

Pastorate and counselling

Philippians 1:9-10 – And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best.

Romans 12:15 – Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Galatians 6:1 – Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

Pastorate and counselling are love put into practice.

They're about giving comfort, easing loneliness, giving wise advise, helping someone with his or her spiritual growth, giving support in heavy problems, and all sorts of issues.

Pastorate is put into practice with the sick, people who mourn, marital problems, mental problems, all kinds of sin, problems with the upbringing of children, loneliness etcetera.

Because we live in a fallen world, and are imperfect and broken ourselves, every human has the need for pastorate.

As reborn Christian we all receive individual pastorate and counselling from the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

The Holy Spirit is our Counsellor. Our Comforter, who brings Gods Word to our minds, who is with us and rebukes us, who makes sure we're not alone.

Furthermore Jesus gives us the command, from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit inside us, to give pastorate and counselling to the people around us.

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”(Matthew 9:36-38)

We can do this for every human being; both for believers as well as unbelievers. God encourages us to do this especially for our fellow brothers and sisters: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good

to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”
(Galatians 6:10)

Maybe you think that pastorate and counselling are solely the task of the pastor.

In the days of Moses, they thought that too. Moses had to listen and solve everyone's problems from early in the morning till late in the evening. It wore him out.

And when his father-in-law came to visit and saw how overloaded Moses was, he said: “What you are doing is not good. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.” (Exodus 18:17-18)

Moses followed his advice to divide the pastorate and counselling among the people. They could solve the simple problems themselves, and the bigger problems remained for Moses.

And this is how it works for us as Christian congregations as well: when we are shepherds for each other, the pastor doesn't get overloaded as the job is shared by more members.

What can we practically do for each other?

- Visit the sick, lonely and mourning. “Mourn with those who mourn”, Jesus says. Empathize with them, listen to them, be kind and caring to them. Send an encouraging postcard or letter, give practical help where necessary. Offer this, even before you're asked to do it.
- Connect with each other, so that you can share your worries and problems with each other. Listen and show understanding (no criticism or judgement). Empathize with each other and pray for each other. House groups are often suitable for this, and also the contact before and after the church service.
- Speak from your faith and from how the Holy Spirit works in you. Build each other up with that, humble and kind. Give each other advice in that way, based on the Bible and your experience in your Christian life.
- Make contact with people of whom you suspect that they are not doing so well. Be kind, listen to them, find out if you can help. And if the problem is very big, or if you don't know what to do with it, you can encourage that person to go to the pastor with his problem.
- When you see someone sin and you're worried about that, pray about it and talk to that person if you think that's a good idea after you've prayed about it: “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught

in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1)

- Inform yourself about different kinds of problems. When you know a little bit more about it, you can give more directed help. Listen for example to cd’s of the Pastoral Course that is offered with this course, or read books that can inform you better. When you’re very motivated on this topic, you can even take a pastoral course at the Centre for Pastoral Counselling. You can find information about this in the course binder.

Here are a few characteristics that are important for pastorate:

1. Your relationship with God and being led by the Holy Spirit. This is the most important characteristic. It ensures that what we do for others; how we love them, and what we say to them, is coming from our relationship with God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in us.
2. The fruit of kindness. When you have an open, non-judgemental, kind glow towards your fellow Christians, it’s easier for them to share their problems with you. Nobody needs a bucket load of criticism or judgemental looks.
3. Good listening. Let someone finish, look at him friendly, and try to understand what the other person is intending to say. Summarize now and then what he said and ask him if you understood him correctly. Wait with your own responses and answers, until he has said what he wanted to say. Ask questions to make it more clear.
4. Empathy and compassion. Empathize with the other person, try to put yourself in his situation. Feel your responsibility to give your warmth and consideration to that person.
5. Grow as a Christian yourself. In your knowledge of the Bible, in your life as Christian, in grace and humbleness. The more you grow, the more you have to give.

And if you’re insecure about yourself, or timid? Have difficulty talking or are shy? What can you do then?

- Do small things you feel (reasonably) well with. Send a postcard or do something practical for someone else. Have very short conversations with others.
- Give yourself time, but keep doing things for others that are easier for you. Try to prevent yourself from withdrawing.
- Help with children’s work; children are spontaneous, and can help you sometimes to overcome your shyness more easily.

Questions:

1. Do you feel comfortable to give pastorate or counselling? If not, why not?
2. What points that we've discussed you find easy, and which ones hard(er)?
3. Is it easier for you to help people around you who are not believers or easier to help your fellow believers? Why, do you think, is that so?
4. How is the atmosphere in your congregation; can you share your worries and problems with each other? What could you do to improve this?
5. Do you feel very interested in this topic, and would you like to develop yourself further in this? Discuss it with your course leader, so you can look at the possibilities together.

Practice:

Sit together in couples. One person tells something he or she finds difficult about his/her life, and the other one listens, shows understanding and gives advise if necessary. Afterwards you do this the other way around.

Assignment:

1. For the next weeks, try to put something of this topic into practice. Visit someone who's alone, see how you can listen better in conversations in the church, or read a good book about a pastoral subject.
2. Find out if you've noticed something where you could grow in, like listening with more patience, or having a kinder glow. Take this in prayer to God and ask Him to help you grow in this.