



PASTORAL CARE SPECIALIST OVERVIEW

The United States is in the midst of a drug epidemic, which is harming people with substance use disorders and their families at an unprecedented rate. Mental healthcare is a hot political topic, yet the demand for care far outpaces what our professional systems of care currently provide. Societal awareness of various kinds of traumatic experiences (from combat to domestic violence to mass shootings to environmental catastrophes) is improving, but our awareness doesn't prevent such experiences from happening, and the support needs that arise in their wake are considerable.

Clergy and other kinds of pastoral caregivers often find themselves on the front lines of these issues. The people they care for often seek spiritual consultation before exploring more formalized or issue-specific professional support. The *Association for Clinical Pastoral Education* presents its *Pastoral Care Specialist (PCS)* training program, which offers clergy, chaplains, lay leaders, and allied professional caregivers of faith an opportunity to deepen both their knowledge of the kinds of concerns around which people seek pastoral care and their own formation in ministry.

Components of the *Pastoral Care Specialist* training program include didactic seminars on a variety of topics of importance for people providing pastoral or spiritual care, case consultations, small group exercises, large group discussion, case vignette study, role play, devotional/prayer components, and written reflections. Some facilitators may want to assign outside reading as well. A list of suggested readings is included herein.

The course is divided into a series of topics presented as modules. The module structure is used to offer flexibility for facilitators. Some PCS programs run as a monthly day-long retreat where multiple modules are covered. Other programs have run in weekly three or four-hour blocks, so that only one module is covered per session.

✳ Contributing Authors

- Aaron Pawelek, LICSW, M.T.S. (Co-Chair)
- Tres Adames, M.Div., BCPC (Co-Chair)
- Laurence Heckscher, M.Psy., Th.M., D.Min.
- John Mokkalosian, M.Div., D.Min.
- Dawn Stary, M.A.
- Minna Graban Davis, M.A., NPP, LCC
- Rhonda MacLeod, M.Div., D.Min.

✳ Topic Areas

Pastoral Theology: Our Images of Spiritual Care

This module is an overview of the development of the tradition of pastoral care with emphasis on some key figures in the field and their ways of understanding what it means to provide such care.

Ethics of Pastoral Care

The PCS is faced with many difficult decisions while providing care. What happens when two values or rights come into conflict with each other? This module familiarizes participants with the Code of Ethics of what was formerly the *American Association of Pastoral Counselors* (now a part of ACPE), which helps provide a framework for navigating ethical conflicts.

Marriage and Family Issues in Systemic Perspective

The family is our society's primary unit of organization. This module explores ways of understanding the family system and supporting it to respond in healthy ways to difficult circumstances. Here we also introduce the genogram construct and spend time exploring each participant's family of origin.

Pastoral/Spiritual Assessment and Diagnosis

Whereas the fields of medicine and psychiatry largely dictate how we understand personal problems, practitioners of faith learn how to use their theological understanding of the person to formulate and provide appropriate care.

Listening in the Service of Healing

The primary skill of the PCS is their capacity to listen well. This workshop supports the development of deep and reflective listening skills.

Grief, Loss, and Resilience

The experience of grief and loss may be the most common reason a person might seek pastoral or spiritual care. This module provides an overview of what we know about grief and how we can support the strengthening of resilient factors in care-receivers' lives

Mental Health and the Role of the Faith Community

This module describes some of the more commonly recognized mental health conditions and offers ethically sound ways the PCS can support people who come to them with mental health concerns. Here we also consider the Pastoral Care Specialist's faith community and how they may assist that community in becoming more knowledgeable, welcoming, and supportive of people with mental health conditions.

Trauma-Informed Pastoral Care

This module is very similar to the mental health and substance abuse modules, paying close attention to the experience of trauma, how we understand it, and what the Pastoral Care Specialist can do to support someone who has experienced something traumatic.

Understanding and Responding Effectively to Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is widespread in our communities. Through the use of a number of different vignettes, PCS participants will study the range of manifestations of domestic violence and think together about how they will respond when encountering such situations in their own ministries and relationships.

Substance Abuse, Addiction, and the Role of the Faith Community

This is a three-part module. Part One is an overview of substance use disorders with ideas for how to recognize and understand them. Part Two reviews the levels of care found in most communities, and then provides instruction in some brief counseling methods to assist the PCS in speaking effectively with people with substance use disorders and their families. Part Three is a workshop that provides the opportunity for the PCS to consider their personal faith background and community, and grow in their

knowledge, ability, and skills in working as a support to people with substance abuse disorders and their families.

✳ **Components**

Didactic Presentations

Facilitators will use the prepared PowerPoint presentations to convey important information about each topic. These presentations will include a mixture of lecture, group exercises and discussions, reflections on case vignettes related to the topic, and role-play scenarios related to the topic. Descriptions of each kind of activity are offered in the directions for each module.

Peer Process Groups

Facilitators will devote time to support peer process: group development among the participants, communal pastoral/spiritual reflection, and sharing of self-reflection for participants will center around how their ministries are growing and changing in response to the material they are learning. Facilitators will note that Peer Process Groups are not written into individual module scheduling as presented here. As these modules are designed in 3-hour blocks, we have found that the amount of material needing to be covered prohibits including the peer process component in that amount of time. Below, we will address how to structure peer process time.

Guiding Foci and Questions for Peer Process (Suggested)

A peer process group might typically begin with spending some time checking in, creating space for people to share happenings in their lives and ministries. Questions for further reflection may include:

- ▶ In what ways are you experiencing the Divine in your life and ministry these days?
- ▶ How is your personal theology reflected in the ministries in which you are engaged?
- ▶ How is your theology evolving?
- ▶ What are your spiritual practices?
- ▶ In what ways do you take care of yourself/engage in self-care?

Reflection on the Course Material and Educational Process

- ▶ What course topics are resonating with you?

- ▶ In what ways are you being/feeling challenged?
- ▶ How is your ministry growing or deepening as you move through this course?
- ▶ Share 2 or 3 things you've learned in the course so far that have been meaningful to you and elaborate about why this is so.
- ▶ Is the course meeting your needs? If not, what ideas do you have about how we can expand what we're doing to address those concerns?
- ▶ What do you like about our group interactions? What could be improved upon?

Religio-Philosophical Reflections

- ▶ How do you describe/define God or the Divine?
- ▶ How do you describe/define what a person is? (What is your theological anthropology?)
- ▶ How do you describe/define spirit? Soul?
- ▶ What is your understanding of the afterlife?
- ▶ What is your theology of care-giving?
- ▶ How does God or the Divine enter your life?
- ▶ In what ways do your views align with and diverge from that of the faith tradition to which you belong?

Spiritual Object Exercise

Ask participants to bring an object of spiritual value from their homes—one that they wouldn't mind letting other people hold. Construct an exercise where a participant shares their object with the group and explains its meaning and importance. The object could be passed around and each person can share how the object is inspiring or moving them. The same could be done with a reading or piece of scripture someone would like to contribute.

Sharing and Discussion of Written Reflections

Facilitators may want to have participants share some of their written reflections with the group and allow the group to respond.

Devotional/Prayer

We ground the work of the *Pastoral Care Specialist* training program in its faith roots. Each session starts and ends with a period of devotion and /or prayer. During

orientation, facilitators will create a schedule so that each participant will have an opportunity to provide such resources from their particular faith tradition during the course.

Case Consultation

Each session will include a presenter (one of the participants) bringing case material from their pastoral ministry. Typically, the person presenting will describe a person they have been providing care for by telling about the person, their situation, and the types of care they are providing. The presenter is expected to have particular questions and/or hopes that they would like addressed via the consultation: how they believe the consultation can be useful, what they would like to receive from the group, and where they are having difficulty. It is important for facilitators to allow participants to drive the discussion in ways that are meaningful for them. Facilitators should think of themselves as exactly that—one who helps the group stay focused and on-task, raising issues that seem pertinent if the group is not picking up on them, and encouraging them to access course learning in their discussions.

It is helpful to make a schedule for presentations in advance and for presenters to give some thought to the scheduled topic for the day they are presenting. Ideally, the issues in the case will relate to the topic for the day.

Writing Requirements

Participants will deepen their formation by writing reflectively on a regular basis while immersed in the course material. Facilitators may tailor the kind of writing they'd like their students to do based on the needs of that particular group. Some groups may resonate more strongly with open-ended reflective writing in the form of a journal. Other groups may do best with specific reflection assignments—for example, writing about their experience with or understanding of the next session's topic, or summarizing what they learned in the most recent session after that session's completion. Facilitators can use prompts specifically tailored to their participants' particular needs and learning objectives. Facilitators may also choose to offer a reading related to the forthcoming topic that participants would then read and offer a written reflection on the piece.

If facilitators choose to assign readings from the bibliography in order to enhance the information provided in the sessions, writing may also be used to reflect on the reading

that participants are asked to do.

✳ Suggested Reading

- ▶ Dykstra, R.C. (Editor) (2005), *Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings*, Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press.
- ▶ Friedman, Edwin H. (2011, 1994, 1985), *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, New York: The Guilford Press.
- ▶ Kornfeld, Margaret (2012, 2002, 2000, 1998), *Cultivating Wholeness: A Guide to Care and Counseling in Faith Communities*, New York: Continuum.
- ▶ Lartey, Emmanuel (2003, 1997), *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, London & New York: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- ▶ Miller, W.R. & Jackson, K. (1985), "Practical Psychology for Pastors: Toward More Effective Counseling", Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall.
- ▶ Patton, John (2015), *Pastor as Counselor: Wise Presence, Sacred Conversation*, Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- ▶ Richardson, Ronald W. (2005), *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family*, Fortress Press: Minneapolis
- ▶ Killen, P. & DeBeer, J. (1994) *The Art of Theological Reflection* New York: Crossroads Publishing Company.
- ▶ Savage, John S. (1996) *Listening and Caring Skills in Ministry: A Guide for Pastors, Counselors, and Small Groups*, Nashville: Abingdon Press.