

Pastors & Counsellors in Consultation

Background:

Shalom Counselling is committed to being a resource to the faith community. This would include support of pastors as they minister in our congregations. The role of ministry is complex and multi-faceted. Pastors find themselves involved in a myriad of situations that call for much wisdom as they seek to respond to people in need.

Shalom staff strive to be available to pastors to support them in their ministry. Shalom staff have also pondered if there are additional ways to support pastors that include a “preventive” or “health promoting” component, in addition to responding to pastors’ requests for help in times of challenge.

Shalom counsellors support pastors in a variety of ways:

- Pastors regularly refer people for counselling services at Shalom.
- Pastors contact Shalom staff for consultation pertaining to challenging situations that they face within the congregation. The role of consultation is to provide feedback, perspective, and problem-solving, which enables the pastor to obtain the clarity and direction that they need to proceed.
- Pastors contact Shalom for personal counselling. The work of ministry impacts a pastor’s sense of self and at times their well-being. Issues faced in the context of church dynamics and in providing pastoral care may tap into agenda from a pastor’s personal experience. Pastors seek counselling to address issues of their own healing so that they can continue to minister from a place of deeply rooted personal and spiritual health.

Taking things a Step Further:

In the process of meeting with ministerial clusters in the fall of 2010, pastors named their appreciation of the ways that Shalom counsellors have supported them in their ministry. In one cluster this was discussed at length and the question was raised as to whether Shalom staff would consider running pastoral consultation groups for pastors.

This idea prompted significant energy from both pastors and Shalom staff. Further conversation with both pastors and leadership staff at Mennonite Church Eastern Canada has confirmed that there is interest in developing pastoral consultation groups.

A proposal:

The above considerations have prompted the development of this draft plan for consideration of a consultation group for pastors entitled: *Pastors & Counsellors in Consultation*

Purpose & Goals:

The group is intended to offer a place for pastors to reference with other pastoral colleagues and a mental health professional regarding issues that they are facing in the context of their ministry role.

The intended goal would be to create a safe context for referencing with others regarding areas of uncertainty or challenge. The uniqueness of this model brings together both the wisdom of pastoral colleagues and the unique perspective of a mental health professional in one setting. It is assumed that the synergy of this meeting together will provide value added beyond meeting with a colleague or a counsellors on one's own. The mix of ideas from other church experiences in combination with the mental health perspective will provide a holistic context for problem-solving and support.

Format & Structure:

This group will be run as a pilot project. A format and structure will be proposed that allows for flexibility for the group to modify and shape the group as it evolves. The process will also involve an evaluative component at the close of the group, allowing participants to provide feedback as a group and individually. This feedback will create a context for future groups.

The group will be facilitated by a Shalom counsellor. For the pilot stage this will be either the Executive Director or the Clinical Director as they have provided the majority of consultation to pastors, and would thus be very comfortable in facilitating this group. The facilitator will shape "agendas" for the group meeting and will serve as the contact person for group members who wish to bring a case study to the group.

The counsellor will act as both facilitator and resource provider. It is intended that the group meetings will include opportunity for case sharing, reflections on pastoral role in challenging contexts (use of self) and educational input. The group is not intended to be a course or workshop, but when themes emerge from the group that identify the need for further education, this will be researched and provided by the Shalom counsellor.

The group will be run with clearly defined parameters that would include clarity regarding confidentiality and norm-setting to ensure the comfort and trust of group participants. The group will also allow time for personal check-in regarding the well-being of group participants and the opportunity to name pressing issues for discussion that were not submitted

Time Frame/Duration

The group will run once/month for two hours. It will meet four times. This time frame is suggested as a way for group participants to test the value of their participation, without making a lengthy commitment.

The possibility to extend the group meeting time will be determined in conjunction with group members at the end of the group. If a group connects well and is able to make solid use of the group consultation format, consideration will be given to ongoing meeting times; perhaps spaced further apart.

Number of Group Participants:

Five to seven participants, plus the Shalom Counsellor is considered the ideal size. This would allow for a variety of perspectives and would allow for sufficient group process if one or more members is not able to attend.

Where to from here:

The two pilot groups were completed in the winter of 2012. Based on positive feedback from the pilot groups, consideration is being given to running additional groups. Funding is being explored to support this initiative.

Please contact admin@shalomcounselling.org if you wish more information or would like to be placed on a waiting list for future groups.