assistance. In turn, the links between clergy may lead to developing a permanent single contact ministry.

### Creating a Single-Contact Ministry in your Community

A single contact ministry is essentially a volunteer organization staffed with church and community volunteers with oversight by an existing agency—(for example, a clergy association or Catholic Charities) which is the single point of contact for individuals seeking housing, food, temporary emergency financial assistance and other subsistence needs. Individuals who might otherwise approach multiple churches and community offices are referred to this single point of contact. This organization provides office space, computer internet access, training and monitoring. They also develop a standardized intake procedure which includes a simple background check to detect system abusers. Upon passing the background check, the needs of the individual or family are matched with community resources. The expenses of this program are covered by contributions from participating churches and community groups and by appeals for grants (agencies such as Catholic Charities are accustomed to soliciting grants for programs such as this).

In short, those of us committed to serving God and our neighbors can not only multiply our effectiveness by gathering and sharing information about resources, but can also build a community of service in our locations at the same time. Even imperfect information and links with service and ministry groups will repay efforts far more than we can imagine, aiding those in need and in so doing, bringing glory to God and serving the Lord as we encounter him in the hungry, the naked, and the distressed.
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