

Counseling in the church



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Introduction Christian counseling has been conducted since the origin of Christianity. Even in biblical times counseling was a part of the churches spiritual life and development. In the Pauline epistles it is clear that God ordained and approved church based counseling.

Paul states in Romans 15: 14: " I myself am convinced; my brothers that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct (counsel) one another". Like the pagan nations of the time, Christianity also addressed grief and sin. (Deadlocked-Haynes, 2010) There is a need for Christian counseling in today's church. The need stems for a larger social, cultural, and professional dynamic. In Christ centered soul care, the church is the primary place where healing, growth and healthy relationships take place. Christ centered soul care views hurt as a soul wound.

It means making connections instead of just skilled talking. The impact of care and maturity of the counselor outweighs the techniques used. Soul care incorporates the belief that God is the ultimate healer. Soul care goes beyond psychotherapy into spiritual transformation and discipleship.

Psychotherapy has its place but should be done in adjudication to the work of the church. (Clinton ; Leaseholder, 2002) Major Themes Pastoral

Counseling The term pastoral comes from the Bible; it is the human effort of man responding to Gods call to care. (Bock, 2007) It is God ordained for " some to be pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, to which all come to the

unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4: 11-13) Pastors are essential to the success of today's church. The preaching and teaching, as well as pastoral counseling transforms lives. Pastoral counseling is not separate but is an extension of preaching. (Clinton & Leaseholder, 2002)

People who are in the church hurting need a pastor whose shepherding is in line of that of the Good Shepherd. In the Bible Paul appointed loving shepherds everywhere he planted a church. Specific duties for them were outlined. As pastors counsel their flock, their approach should be Christ centered and have a strong theological structure based in love. (Chosen & Diabolism, 2007) Lay Counselors There is an ever increasing role of paraprofessional counselor. The increases have been seen both nationally and internationally.

There is a significant need limitations of mental health benefits, has raised the need for paraprofessional services. Paraprofessional counselors are those counselors, who have not been formally trained in or credentialed in mental health, yet facilitate mental health care to those who are hurting.

Paraprofessional counselors also known as lay counselors operate in such settings as hotlines, peer counseling, client's homes, and within church-based ministries (Garçon ; Tillie, 2009). It is increasingly difficult in today's church for a pastor to facilitate all counseling within the church.

There is a pressing need today for paraprofessional counselors in the church. Within the church paraprofessional counselors are commonly referred to as lay counselors. All Christians are given the biblical mandate to care for one another. Galatians 6: 2 challenges Christians to carry each other's burdens,

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and in doing so the law of Christ will be fulfilled. For those who have been given the spiritual gift of exhortation the call is even louder. Scripture illuminates the priesthood in all believers (2 Peter 2: 5). Believers are to minister one to another.

Lay counseling is a key ministry within the church. The use of lay counselors has scriptural basis, and proven effective through research. (Dry. Tan, 2013) There are three models commonly used by lay counselors. The informal, spontaneous model supports in naturally occurring settings through informal relationships such as friendships. This type of lay counselor may or may not have training. The second model, the informal organized model, lay professionals help in natural settings, but they have training and are supervised. The third model is the formal organized model.

With the formal organized model counseling is conducted in an official setting, the counselor is supervised, and the counselor has received training. There are hybrid models that incorporate the informal organized and formal organized models (Garçon ; Tillie, 2009). Incorporating A Counseling Ministry Within the Church Dry. Slang-Yang Tan the editor of the Journal for Psychology and Christianity suggest our steps to follow to incorporate counseling ministries within a church. 1. Decide the appropriate model for counseling. To incorporate lay counseling as a ministry the choice is between informal, organized and formal, organized models.

In larger churches, both models are incorporated at times. Having the ability to incorporate both models gives, different levels of care, appealing to different clients. Some cultures have a stigma against formalized counseling.

Within a church where this stigma may be present the informal organized model may be deemed more appropriate. 2. Obtain support from both the pastoral staff and churches board. To be sure that the foundations for counseling are laid securely; full support from the pastoral staff and church board is a must.

Counseling ministries should be viewed as an extension of pastoral care, and vital to the health and development of the church. 3. Selection and screening of persons who are gifted and qualified from the congregation. Person can be recruited openly or privately. Open recruitment involves an announcement to the congregation, and taking applicants. Closed recruitment involves the churchleadershipnominating candidates. No matter the selection process candidates should be interviewed and trained. Selection should be done after interviewing and training is complete. 4.

Establish an effective training program normally incorporate basic listening and helping skills. It is also recommended that the training program includes, Bible knowledge as it relates to people helping, counseling skills, common problems likedepressionand spiritual dryness. An effective training program also incorporates ethics, and addressing ethical dilemmas. Lay counselors should be given instructions on how to obtain informed consent with linens. 5. Establish ministries for using lay counselors. The specific ministries established for care using lay counselors will depend on the models chosen by the church.

There should be continuous training and supervision for lay counselors. If the church has the resources the training should be conducted by licensed

mental health professionals or at a minimum by an experienced pastor or church leader who has such knowledge. Some state laws may not allow the use of the term lay counselor due to licensing laws for paraprofessional counselors. In this instance other terms may be used for example lay helpers or lay caregivers (Dry. Tan, 2013). Individual Counseling Within the church setting one on one counseling is often conducted.

Using one framework, the counselor helps the client connect with God who ultimately changes the client. In this framework God is invited in and God is the one primarily changing the client. Through God the client moves closer to their goals, and deepens their relationship with God. The dynamics of individual counseling are similar when the counselor is a clinician, a pastor, or a lay counselor. (Clinton ; Leaseholder, 2002) Premarital Counseling Religious policymaking has increased opportunities for development of marriage counseling. 0% of couples that receive marriage counseling use clergy. 75 to 80% of first weddings occur within a church, or other religious structure. This gives clergy access to couples, as well as the power to set minimum marriage requirements within religious institutions. Clergy having the power to set permissions to marry, have a captive audience. Couples will submit to counseling as a means to get married. There are few couples who voluntarily seek pre-marital counseling. (Wilhelm, 2006) Clergy have less influence over couples once they are married.

About half of married couples would consider relationship education such as classes or workshops. The influence of clergy is greater, when he or she is deemed morally sound. Clergy have an unparalleled opportunity to facilitate premarital counseling. The number of organizations that actually provide

premarital counseling is lacking. Less than half of the religious organizations provide premarital counseling services. (Wilhelm, 2006) The most helpful topics in premarital counseling are family of origin, finances, communication and conflict resolution, and sex roles and sexuality.

All couples must solve or develop the skills to resolve issues relating to the aforementioned. Premarital counseling should not consist primarily of lectures. An effective program begins 6 to 12 months prior to the wedding. There should also be follow-up counseling after the wedding. (Wilhelm, 2006) Group Counseling Four out of every 10 Americans are part of small organized groups that meets it is an enriching experience. Such groups occur in settings such as treatment facilities, churches, counseling centers, schools, and in the business world.

Groups are also prevalent in the field of mental health. Wencches groups are constructed there are clear specifications of guidelines, number of sessions, and cost. Churches are primary components of small groups. Churches give small group opportunities, and are meeting needs of people in a variety of ways. These groups can include Bible studies, and support group as well as lay or professional counseling groups (Clinton ; Leaseholder, 2002).

Counseling and psychotherapy groups are two types of groups that meet within churches. Counseling groups focus on interpersonal problem-solving skills.

They also incorporate, support methods using a here and now framework. On the other hand psychotherapy groups are established to reduce psychological or emotional dysfunction. These groups explore antecedents to

behaviors using both interpersonal and interpersonal assessment, diagnosis, and interpretation. Historical and present material also are connected. Both groups focus primarily on the needs of the individual members. There is a leader in both types of groups who facilitates, teaches or counsels (Clinton ; Leaseholder, 2002).

One therapeutic model used for Christian group therapy is The Healing Cycle. This model is used in interpersonal process therapy groups. The core mechanism for change in this model is interpersonal interaction. The healing cycle is compatible with a Christian worldview, and incorporates Scripture at each step of the process. It also includes theoretical orientation, the most prevalent of which is cognitive behavioral and interpersonal theories. The healing cycle consists of six phases which are grace, safety, vulnerability, truth, ownership, and confession.

In the final phase it further incorporates grace and the cycle continues. (Hook ; Hook, 2010) Ethical Issues The church has been infected by the societal shift to post-modernism, and post- Christianity. In today's church acts of negligence are ever present. Wrong doing is no longer accidental but intentional. Sexual misconduct, abuse of power, and other forms of exploitation are prevalent. The cause of Christ suffers, and Christianity name is slandered, because of these dreadful acts. There needs to be a renewed pursuit to uphold biblical and ethical standards within the church.

Congregants still hold fast to the belief that church leadership can be trusted; therefore the standard of excellence and integrity cannot be compromised (Clinton & Leaseholder, 2002). Ethics is defined as " the study

of standards of conduct and moral judgment and the system or code of moral conduct of a particular person, religion, group or profession" by Webster New World Dictionary. A code of ethics outlines standards of behavior for particular group. The focal group for the American Association of Christian Counselors (AAC) code of ethics is Christian counselors (Clinton & Leaseholder, 2002).

Ethical decision making and subsequently ethical codes are based on three views: divine revelation formulating moral absolutes, radical individualism creating moral relativism and social constructs which produces moral conscience (Clinton & Leaseholder, 2002). In the past most ethical systems were biblically based. This view undeniably viewed God's Word as truth, therefore His statutes were power to submit to this law could be obtained through a relationship with Jesus Christ (Clinton & Leaseholder, 2002). The view of the AAC code of ethics is derived from biblical principles.

Christian counselors ascribe to Christianity, and thus should have no problem conforming to ethical standards (Clinton & Leaseholder, 2002). Counselors face ethical dilemmas. When ethical dilemmas arise, a standard ethical decision making process should be employed (American Counseling Association, 2005). It is important to deliberately engage in the decision making process. There is no decision making model that has been proven more effective over another. Counselors need to be familiar with at least one, or a combination of several.

Ethical decision making is not always a clear cut process, but emotion effect decisions made as well. One model recommended which incorporates

consideration of cultural differences, principles of altruism, and caring. 1 . Identify the problem. . Identify issues that are surrounding the problem. 3. Review ethics codes pertaining to the problem. 4. Have a working know of laws and regulations. 5. Obtain consultation. 6. Outline possible course of action. 7. Weigh the consequence of various decisions. 8. Chose best option (Corey, Corey, & Callahan, 2011) The modern day pastor lives in controversial world.

There is a rise of malpractice suits against the clergy. There needs to be clearly defined ethical accountability within the arena of church counseling. Many states do not require clergy to be licensed in the field of unseeing, as long as they are operating within a theological framework, and serve under a legitimate religious organization, body or denomination (Pain, 2010). The Practice of Pastoral Care by Carrie Doddering outlines three major ethics issues faced by clergy. These issues are prevalent within church counseling.

1. Limits of confidentiality.

Clergy fall in to the group of mandated reporters. Clergy members who counsel must report sexual abuse or neglect when it involves children or the elderly. Clergy members are also required to protect sensitive information about clients (Doddering, 2006). 2. Sexual misconduct. There is a power dynamic within counseling. Because of this power dynamic the client cannot authenticate consent to a sexual relationship with the counselor. Without authentic consent this type of relationship is viewed as coercive in nature. (Doddering, 2006) 3. Limits of expertise.

Long-term counseling should not be conducted by a pastor unless they have been trained in pastoral counseling. Pastoral caregivers should only practice within the limit of expertise. (Doddering, 2006) Four other areas of ethical concerns within church counseling are pastoral identity, referral, integrity, and boundary limit. Within all these areas malpractice can occur. In regards to clergy malpractice is negligent counseling within the realm of spiritual counseling practice. Another definition of malpractice is negligence in executing professional duties.

In this definition of negligence implies the counselor not fulfilling their duty and subsequently harming the client. Ethics goes beyond the minimum requirement set forth by law, ethics acts as a buffer. When ethical standards are viewed the Bible supports counseling within the church. In Christ centered soul care theology and biblical principles are at the center. Christian counselors should consider theological perspectives while simultaneously engaging in the psychological task of counseling. Biblical understanding is essential to counseling.

To be an effective Christian counselor it is important to incorporate theology, psychology, and spirituality. James 5: 16 says "confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" within the Bible they are more than 60 one another Scriptures that given instructions for the care of believers. (Clinton & Leaseholder, 2002) Personal Reflection Philippians Chapter 3: 3 Paul admonished believer that we the circumcision of God, which worship Him in spirit and have no confidence in the flesh.

There are many ideas, concepts, and frameworks, ideologies, and so forth, but without a firm rooted foundation those things may pass away. The only thing that will stand is the Word of God. Through the Word lives are impacted and change can take place. I have seen demonstration of the power of God through my own life. No matter the road God leads me to on my Journey to help others, I will hold fast to the Word of God. I may acclimate care in an arena, where spirituality, and religion cannot be openly discussed.