

sometimes most important, how who one is and what one represents is a part of that wisdom. Pastoral wisdom involves our knowing, being, and doing.

What Wisdom Is

Wisdom is commonly understood as the ability to make sound choices and good decisions. It is not something a person is born with. It comes from living, from making mistakes and learning from them. Wisdom is often thought of as a state of mind characterized by profound understanding and deep insight. Although it is often accompanied by intelligence and academic knowledge, that is not always necessary. In fact, wisdom can be found among relatively uneducated persons who have developed it through learning from their experience. **A person who has wisdom is one who maintains a larger view of the situation to be addressed without losing sight of particularity and the intricacies of interrelationships within it.** Thus wisdom involves the acceptance of complexity in a situation as matter-of-fact. This is demonstrated in the recognition that the relationships between persons and things are not always the same—that there is a messiness and disorder in life that must be dealt with.

The books of the Bible known as the Wisdom literature—Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes—can be a resource for developing both personal and pastoral wisdom. Many persons have turned to these books less frequently than others because they appear to be more about human relationships than about the relationship of God and humankind. There is less talk about God in them, more language that is not specifically religious. Thus, at first glance they may seem less inspiring than other books of the Bible.

Theologically, the Wisdom literature of the Bible seems more concerned with creation than redemption. Old Testament scholar Carol Newsom describes the Wisdom literature as affirming God's creative activity by which the orderliness and dependability of the world is achieved.¹ Human wisdom is having insight into this world in order to live successfully and harmoniously. Biblical wisdom affirms the goodness of creation and believes that the good life in a material sense is not in essential conflict with the good life

in the moral sense. The essence of such wisdom is to appreciate the relationship between one's acts and their consequences for oneself and for others. Wisdom is essentially concerned with the creation of a good life in the family, in the local community, and in the larger society. Pastoral care is also involved with these practical human concerns, assuming that persons' relationship with God is a part of them whether God is talked about or not.

It is the very human quality of these books, however, that offers important guidance for the ministry of pastoral care. The Wisdom literature of the Bible can remind pastors that more often than not pastoral care involves dealing with people who talk of practical, everyday problems more than they talk of God. Unlike other parts of ministry that involve teaching and preaching about God and religion, **what is essential for pastoral care is familiarity and comfort with ordinary, secular language.** The Bible's Wisdom literature and pastoral care are similar in their spending most of their time addressing the way things are in the world of everyday life. Wisdom in pastoral care involves learning to talk seriously about life with or without always having to talk about God.

Where Wisdom May Be Found

Knowing something about wisdom is an important part of developing it, and a book like this may serve as a guide. **A more important part of developing pastoral wisdom, however, is experience in life.** Wisdom for ministry begins in action, in doing ministry in the best way we know how, but developing the most effective wisdom for pastoral care requires a particular kind of experience. Just doing it is not enough to learn most effectively. **The wisdom of caring emerges from bringing together three things: actually doing pastoral care; sharing what has happened in that ministry in a community of ministers; and reflecting on the meaning of those pastoral events and one's development in ministry within that community.** *Reflection in a group is the best way to get better.*

Two philosophers have said some things about experience that can be helpful in learning from it most effectively. The first one is Søren Kierkegaard in his criticism of philosophy's tendency to think instead of act. His concern was to move away from thinking