



Clergy Pastoral Supervision Program Launch

Speech

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Archbishop of Perth**

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Today, I wish to speak to you about Professional Clergy Pastoral Supervision which I have previously spoken about at various gatherings of clergy and seminarians. Over the last two years the Curia and I have been engaged in an ongoing conversation regarding pastoral supervision. Assisted by our own experiences in supervision, and mindful of my responsibilities for the ongoing support and formation of the clergy of the Archdiocese, I have recently approved a Policy for *Clergy Professional Pastoral Supervision*.

I have come to know firsthand the importance of supervision in my own life and the value of the support it provides me in my role as the Archbishop. There are always challenges to meet and being able to access an independent skilled supervision specialist who can provide me with perspective and insight, and who sometimes challenges me, has helped me immensely.

This policy is significant for all of us because up until now, most of us have been used to seeking support primarily from our brothers in the clergy and generally haven't considered other external support. But the reality, for both me and you, is that the world and our vocation within it are much more complex than they have ever been. It is increasingly common for us not to live with even one other priest and, as is the case for me, many of us do not have family or a wide circle of other friends. The reality of our sometimes isolated lifestyle and the demands of our ministry can easily lead to both personal and professional difficulties. There should be no embarrassment or shame in acknowledging this: it is part of that virtue of humility, another name for which might be courageous self-knowledge.

You will be aware that up until now, I have contented myself with encouraging everyone to consider undertaking supervision. Now, with the formal launch of this policy today, I am indicating my conviction that we all share a common responsibility in this regard. We all need to take advantage of the benefits this will bring to our own effectiveness in our pastoral ministry, both for our own sake and for the well-being of our people. With the launch of this policy all of us who are engaged in parish or other ministries in the archdiocese, and those in formation for ordination in our archdiocese, will need to establish a regular supervision practice and attend, at least while



the policy is being implemented and until it is formally reviewed, a minimum of 6 sessions per year.

As you are aware, the Catholic Bishops of Australia, following the conclusion of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, made a commitment to all Catholics and the Australian community to implement a process of pastoral supervision. I take this commitment seriously. I certainly do not want you or the Church to ever again be criticised for failing to respond to all those recommendations of the Royal Commission which is in our power to support, or for failing to support the clergy in their commitment to providing the best pastoral care possible to their people.

Our wider community expects us, rightly, to respond as fully as possible to the recommendations of the Royal Commission. Even more importantly the Lord, through his Church, calls us to do whatever we can to make our pastoral ministry as effective as possible. Clergy Pastoral Supervision is one element in a suite of offerings which can help us do just that.

The important initiative which we are formally launching today is not unique to us. Many other dioceses are well advanced in this area and we have been able to learn from their experience. When the Church is striking out in a new direction, it is important that we learn from each other. While we have benefitted from the experience of others around the country it is my hope that, just as happened with our Safeguarding Project, other dioceses might also now learn from us. We are also learning from our wider society. Many of you would be aware that most professionals in the “well-being” field are professionally bound to participate in supervision or risk being deregistered. This has long been a practice in many sectors of our society and is seen as critical to maintaining the integrity of professional practice and ensuring the wellbeing of those assisting others in difficult and complex life situations.

Pastoral supervision is the beginning of several initiatives I hope to introduce as we move forward. To assist me with this initiative I have appointed Access Wellbeing Services (AWS), a service of Centrecare Inc, to be the providers of pastoral supervision for the Archdiocese’s clergy and seminarians. AWS has a long history in providing professional supervision and is staffed by a dedicated team of trained professionals. AWS also has offices across the metropolitan area making it convenient to access appointments, and has the flexibility to provide face-to-face, telephone and video-link sessions, including to clergy outside the metropolitan area of greater Perth.

Today, I am encouraging you to register as soon as possible for a place in the pastoral supervision program. The program will be implemented in stages, commencing with the group of seminarians and clergy ordained less than 15 years. There will be 40 places initially and these will expand over the next 12 months.

Greg Russo, the Executive Director, Finance and Administration, will soon be writing to parishes and their Finance Councils to advise them about the financial aspects of this initiative. As a



general principle the cost of the pastoral supervision sessions will be covered in the same way as other personal/living expenses are met. However, details of this will be provided by Greg in due course.

This is something new for most of us and in some ways may be a little daunting. The unknown often is. However I am convinced, largely because of my own experience, that this can only add to our effectiveness as ministers of the gospel, signs and bearers of God's love for his people. For this reason I am full of hope as I formally launch this new initiative today.