

“being,” pastoral care must certainly involve praying to be or to become one’s essential self. That could mean a number of things. It might mean praying to be my best self or praying to be aware of my connection or relationship to God. It could mean the risk of changing my comfortable or familiar self in response to a difficult or challenging situation. My presence involves my awareness of my “esse,” or being, and my awareness of the “being” of those to whom I offer care. “Presence” is a heavily loaded word, and being in touch with its meaning can enrich our experience and understanding of pastoral care.

The pastoral carer, whether laity or clergy, is present to the person cared for in a particular kind of relationship—one that “re-presents” the presence of God through relationship to the person cared for. Pastoral carers “re-present” or remind persons of God by remembering and hearing, and affirm by their action that God continues to hear and remember them.

God is “re-presented” in relationship most effectively—there is genuine pastoral presence in the relationship—when (1) the carer’s own person is fully present and he is aware of himself and his own feelings; (2) when the carer is fully aware that he represents more than himself; and (3) when he is aware of and able to experience as much as possible the unique personhood of the one to whom care is offered. All three of these dimensions of presence involve awareness—developing awareness of self, of what one represents, and increasing awareness of the personhood of those cared for.

Presence in the Person of the Carer

Although the ministry of pastoral care involves knowing something and doing something, it is most of all about being something. It is not just about reaching out to the person cared for. It is about oneself. In order to be present, to “be with,” the carer’s being or full selfhood must be there. The carer is one who is seeking to be more than he is. The church has always expected this from its ministers. The question about this does not have to be as radical as the historic Methodist question about its ministers at annual conferences: “Are all ministers blameless in life and character?”

Nevertheless, the question reminds us that the kind of person a minister is, whether laity or clergy, is important.

The meaning of the word “character” grows out of the term’s use in printing, where a character is a distinctive mark, such as a letter or a symbol. Character applied to a person is similarly understood as a distinctive mark, a distinctive trait, quality or attribute, an essential quality. Secondly, character has meant moral strength, self-discipline, or fortitude. It has also meant having a definable role, such as a character in a play. All of these meanings are associated with the person of the pastoral carer.

David Duncombe has identified six dimensions of spiritual or religious life in the Christian tradition that have been used to describe the distinctive mark of the minister.¹ All six reflect the difficulty of identifying Christian character with any single thing. Thus there are contrasting meanings or two sides for each of the dimensions of character. The character of the minister should be both:

1. *Mystical and moral.* The first side suggests some kind of union with God and the second reminds us of social obligations to humankind.
2. *Sacred and secular.* One side represents the encounter with God at special times and places, such as in worship. The other side affirms the possibility of divine presence at all times and in all places.
3. *Individual and corporate.* This dimension emphasizes the minister’s individual religious quest, and the importance of membership in the gathered community.
4. *Belief and faith.* Belief takes seriously the historical convictions of the faith community, while faith emphasizes the creative and new insights that appear to be relatively unrelated to a particular set of beliefs.
5. *Virtue and ability.* One side emphasizes particular Christian virtues as necessary for Christian life and ministry—for example, the Galatians 5:22 list which includes love, joy, peace, and so on—and the other side emphasizes that any ability can express the Christian life and ministry if it is rooted in God.

6. *Perfection and wholeness.* The striving for perfection, as commended by Christ in Matthew 5:48, is on one side, and on the other side is a wholeness emphasizing balance or integration of the good and bad which is present in all human beings.

The richness of these dimensions reveals the complexity of describing what the person of the minister, the pastoral carer, ought to be. What is most important is not some strict compliance with one or both sides of these dimensions, but that their representation of what the minister "ought to be" is taken seriously. Reflecting prayerfully on what these dimensions of character might mean in his or her life can guide the minister in becoming a pastoral presence.

Presence in the Awareness of the Carer

It may seem paradoxical, but full awareness of and care for the other require full awareness of oneself and what one is experiencing. This book is about pastoral wisdom, and an essential part of pastoral wisdom is wisdom about what one is feeling and experiencing in the pastoral relationship.

The immense value of a consultation group on ministry in which one can be honest about the pastoral events that occur in one's ministry is that such a group can increase one's self-awareness. Other group members notice things about you and what you may have been feeling that you yourself have not noticed. Group members (and preferably a skilled consultant meeting with the group) notice and share with the carer both strengths and weaknesses that he or she may have been unaware of. Reflecting in community about one's self-awareness in ministry is an essential element in the development of the kind of presence involved in pastoral wisdom.

The carer needs to become aware of how what has happened in his or her life may be affecting what he or she hears and responds to. A recent loss of a loved one by the carer may significantly affect what and how he or she hears and responds to the losses in another's life. She may be tempted to talk about her own loss, or, on the other hand, may steer the other person away from talking about

any sadness at all. What is important, both prior to entering a relationship and in later reflections about it, is being aware of how one's own life experience may affect response to another's life. That awareness may involve that carer's knowledge that she is at a point in life when she herself is in need of care and that need is affecting her care of others.

Awareness of oneself and what is going on in one's experience is an essential part of the presence required in pastoral care.

Another essential is an ongoing development of oneself in the Christian life. One might call this the spiritual and intellectual preparation for being a pastor. This is something that is important for both laity and clergy. Ordained ministers have completed the required academic preparation required by their denomination for ordination. Lay ministers have been trained and certified in some way, but for both kinds of ministers, a study and search of their faith and tradition is required. One could call this spiritual preparation for ministry or a quest to become more "faith-full." It can take place in a variety of ways, both individually and in community. The important thing for one's being and one's presence in pastoral care is that it is something going on now.

Presence Through What the Carer Represents

God is "re-presented" in a pastoral relationship when the carer is aware that he represents more than himself and more than his particular community of faith. The presence he offers is more than his presence. He is a reminder and re-presenter of God, faith, the church, and all that religion may represent to the person cared for. It is important that the carer be aware that he is not the one who "brings God" into the room of the person cared for. The faith that he represents affirms that God has been there and is there now. The carer is a part of bringing that presence into some kind of awareness in the person cared for and in himself.

What is involved in a pastoral relationship has most often been discussed in terms of the role, function, and identity of a minister.

A role is an external perception of what one is and how one functions in relation to a particular society or community. It is the way in which the individual in his ordinary work situations presents

himself to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impressions they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while performing in his role. Carrying out a role always involves visibility and function. Visibility emphasizes the power of the role itself, however actively one accepts or “plays” it. Function underscores the importance of action in carrying out the role, however effective or ineffective that action may be. Thus it is essential for a minister to be seen as minister by both church and community and to have the function of minister for those who view him in that way.

How one is visible in a pastoral role is always a central issue in learning pastoral care. In her supervised ministry in a hospital, for example, the theological student or lay minister may feel that she is not really a chaplain and may have difficulty in introducing herself as such. In her training, however, she is reminded by those supervising her that she has no “license” to be in the hospital except as a representative of the chaplain’s department and that she must have visibility as such. Learning to be a pastor involves learning to accept and deal with what that role represents.

Even ministers who seem to be saying openly, “I accept the fact that I am minister and am proud of that fact” may have difficulty accepting all the expectations, hopes, and anger that the ministerial role can bring with it. Other people’s perceptions and assumptions inevitably bring the “visible minister” to the point of saying openly to himself or herself, “But I’m not that kind of minister.” It’s embarrassing to be thought of as “that kind of minister.” In being seen as ministers, both lay and clergy pastoral carers are identified with all the distortions and pettiness of church and ministry as well as with its greatness. And the inner dialogue that takes place as a result of the way that the minister is perceived is a significant part of developing pastoral identity.

Identity has been defined as the very “core” of a person toward which everything else is ordered. It is something that, if one knows it, provides the “clue” to a person. Identity is the specific uniqueness of a person, what really counts about him, quite apart from both comparison and contrast to others.

Pastoral identity involves the confidence that in the midst of changing circumstances I *am* a pastor and that in many ways I can take this for granted. To myself I *feel* like a pastor and, therefore,

do not have to be concerned about this when I attempt to offer ministry to another person. Because pastoral identity is only a part of my total identity and is one of the later developing parts, it is more vulnerable to identity diffusion as a result of changes in role and function. As a later developing part of my identity and because it makes up only a portion of who I am, it may sometimes be competitive with earlier ways in which I thought of myself.

It is important to note that pastoral identity—identification of oneself as a minister—is an issue for both lay ministers, who function in a specialized pastoral care ministry, and for ordained clergy, who carry out all of the functions of ministry. For lay ministers who have previously had a different relationship to the persons for who they have been assigned to offer pastoral care, being seen as a minister and experiencing oneself as a minister is a somewhat surprising experience.

For example, Sarah is a lay minister who has been in a ten-week lay ministry training course provided by the nearby hospital’s clinical pastoral education supervisors. She has been commissioned by her church as a lay minister and has functioned in that role a little less than a year. She is visiting a family that she has known for many years in an extended care facility. When she arrives where the patient and family are, she is introduced to a friend of this family, whom she did not previously know, as one of their church’s lay ministers. In her reflection on the visit she noted that even though she had been known longer as this family’s friend, in this visit they identified her as a minister of their church. Having been identified in this way during the visit, she was approached by a second friend as she was leaving the facility. This person had seen her visiting the family, and she sought Sarah’s guidance about her own relationship to the family.

Later, when the consultation group for lay ministers in her church discussed this visit, much of the discussion centered around Sarah’s different relationship to this family in how they perceived her, how she functioned, and how she experienced herself as a minister. Most important was Sarah’s developing awareness that there was something different in her and in her relationships when she was functioning as a lay minister. She was seen differently—as more than “just Sarah.” She experienced herself differently, as if something was there that was not there before,