

dialogue about them by two persons in a secure relationship tends to reduce them. The important part about this kind of guidance is that it expresses the presence of the pastor in the midst of the anxiety.

It is important to recognize that a secure relationship, one that can lead by still waters, is one that has clear boundaries and limits. The pastor guides by being present, but there are limits on his or her physical presence that allow for the symbolic presence of the caring community to be there in its stead. As suggested earlier, there should be limits on physical touching, but there should also be limits on the time a pastor spends with a particular person or family. Although there are no rigid rules for this and a pastoral relationship has many of the personal elements of friendship, there should be clear limits of time spent and personal involvement allowed by one who is functioning primarily as a pastor. There are times in crisis when a pastor may appropriately spend all night at the hospital with a patient's family, but unlimited time spent is more the function of friends and family than of the pastor. The parishioner can only be free to share her deepest concerns when she knows that there are boundaries and limits on her relationship to the pastor.

In a more structured pastoral counseling situation it is particularly important to have limits on the time to be spent in a particular session. There are a few emergency situations when the usual rules of procedure are broken—for example, threats of suicide or violence—but in most situations the pastor leads by still waters by symbolically conveying the message that “there are ways of dealing with this, and this is my usual procedure of doing so.” Setting limits of time can convey the very useful message that “We’ll deal with as much as we can in the time we have and then go on with the rest of our lives. This situation or problem is not the only thing in your life and mine.”

Just as a parent's being away from the child can teach the child to hold on to the parent's presence when they are separated, the pastor's limits on time spent with a parishioner also conveys an important message. “You can be strengthened by relationship with me and through me with the community of faith, but you can use this relationship without constant physical presence.” A similar message is conveyed by Jesus to the disciples in the Gospel of

John. “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14:25-26). Although the presence of the pastoral carer is certainly not the same as the presence of Jesus, because the carer represents Christ and his church, the carer also conveys the message, “You do not need my constant physical presence because the Holy Spirit can be with you.”

Finally, one of the most important boundaries involved in providing a secure relationship is the boundary that the pastor keeps between her life situation and that of the patient or parishioner. It is difficult for a patient or parishioner to trust a relationship when it seems that the pastor is working on her own life situation as well as responding to that of the parishioner. A pastor's affective response, her feelings, are the most valuable asset she has in expressing her care. Her own past experience and feelings related to that experience help her to understand and express her care for others. In tension with this, however, is the fact that those same feelings can get in the way of her responsiveness to the person cared for.

If a person is sad or depressed, the pastor's own experience of sadness can help her understand the patient or parishioner's experience, but if she gets too deeply into her own experience she may be unable to respond to the other person. The pastor may have had an experience of illness or other life-changing experience that is similar to that of her parishioner. Having a similar experience can help her understand and be responsive in the pastoral situation, but it may also tempt her to talk about her experience more than to listen to the experience of the other person. There needs to be definable limits on the pastor's self-expression of the feelings and experiences that can help her respond helpfully to another.

Most pastors need some kind of consultation with a colleague or experienced professional to help them deal with limiting self-expression. A guideline that can be used without consultation is asking oneself, when in the pastoral situation, “How much do I want to share this experience of mine with this parishioner?” If the answer comes back, “I really want or need to do it,” then the experience should usually not be shared. The intensity of the desire to share indicates that the pastor is responding more to her need