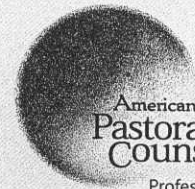


The Pastoral Counselor

A Public Information Pamphlet
prepared by



American Association of
**Pastoral
Counselors**

Professionally Integrating
Psychotherapy and Spirituality

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Introduction

Pastoral Counselors are dedicated to the healing of the mind, spirit, and human relationships through the integration of spiritual values and behavioral sciences.

Pastoral Counselors are attempting to fill the needs of a growing percentage of our population, reflected in a recent national survey which showed that 90 percent perceive themselves religiously oriented. Linking this fact with the mounting national incidence of mental and emotional illness, demonstrates the growing awareness of the need for pastoral counseling.

Moreover, the decline in moral and family values, resulting in alcohol and drug abuse, distressing numbers of school dropouts and runaways, general disintegration of family life, other societal ills, and concomitant mental and emotional turmoil, highlights the increasing need for the greater inclusion of spiritual values in inpatient and outpatient mental health therapy.

Regardless of the particular orientation that one's belief system may have, there is a spiritual dimension to everyone's life, and that dimension is intrinsically associated with one's mental, emotional, and relational health.

While there are various types of professional helpers who can provide assistance through counseling, this brochure is intended to give you a clear and accurate description of only one of those helpers — *the Pastoral Counselor certified by the American Association of Pastoral Counselors*.

What is Pastoral Counseling?

Pastoral counseling is a form of therapy or counseling in which a pastoral counselor, as a representative of a religious tradition or community, uses the insights and principles of religion, theology, and modern behavioral sciences in working with individuals, couples, families, groups, and institutions toward the achievement of wholeness and health. An important ingredient in pastoral counseling different from other forms of counseling and psychotherapy is the conviction that mental and emotional illness are best met by *both* the wisdom of religious teachings and the knowledge and skills of the human behavioral sciences.

Services Provided

Pastoral counselors offer a variety of ways to alleviate mental and emotional problems and to move through life's crises and transitions. Based on psychosocial research, religious principles, and cultural understandings, the pastoral counselor, after a careful assessment of the problem, recommends one or more particular ways of helping — for example, individual counseling/psychotherapy, group therapy, couples counseling, marriage and family therapy, spiritual guidance, short-term counseling. In some instances, the pastoral counselor may feel that the help needed can best be provided by some other mental health professional or some other pastoral counselor. If that is the case, the pastoral counselor will assist the client in finding a more appropriate professional. Whether the pastoral counselor provides the

needed treatment or makes the referral, the decision is always made in consultation with the client and will be based on what seems to be in the client's best interest.

Standards of Practice

In accordance with standards set by the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, each pastoral counselor recognizes his or her areas of competence and seeks consultation, supervision, and referral whenever one or more of these aids seem appropriate. Although pastoral counselors openly acknowledge their own religious faith, heritage, and values, they are trained to be objective as well as empathetic in relating to the client's own racial, religious, ethnic, or cultural memberships and preferences.

Duration of Pastoral Counseling/Psychotherapy

The time required for pastoral counseling varies with each person depending on the nature of the issues presented, personal history, personality difficulties, and the agreed upon goals. In some instances, pastoral counseling may be as brief as a few sessions; in other instances, it may require a year or longer.

Cost of Pastoral Counseling

Fees for pastoral counseling are based on the amount of time involved and on the type of help needed. Ordinarily, appointments are once or twice a week and last about 50 minutes. Group therapy may go for an hour-and-a-half. There is a range of fees. However, most pastoral counseling centers have a sliding fee scale based on income and general ability to pay. In some instances, it is possible to have psychotherapy partly covered by health insurance.

The cost of counseling is discussed carefully at some point during the first interview with a pastoral counselor, and a mutual agreement is reached before the actual counseling begins.

Relationships with Other Professionals

At times, pastoral counselors may be consulted by other professionals (for instance, physicians, psychologists, attorneys, etc.), concerning the client's progress, and the pastoral counselor may consult those professionals as well, with the client's consent. It is not unusual, for example, for a pastoral counselor to consult with a psychiatrist if medication seems appropriate. Such consultations are initiated only after a thorough discussion with the client for this form of additional help.

Many professionals from other disciplines are members of AAPC due to shared values and beliefs about the spiritual dimension of personality and therapy.

Education and Training of Pastoral Counselors

Ordinarily, a pastoral counselor has completed from nine to twelve years of education beyond high school — a Bachelor's Degree from a college or university, a professional Master's degree from a seminary, and usually a specialized counseling masters or doctoral degree from a graduate school of theology or a university. A significant part of this advanced education is spent in some type of clinical training setting working with persons in crisis or transition (e.g., mental and general hospitals, counseling agencies). All phases of this advanced teaching and learning process seek to integrate the enduring wisdom of religious traditions with the emerging reliable insights and methodologies in the field of psychotherapy.

Confidentiality

Pastoral Counselors who are certified by the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, Inc., are bound by its Code of Ethics and state laws related to privileged communication and confidentiality.

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AAPC's History

The American Association of Pastoral Counselors, organized in 1963, in response to the need for leadership and standards for the involvement of religious organizations in mental health care. Since that time, the Association has provided clarity in pastoral counseling practice and training, criteria for religious institutions in pastoral counseling ministry, and coordination with other mental health professions.

AAPC's Position on Health Insurance

The American Association of Pastoral Counselors takes the position, alongside many of the other national mental health associations and organizations, that mental and emotional illness should be covered in a nondiscriminatory manner in health care proposals enacted by the Congress of the United States.

Those suffering from mental and emotional illness should also be entitled to select a qualified practitioner of his or her choice, and to enjoy a high quality of care at a reasonable and affordable cost.

The treatment of mental and emotional illness will help contain health care costs, since a significant percentage of patients who enter the health care delivery system with physical symptoms are also suffering from a component of mental or emotional illness. Appropriate mental health treatment in these cases will reduce other health care utilization costs.