

# “Incredibly helpful” pastoral supervision plans get green light

Judy Adamson

*Church* workers in the Diocese will be required to undertake regular pastoral supervision following the passage of the Pastoral Supervision Ordinance on the second Monday of Synod.

The Bishop of the South West Region, Peter Lin (right), said the bill had been brought to members in response to a request from Synod the previous year to prepare a proposal for mandatory supervision.

“The Royal Commission [into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse] recommends this as a measure for the protection of the vulnerable, but the research that we’ve looked at says it has enormous benefits for the wellbeing of ministers and gospel workers – such things as less feelings of isolation, less burnout, less stress and anxiety,” Bishop Lin said.

He added that a pilot study was undertaken to assess the benefits of pastoral supervision – involving rectors, assistant ministers, a bishop and female lay and ordained ministry workers.

Everyone in the study took part in six to 10 pastoral supervision sessions (some individual, some in groups) with trained supervisors.

To analyse the effectiveness of the supervision, those involved answered a range of questions. Bishop Lin said that “on the key question of was it helpful for ministry, 96 per cent of respondents were in the range of ‘agree’ to ‘strongly agree’” (see box, right, for more results).

“Our own research with our own people aligns with the other research across the world in this area: that pastoral supervision



is helpful for ministry and for wellbeing,” he said.

Giving a speech in support of the bill, lay member Jan Corbett-Jones spoke of her 18 years as a chaplain with Anglicare – where full-time staff are required to undertake pastoral supervision once a month – plus her work as a supervisor after achieving an MA in chaplaincy.

“I can say from both sides of the fence how absolutely, incredibly helpful it has been,” she told the Synod. “It’s not anything like coaching or mentoring... it’s a reflective practice.

“Clergy supervision will allow

clergy and church workers to reflect on what they do... in such a way that helps people not to react to situations, but to respond to situations. It’s a great learning tool for that.”

The director of Ministry Training and Development, the Rev Gary O’Brien, also spoke in support of the bill – recalling the weight of responsibility he had felt as a first-time rector and the ongoing “big decisions to be made” in ministry life.

“I realised the importance of finding someone who I could meet with regularly, someone who was a good listener, someone who would ask good questions, someone who would make me see things from different perspectives,” he said.

“I needed support. I needed somebody who cared, but I didn’t need a friend. I didn’t need a group of college buddies. I didn’t even need my wife in that way. What I needed was somebody who was more distant from my context, somebody who understood, but somebody who

was objective; somebody who wasn’t swayed by our friendship or relationship or history.

“And so, for the past 30 years, I’ve had someone just like that... I cannot describe how important that was in giving me perspective and thinking through what was happening.

“It was important for my personal life, but it was also important for the people that I was committed to serving. Because pastoral supervision is not just for the wellbeing of the minister but the wellbeing of the church. A healthy minister leads to a healthy church. An unhealthy minister leads to an unhealthy church.”

The bill passed with overwhelming support and without amendment.

Implementation of pastoral supervision to different groups of church workers will be staggered to allow for the approval/training of more pastoral supervisors, but for some could begin as early as next year. SC

## RATE YOUR EXPERIENCE



Regular pastoral supervision:

- was helpful for my ministry = **96pc**
- developed my ability to be reflective = **92pc**
- developed my ability to be self-aware = **92pc**
- enabled me to gain insight into my approach to ministry = **96pc**
- developed my ability to be resilient = **76pc**
- developed my ability to see things from others’ perspective = **96pc**
- provided an environment to be supported in ministry = **100pc**

Results show the percentage of diocesan church workers in a pastoral supervision pilot program who agreed or strongly agreed with the questions posed.