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Pastoral Assistant

Lay Ministry Training Courses - Solo

*Material adapted from 'Living and Learning: Pastoral Visiting'
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Session 6: Reflecting on your experience

Pastoral Assistant Training Course

One of the important ways in which we learn as disciples of Jesus Christ and ministers of the Gospel is through a process of reflection. We learn by reflecting on our practice and making improvements to the way we undertake our work. This process of reflection is often represented by the 'pastoral cycle'.



In this cycle, **experience** (of a situation or event) is explored so that the various elements can be better understood. A number of questions can help this **exploration**. They can be used as a checklist, although not all of the questions will be helpful for each visit.

1. There are questions about the situation.
How was the visit set up? Was I well prepared?
What happened a) at the beginning b) as the visit progressed c) at the end?
Who was present? How long did the visit last? Did anything unexpected occur?
2. There are questions about those involved.
What did the person you visited do? Why did they act the way that they did?
What do you think they wanted? How were they feeling? What did their body language signify?
3. There are questions about the visitor.
What did I do? How did I feel? What were my expectations? What role did I fulfil?
Did I listen effectively? Did I know my limitations? Did I do what I intended to do?
4. And there are questions about the interaction.
What was happening between the people present? How did we interact? Did we both know why the other was present? Was there a common purpose and mutual understanding? Was there anything I omitted to do?



Once we have a clear idea about what happened at the visit, we transition into **reflection** on our own practice. We ask the questions:

What can I learn from reflecting on the behaviour of the person I visited? What can I learn from the way I managed the visit? What can I learn from the way we reacted to each other? Is there anything I need to do as a result of the visit?

And because this visit was undertaken on behalf of the church and as a disciple of Jesus Christ there will be a need to address the questions:

How did I serve Christ during my visit? Are there ways in which I could have done that more effectively?

The **response** can then be formed by asking:

What have I learned from the visit? How might I do things differently in the future? Are there skills or knowledge that I lack? Who might help me develop my skills and/or increase my knowledge?

The Pastoral Cycle is arranged as a spiral simply because each new experience is changed in the light of previous reflection. Variations on this model are common and can be helpful in exploring how the reflective process works.

The best reflections are often undertaken as prayer. Reflection on the visit can lead both to meditation and intercession as we offer the whole experience to God and place before him the needs of the person we visited. Reflection can lead to confession as we recognise our own inadequacies and the desire to improve our practice can lead to thanksgiving and supplication as we give thanks for the opportunity to serve Christ and seek God's guidance as we move forward.

God calls us to service in many different ways. As disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to witness to his life, death, resurrection and ascension in every part of our lives. Through our baptism we are called to explore the way of Jesus, to grow in friendship with God and in love for his people and in service to others. As disciples of Jesus Christ we do this in our homes, in our places of work, in our times of leisure and through the membership of his church.

There are many ways in which God calls us to serve, and helping with pastoral visiting is one of those ways. It is a ministry that grows out of our journey of discipleship and is part of our Christian witness. It is sometimes difficult to know quite what God is calling us to be and do during the next part of our lives and we often discover the right way forward for us by trying different avenues of service.



This session is designed to help you to discern whether pastoral visiting is right for you at this point in your life. In order to do this we will ask you to honestly and prayerfully reflect on the work that you have done on this course and the visit(s) you have made in your ministry area. It may be that you are busy with other duties that you feel are more pressing either in the church, at work, or in your family. It may be that you feel that this new work is so rewarding that you decide to give up other forms of service to concentrate on this area of ministry. It may even be that God is calling you to explore this ministry further and you would like to go on and explore Licensed Lay Ministry or ordination as a deacon or a priest.

Indeed, the life-long journey of faith demands that we constantly seek God's guidance on the path that he wants us to take so that we can become the person he wants us to be.

When we undertake a task on behalf of the church, the discernment for that task is the responsibility of both the individual who takes on that work and the church in whose name the ministry is undertaken. Therefore, at this stage it will be important for others to engage with you in a discernment process to prayerfully identify whether pastoral visiting is right for you at this time. You will have thought about this before undertaking this course of training and others in the church will have supported you on this journey.

However, you now need to reflect on the work that you have been undertaking with those responsible for pastoral care in your church and need to come to a joint decision about the way ahead.



Solo Reflection Questions

1. Beginning

Spend a few minutes in silence, offering any worries or concerns from everyday life to God, and acknowledging God's presence alongside you and within you as you prepare to reflect more deeply.

**God our Father, Lord of all the world,
through your Son you have called us into the fellowship
of your universal Church:
hear our prayer for your faithful people
that in their vocation and ministry each may be an
instrument of your love,
and give to your servants the needful gifts of grace;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen.**

2. Reflecting

Remain in an attitude of prayer, as you walk through this 'Examen' - a guided meditation to help you reflect on your experience of pastoral visiting so far. Give yourself at least 20 minutes to do this.

Step 1: I relax and find stillness:

- I remind myself that I am in God's presence.
- I breathe in my desire to feel God's love. I breathe out to fill the space around me with God's loving presence.

Slowly and in silence, work through the following reflection on the pastoral visiting you have undertaken:



Step 2: I ask God to bring to my heart the moments in my pastoral visiting...

- When did I feel the presence of the Spirit most closely?
- When did I sense that I had lived out my faith and commitment to love God and my neighbour?
- When did I feel that something I said or did, or did not say or do, made a real difference?
- In my heart, I re-live those moments.

Step 3: In God's loving presence, I ask to be made aware of the moments in my visiting when I failed to love God and neighbour...

- When did I feel that my words or actions were most distant from my faith and from the training on this course?
- When did I feel uncomfortable or ill-equipped or prepared?
- When did I feel least loving towards myself or others?
- Do I have any other feelings I need to release?

Step 4: I give thanks and pray for wisdom...

- I thank God for graciously enabling me to be a disciple, to know love and share it with others.
- I pray for the grace to love and be loved.
- I pray for the wisdom to know the gifts I have and do not have and for help discerning the best path forward for me and for pastoral work in my ministry area.



3. Exploring

Share any reflections which have come to mind as a result of undertaking the Examen. Are there any thoughts that you would particularly like to note down?

What have you learned from your initial experience of making pastoral visits? What might you need to spend some more time learning about to help you to continue to grow and develop in this ministry?



4. Responding and Concluding

You have now come to the end of the Pastoral Assistant Training Course. We pray that through this journey of learning and gaining experience, you have been challenged in your discipleship and encouraged in your ministry to others.

After completing these reflections, you should have a follow-up meeting with your mentor/supervisor, to agree whether you will go forward to be fully commissioned as a Pastoral Assistant.

As you finish, describe the one most significant piece of learning you will take away from the whole training process.

