

Pastoral Theology 2 Written Assignment



By Albert J. Risdorfer

Candidate for the Order of Priest in The Catholic Apostolic Church in North America

August 2018

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam

This paper explores the role of the priest as a pastoral counselor in serving the Lord's flock. It explores how to carry out this mission based on my experience and readings to date. It ends with a hypothetical, yet realistic, case of a parishioner who approaches me as the Pastor of a CACINA Parish to be his spiritual director. The paper describes the issues affecting the person and lays out how I, as his pastor and spiritual director, might try to help this soul in distress.

I was tonsured for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in the Fall of 1971, by Bishop Thomas J Welsh on behalf of his Eminence, John Cardinal Krol, the Archbishop of Philadelphia. The clerical tonsure, involved having the bishop cut one's hair in four places, marking the sign of the cross. It was an analog to a monk shaving his head as an outward sign of one's enslavement to Christ and dedication to the Church. My class was the last class at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary to participate in this ancient ceremony. In fact, the scissors actually broke in Welsh's hands as he cut the hair of Phil Woestman, the last guy in alphabetical order in our class. Tonsure marked your "incardination" into the Archdiocese whereby you were adopted by the Archbishop as one of HIS clerics. One was now bound by Canon Law, and could officially bless a bowl of fruit. The other big bonus that came with the tonsure, was as a new member of the "clergy," one could now wear the Roman collar in public! Now, I would henceforth *LOOK* like a priest!

With that change in outward appearance, my world changed as well. I was no longer just "Al," the kid from Rising Sun Ave in Philly, but - despite my constant reminders to people that I was not yet ordained - I was now "Father Al". That little change in appearance, triggered a massive change in how I was now treated by others. Many people in my life – friends, neighbors, family members – and particular my older, Mom's generation, Italian cousins (we called them "aunts" or "uncles" out of respect) – wanted to know if I had a minute to chat – about – "you know...."

The "...you know..." topics inevitably involved some transgression or impropriety that she or he (mostly he) had committed in the distant past. Often these involved some sort of marital infidelity, a sexual issue or some other inappropriateness in the mind of the person. To say I was uncomfortable hearing these long kept secrets, especially from my elder relatives, would be an understatement. I mean, some of these guys diapered me and now they were talking to me as a "penitent"! Add to that, the fact that somehow the teller seemed to feel that telling me would somehow provide a sort of "absolution" or help them arrive at some peace with God, was astounding to me, and humbling as well.

I recall wondering what was the real power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Was it truly in the act of receiving God's absolution from the priest? Or was it the mere cathartic act of "confessing" ...of letting something go that had weighted down one's soul for so long? I tried to imagine what price these men and women had paid over the years dragging this baggage with them, day in a day out. How often might it have reared up and invaded what might have otherwise been a happy time for them? Has there been, or even is there now, some other aspect of the person's life and personality that is shaped by that weighty event of the past? What was the price of long standing, unresolved guilt?

I also had to ask "Why me?" After all these years, was there no one – let alone a priest – that any of them felt safe enough to talk to? What was it about me? ...young, un-ordained, powerless me?

It's About The Relationship

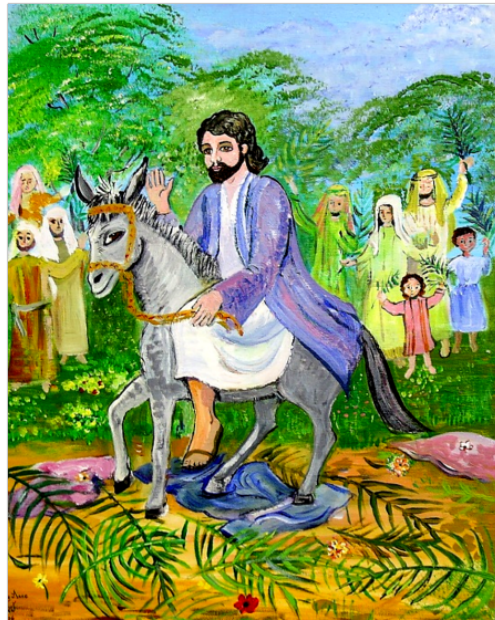
As I pondered this question of "why me" it became clear that in almost every case, they had not changed, but I had – at least in their eyes. Something was new about me. That collar took the historic basis of our life long relationships and enhanced it in a way that they saw as "opportunity." The young man they knew and trusted and loved, now had a new and compelling feature: he had acquired insight...and access...because the Church had marked him as "priest."

An organization like the Roman Church would not have adorned me with this symbol of such a holy and esteemed office, if I had not somehow earned it. So now as they saw it, they had an “in” with the Church...a friend in the business! Not only was I someone they had historically trusted, but to them I also had a special relationship with God. I could be their “consigliore,” their “fixer,” who could be relied on to take their case before God and make things right.

The awesome responsibility that this imposed hit me like a ton of bricks. The weightiness of the priesthood became suddenly very, very real. As *alter Christus*, would I have Christ’s limitless capacity for understanding and compassion? How could I be “servant” and “shepherd” in a way that would truly help? Could I really be an instrument of peace and healing? Perhaps the biggest question that welled up in me, was how can I have the audacity to offer solace and guidance to another, when my own sins and unresolved deviations were just as real, and just as huge, as any that I was hearing? How can “sinner” and “forgiver” sit in the same man? At times when I was talking to one of these people, I felt so burdened by what I had heard, especially when I had no sensible response, my mind wandered to Christ. If I was like this, having absorbed the weakness of one person, what was it like for him to have taken on the sins of the whole world?

Those initial experiences as “pastoral counselor,” even though I had no sacramental power to effect the grace these people sought (and yes, I did always pray with them and advise them to see a real priest), are once again a source of learning as I pursue priesthood in CACINA.

- **Lesson 1:** Do not to be surprised if people again see me as one who can help simply by virtue of my office. But remember the old story of the donkey that Jesus rode as he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The donkey thought to himself: “Wow, look at all these people coming here to see me.” It is not about me, but about Who I represent.
- **Lesson 2:** The main drive for one to come to me, will be that they see someone they can trust. Never take that trust for granted. Never betray a person’s trust.
- **Lesson 3:** Develop approachability, kindness and compassion as core competencies. The “welcome sign” must always be posted.
- **Lesson 4:** Practice active, empathic listening and not worry as much about having answers. Sometimes listening is all one can do...all one should do. A Ministry of Silence and Support can be very effective in some circumstances.
- **Lesson 5:** Don’t judge but advise gently when needed. Remember always that I too am a sinner. I am an expert on finding ways to displease God. I have no basis, no justification, and no commission to condemn another. Rather be the constant conduit of the God who loves unceasingly.



It's About Competency

Since the seminary days, I have developed a successful career in the field of human resource management and development.

Here again, although in ways nowhere near as intense, I have time and again found myself in the role of one who is sought out for help. Typically, the issues are business based and involve performance or conduct problems, team or leadership effectiveness issues, interpersonal conflicts, etc. However, more often than one might think, it would become clear that the root cause of a workplace issue is actually something deeper that is affecting one or more of the protagonist. Issues at home,

issues with personal relationships in the workplace or elsewhere, substance abuse, physical and mental illnesses, stress, financial problems, even an occasional concern about religious or moral/ethical matters, often became the topic that could not be ignored because it was the impetus for what was occurring at work.



As a Human Resource professional, one's priority is to solve the piece that impacts the business. But to do so effectively, and because it is the human thing to do, the path often leads one to solve (or at least help with) these underlying issues. The professional response therefore is to not only focus on the areas that are properly within one's organizational authority, but also on areas where one has legitimate competency to deal with them effectively.

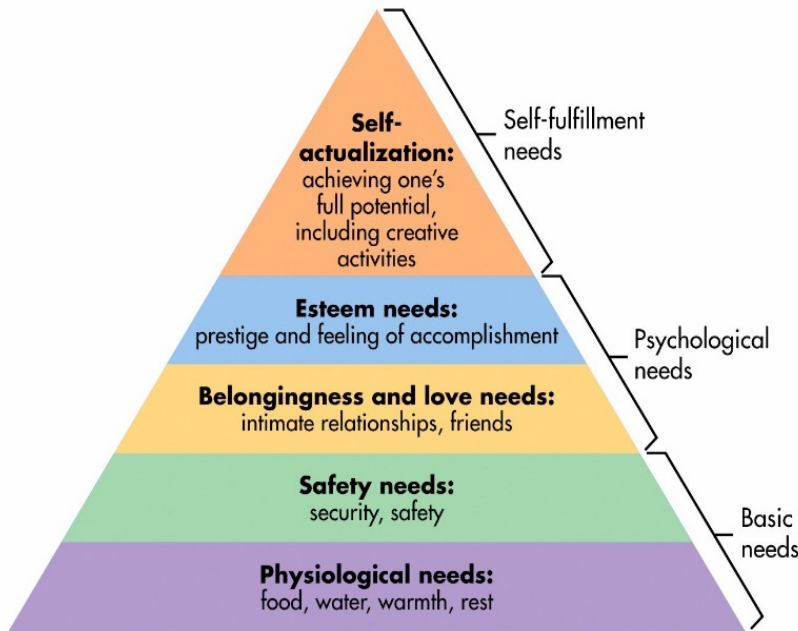
As I apply this idea to pastoral care, a similar assessment of where one can and should help applies. I think that is the point of Paul Pruyser's book, "The Minister as Diagnostician." As the Pastor meets with those who seek his or her help, the first task is to "diagnose" the issues and to then determine where among the many domains of possible issues, *can* one effectively help. Where the priest has expertise and skill to help, then he or she should offer to do so. Where it is clear that the issue is far from his or her competence, then offer to refer the person to someone who can. The last thing people need, is an incompetent minister intervening where they have no business doing so.

I, for one, am not a psychiatrist, nor a psychotherapist, nor even a trained family counselor. I do believe I know enough about these areas to diagnose if the person is in need of such help. My stance would be to gently describe what I was hearing and seeing, and to then offer to assist them in getting competent professional help. To the extent however, that the person is affected by an issue such as they are frustrated by what they do for a living, career development is squarely in my wheelhouse and I'd help as much as I can. In either case, as their priest, I'd bracket whatever

I do in a spiritual context. That is clearly what most who come specifically to a priest for help would expect.

It's About Them

Whether the interaction is initiated by the pastor (such as in those times when he or she may feel compelled to talk to someone about an issue that he or she has observed) or by the person themselves, in the end it will go nowhere unless the person is open to addressing it. Teachers and trainers call this trait "readiness" in learners. Are they open and ready to learn?



Of the many models out there to assess readiness, I have found two to be useful frameworks to assess the likely chances of success for a change effort.

The first is Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs." Simply put Maslow's research says that human needs exist in order of priority. Unless the most basic needs are satisfied, there will be no motivation to address higher order needs? To put it another way, in the words of Maslow's contemporary, and equally great management theorist...and with all due respect to Matthew 4:4:

"Man lives by bread alone, when there is no bread."
Douglas MacGregor

As most missionaries will tell you, "Do not preach about eternal salvation when people are starving or living in fear of their lives." The basic needs for sustenance and security will overwhelm any focus on the eternal. If a man is worried about losing his job and not being able care for his family: that is THE issue. If a woman lives in fear of an abusive relationship: that is THE issue. If the parishioner is lonely and feeling abandoned: that is THE issue. Effective pastoral counseling will meet the person where they are – starting at the bottom of the pyramid of needs and working up from there.

A second framework I find helpful is one I developed with my colleagues in RCA's Organization Development function many years ago. We called it the "Predeterminants to Change" analysis.

This model attempts to predict the success of the change effort based on an assessment of certain prerequisites. These are:

1. **Are Expectations Clear?** Does the person have a clear understanding of his or her own desired end-state? Can they describe what it looks like, what it will feel like? If there is no clear terminal point, then one will not know if he or she has arrived, nor will they be able to measure the success of the effort. As someone once said “If there is no clear destination, then any path will get you there.” Without clarity of goal, the effort will meander and this will lead to frustration and despair. The Pastor would be well advised to seek to clarify the end state before engaging in the change effort.

2. **Can they succeed?** Does the person have the skills and ability to change? If a critical skill is missing, attempt to develop it before proceeding. If not, the effort will fail. If a person seeking to advance their spiritual life is unsure how to pray, teach them. If a person is not good at listening to their kids, help them learn how to do so.

3. **Are they truly motivated to change?** Expectancy Theory (see Porter, Lawler or Vroom) can be instructive here. Many human capital development practitioners rely on applying this theory to their interventions every day. Expectancy theory has three components: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence.

- i. Expectancy: effort → performance (E→P)
- ii. Instrumentality: performance → outcome (P→O)
- iii. Valence: V(R) outcome → reward

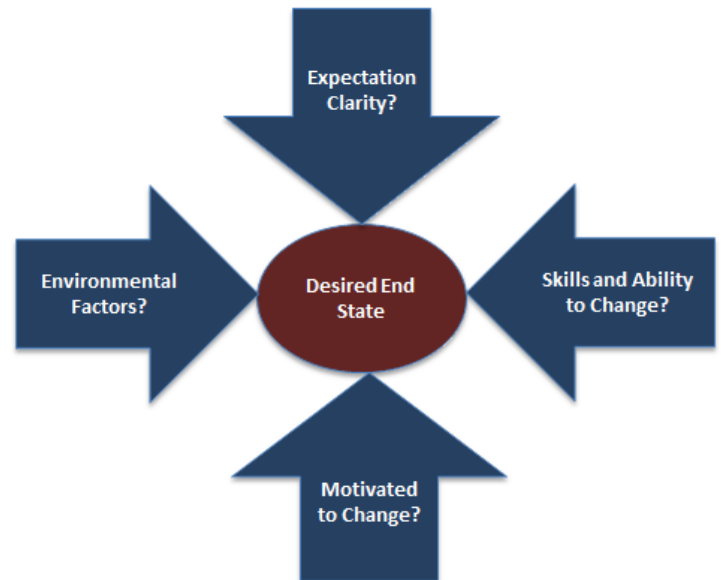
Put together, the theory looks like this: $E_f(E \rightarrow P)(P \rightarrow O)(v)$.

In practical terms this means, that the degree of effort toward change can be predicted by (is a function f of) the persons beliefs that: If I try, I am confident that my effort will lead to new performance (E→P), and if I perform I am sure that I will attain my desired outcome (P→O), and if I succeed I will positively value the outcome I achieve (v).

Note that is equation is multiplicative. If any subordinate belief is zero, the degree of effort toward change can be assumed to be zero. If any are low, the degree of effort for change will be likewise low. A skilled pastoral counselor would be wise to assess the degree of motivation for change before starting.

4. **Are there environmental or structural issues that will facilitate or constrain or obstruct the effort?** Often factors occur in a person’s life that are beyond their control but that can prohibit the best ideas from being realized. There may be still other factors that can be co-opted to help the effort. For example, if a person has no means of transportation to attend group sessions, that is an environmental logistical obstacle. Find a solution if the effort is to succeed.

Predeterminants to Change



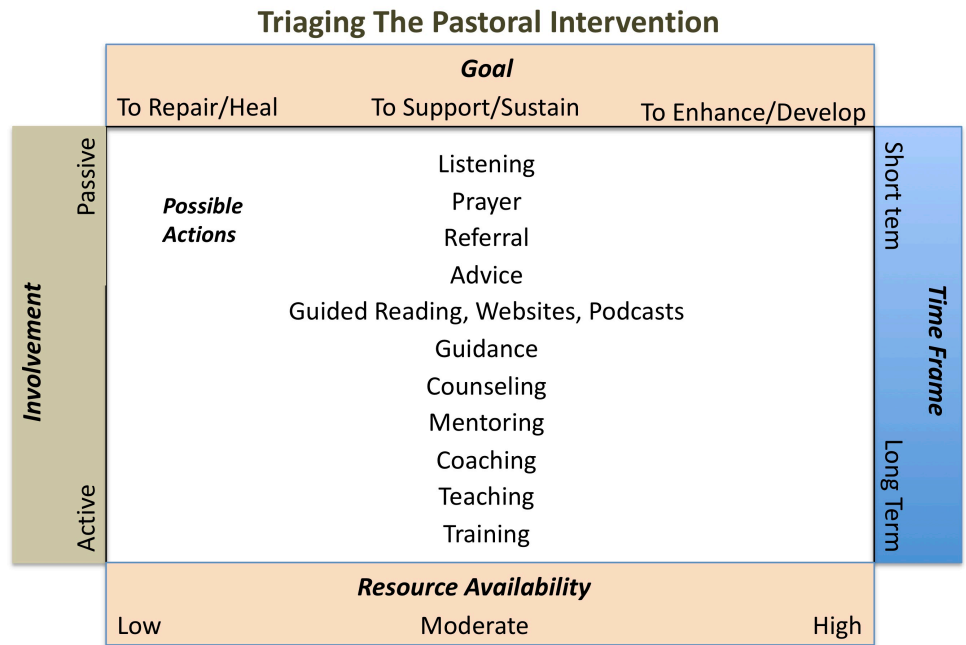
As part of any diagnostic effort, a pastoral counselor would be wise to conduct a “Predeterminants to Change” analysis to strengthen the change effort’s chance of succeeding.

It’s About the Plan

Having been approached by someone seeking help, and having assessed where and how I could help, as well as their readiness to accept help, I would attempt to gather my thoughts into a plan.

It is a lesson that is clear from both the course readings, as well as from my experience, that any human intervention has a better chance to succeed if one has a plan, even if only an informal one. The act of planning lays out a course of action that can be reviewed and communicated with the person to gain his or her endorsement and increase the likelihood of active participation. There may

be many ways to do this. It could be a formally defined written plan or even an informal “back of the napkin” plan but I suggest in any case the plan will need to address several key considerations:



- **What is the goal?** As I stated before, having clarity about what is expected to be achieved, is the starting point. Is the goal to heal something that is broken? Or is it to help sustain an aspect of their life that they like but may need a refresh or guidance to maintain? Or is it the person asking to develop into something greater and better?
- **What is the expected time frame/duration of the effort?** Is this effort something that will be of short duration: e.g. a few conversations? Or will it take a long-term commitment? What can reasonably be accomplished in the time allotted?
- **What level of involvement can I reasonably offer?** The pastor must also be a willing participant in the intervention. Interventions can take time and will thus need to be accommodated within the larger field of other pastoral commitments. It may also take an emotional toll. If this effort will be a very active and involved case, is it only fair and just to me, but mostly to the person, that I realistically assess what I can give to it. A similar consideration is how much can the person commit to this effort given their other commitments? The plan would need to clarify: “If I do this, will you do that?”
- **Are there other resources available?** In addition to, or instead of being directly involved, are there other people or organizations or tools that can help the person in need. Perhaps these

will be even more effective. What will it take to engage them and is their engagement feasible? One example comes to mind, of a highly effective yet highly underused resource that I would recommend to those involved in pastoral care. It is a program called an *Employee Assistance Program* or EAP. EAPs are often available to those persons who are participants in a group healthcare plan (e.g. an employer benefit program). To the extent the issue involves areas such as psychological, social or financial concerns, the Employee Assistance Program has many resources at its disposal. Almost all group healthcare plans offer EAPs. These are staffed with intake professionals, who are usually available on a 24/7 basis via a toll free number, who can assess a person's needs and refer them to help that is covered by their plan or by other means. Pastors should know of these plans and how they work.

A good plan will be able to narrow down the universe of possible activities to those that are possible. Communicating the plan and getting buy-in from all involved is known as "contracting." A good plan then establishes accountability from all involved and provides a baseline from which the effort's success can be evaluated and adjustments made as needed. It defines the expectations and rights of all parties, including the right to provide frank and honest feedback as the relationship unfolds and new developments and information emerge. Finally all good contracts have a set term with a time specified at which the arrangement will end. It also defines a process whereby the arrangement may be prematurely terminated by either party.

As I studied for this paper, I came across a Slideshare presentation called "Models of Christian Counseling, Coaching and Pastoral Care" by Robert and Celia Munson. In it, they quote an author, Len Sperry MD, PhD. Although I have not read Dr Sperry's books in time for this paper, I intend to, based on what I found. They summarize Sperry's triaging of pastoral interventions based on the person's needs. I found this useful.

What to Use?		
	Concern	Treatment
I	Relationship with God, prayer and prayer problems, spiritual practices, discernment regarding spiritual experiences, spiritual emergencies	Spiritual Direction
II	Issues involving the meaning and purpose of life, discernment regarding major life decisions, issues involving self-development.	Spiritual Direction, Pastoral Care/Counseling
III	Moral/ethical issues involving oneself; moral and/or ethical issues involving relationships; moral and/or ethical issues involving work or social justice	Philosophical Counseling
IV	Losses/grieving, relational conflicts, work, family, self imbalances, work/school problems, failed expectations, mild to moderate symptoms or impairment.	Pastoral Counseling
V	Moderate to severe symptoms or impairments, characterological or personality-disordered behavior, addictions, sequelae of early life trauma	Psychological Counseling, Psychotherapy

-Source: Len Sperry

It's About God

Jesus came as the Good Shepherd. When He gave Peter and the Apostles the command to “Feed My Sheep...Feed My lambs” (John 21:16), he appointed them as shepherds to henceforth care for his people as he had done. The word "pastor" in fact, derives from the Latin noun *pastor* which means “shepherd” and is in turn, derived from the verb *pascere* – "to lead to pasture, set to grazing, cause to eat". It implies that a Pastor is to be concerned for and give watchful attention to the feeding, wellbeing and growth of the flock. What makes this form of care and counseling “Pastoral” then is that the healing, guiding, sustaining, liberating, enabling, empowering reconciling and nurturing are all done in the name of, because of, and with the active help of Jesus. The ultimate goal of any pastoral care intervention is to deepen the person’s relationship with Christ.

Jesus is about healing and making whole. Depending on the translation one uses, words relating to “healing” can be found about 130 times in the Gospels. Add to that the healing miracles of the apostles and it is clear that all of us, as fellow pastors, are called to do the same. Beyond that, we are then called to help people grow in the love and service of God. We are called to grow to perfection in grace with the help of the Spirit.



In practical terms, this means that I should seek to infuse pastoral care interactions with invitations to join in prayer, and to encourage a fuller participation in the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, to ask for God’s help. It also means using references from the Scriptures and other spiritual writers to help provide insight, while also recommending such readings to the person and encouraging them to pray that the Holy Spirit opens them to His promptings and guidance. All of this is to provide solace and strength along the journey.

For some, especially the more traditional Catholics, pointing them to a special devotion such as saying the *Memorare* or petitioning for the intercession of St. Jude for causes that seem impossible would provide welcome hope. Pope Francis has a special devotion to Our Lady the

Undoer of Knots, that appeals to Mary as the one who can undo impossible issues. Mary, the humble, faithful, obedient handmaiden of the Lord, undoes the knots and difficulties of life caused by the pride, unfaithfulness and disobedience of Eve.

All of this then, is the proper domain of pastoral care.

Case Study

After Sunday Liturgy I was approached by a man, whose name was Jack. He was a first time visitor to your parish. He asks if you are able to hear his confession and you agree. Most of what he tells you as matter for his confession is pretty simple stuff. He states that he neglects his daily prayers, is sometimes impatient with his wife, occasionally abusing alcohol, etc. Only at the end of the narrative does he tell you that he believes he has committed the “sin against the Holy Spirit” and therefore cannot be forgiven. On asking him why he believes this is so he tells you that as an adolescent he confessed to masturbation several times but “I had no firm purpose of amendment.” He believes that this constituted a “sacrilege” and a sin for which he had never been forgiven. This led him to believe that he had doubted the forgiveness of God and therefore had sinned “against the Holy Spirit.”

As a confessor you reassure him that God forgives him and you give him absolution. He seems relieved and grateful.

The man attends regularly Sunday Liturgy at your parish and asks after mass if you would be willing to be his spiritual director. You agree to provide direction for him and as weeks go by the man begins to call you regularly, sometimes as much as five times in a single day. He is very grateful for your care and concern for him but always returns to the same theme, that he has committed the “unforgivable sin.” Over time you learn that he also has trouble relaxing and letting go of other things he worries about. He sometimes has to return to his house several times on a workday to see if he has turned off the gas range. He sometimes believes he may have hit a pedestrian with his car on his way to work even though there is never any evidence that he has. “I just get this idea that I might have hit someone and I have to go back to check.” He takes three or four times as he retraces his route just to make sure he has not hit anyone.

Commentary

To be totally honest, I’d not have entered into the “Spiritual Director” arrangement without following my own above-described methodology a bit more closely.

In the confessional space, the setting is more *ad hoc* with no time to prepare, and so I would have behaved as the “me” in the case study is described. But in addition to the assurance of God’s mercy and absolution, I would have added that Jack seems to me to be a sincere guy who is trying to develop a meticulously perfect relationship with God. I would have said to Jack that I was hearing him describe a view of God as a wrathful judge who requires perfect contrition every time, for every human failing however minor.

I would ask him to consider how Jesus referred to His Father as *Abba* and ask Jack if he knew what that term meant. I’d explain that it is best translated as “Daddy” or “Pop.” Would a God who is our Dad, be as mean so as to accuse a young man of an unforgivable sin about something that every young man does as part of his basic maturing as a sexual being? If he himself was a Dad or had a good relationship with his own Dad, I’d ask him to think about how the Dad in himself or in his own Dad would react.

For his Penance I'd ask him to meditate on the idea of God as his Dad, who loves him beyond measure, and not as a wrathful, harsh judge. I'd ask him to say the Lord's prayer each day, but substitute whatever word of endearment he used with his own Dad, or that his kids use with him for "Father" and see if the prayer felt differently.

I am assuming that in the form of Reconciliation Jack and I had, I was able to know who Jack was. So when Jack approached me with his request for on-going spiritual direction, I'd have our confessional experience as a data point. Upon his request I'd tell him how honored I was that he sought me out and ask him to meet so that we could define what exactly he wanted from our relationship.

In the meeting, I'd do my best to assess his readiness for development and get some sense if the areas he wanted to explore were within my competence. I'd then commit to getting back to him with a high level plan for going forward. When we met to discuss the plan, I'd be clear about when and how we would meet, and about what we needed to expect from one another.

As time went on and his unusual compulsive behavior became more and more evident, I'd ask him to meet with me. In that meeting, I'd describe what I was now seeing and how it was affecting me. I'd gently describe, as his friend and confidant, that I saw parts of his behavior that came across as unhealthy and that could lead to bigger issues. I'd ask him how he sees his need to retrace steps and go back over and over to make sure things were OK. The fact that he has described these behaviors would indicate to me he knows something is not normal. "Jack. I want to ask you to take a very courageous step and let me find you someone who can help. I respect you too much to pretend that issues like these are within my competence to handle but there are people out there who can."

I'd hope he would agree, and then continue to support him in finding an appropriate resource to deal with his compulsiveness. Perhaps his EAP can help.

I'd also ask him if he could try to limit the times he called me. Instead, when he feels the urge to call, or to go back and double check something, I'd suggest he stop and pray for peace of mind instead. Psalm 116 comes to mind: "Return to your rest, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you."

Lastly, while evolving the plan to help Jack, I cannot let him feel abandoned or guilty. Frequent follow up and expression of care must continue. With God's help he will discover peace.

Final Thoughts

In his book *The Church and The Homosexual*, Jesuit Father John McNeil who was a practicing psychotherapist in New York City with a largely gay clientele, found himself in a dilemma. As a Catholic priest he had to advise his patients of the Church's condemnation of their lifestyle. But

as a mental health professional he also had to deal with the self-destructive consequences of this same teaching. He came to the conclusion that any theology that was causing this much pain, was very bad theology, and that it was itself sinful to continue to preach it. He reached out to theologians and scriptural scholars within his Jesuit community and wrote his seminal book that blew up the Church's teaching, at least insofar as it offered alternative interpretations to scriptures heretofore used to justify the condemnation of gays. He also took apart many of the elements of church Tradition that did the same.

He then turned his pastoral attention to the overt care of gay people. He began support groups and was one of the founders of Dignity, a community of peace, liturgy and support for homosexual Catholics. John McNeil eventually had to leave the Jesuits and the priesthood, but will be forever revered by countless souls to whom he gave hope by holding forth God's love for them, where before there was nothing but hate. I was one of those souls. Father McNeil is an example for me, of how I believe pastoral care should work.

If the mission of the church is to spread the Good News of God's love and salvation and to make disciples of all nations, I see pastoral care as one of the four core pillars of the priestly role in fulfilling that mission. The four pillars are:

- ❖ The Ministry of the Eucharist and other Sacraments
- ❖ The Shepherding of the Christian Institutional Community
- ❖ Preaching the Gospel and Evangelization
- ❖ Pastoral Care & Counseling

In the first, the priest leads the people in prayer and provides spiritual nourishment for its life. In the second, the priest guides the living structures that comprise the Mystical Body of Christ. In the third, the priest instructs in God's Word and challenges growth toward better discipleship.

But it is in the fourth area, Pastoral Care, that the priest adapts Christ's message and love to each individual and thus offers him or her hope on a personal level. I pray that I become worthy of this awesome responsibility. In doing so, I sincerely hope I do my old Italian Aunts and Uncles proud.

Bibliography

Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 1954

Paul Pruyser, *The Minister as Diagnostician*, 1976

Douglas McGregor, Joel Cutcher-Gershenfeld, *The Human Side of Enterprise, Annotated Edition*, McGraw Hill Professional, 2006

Robert H. Munson, ThD Celia P. Munson, M.Div., BCPC , *Models of Christian Counseling, Coaching, and Pastoral Care* By Bukal Life Care, 2014

John J. McNeil S.J., *The Church and The Homosexual*, 1976

Howard Clinbell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 2011

A.W. Richard Sipe & Clarence J. Rowe, Editors, *Psychiatry, Ministry & Pastoral Counseling*, 1984