

What Pastoral Counseling is for Us At Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center

When people seek counseling for their problems, they want counselors who know something about how to help. Often, they also want counselors who are friendly to their values and who can help them to draw upon the spiritual resources that are so important to them personally. They want counselors with a high level of professional expertise, and they also want counselors to respect their beliefs and religious practices.

At Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center, we bring together the resources of behavioral science and of faith in professional counseling. We welcome clients from a wide variety of faith traditions, and we invite them to draw upon these resources as they cope with their problems.

What follows are some ideas about how pastoral counseling works for us and for our clients.

I

Like other professional counselors, our staff has received advanced training in the behavioral sciences. All have been licensed by the Commonwealth as Marriage and Family Therapists and/or as Professional Counselors, (except for residents, who usually are preparing to be licensed).

Our mission is to “provide professional counseling and consultation in a faith context.” Professional competence is an essential foundation of everything we do. The “faith context” requires that act on our good intentions with skill and wisdom, so that the clients entrusted into our care may benefit. We hold ourselves accountable to the same standards that apply to other mental health professionals.

II

Pastoral counseling provides the type of care that many people value. The American Association of Pastoral Counselors and the Samaritan Institute report the following results, which are drawn from questions appended to a national political survey of one thousand likely voters, conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Research from October 30-31, 2000. The margin of error is +/- 3.2 percent.

The research found that an overwhelming number of Americans recognize the close link between spiritual faith, religious values and mental health, and would prefer to seek assistance from a mental health professional who recognizes and can integrate spiritual values into the course of treatment.

- 83 percent feel their spiritual faith and religious beliefs are closely tied to their state of mental and emotional health.
- 75 percent of respondents say it is important to see a professional counselor who integrates their values and beliefs into the counseling process.
- 69 percent believe it to be important to see a professional counselor who represents spiritual values and beliefs if they had a serious problem that required counseling.
- 77 percent say it would be important for an elderly parent or relative who was in need of treatment to get assistance from a mental health professional who knew and understood their spiritual beliefs and values.
- More people mention pastoral counselors and others with religious training than any other professionals (29 percent).

These data also show a widely held belief that emotional well-being is closely linked with spiritual faith. Further results from this poll show that a fear exists on some level that mainstream counseling and therapy may not always take the the spiritual and emotional beliefs of patients seriously.

III

Contemporary pastoral counseling involves a process of drawing upon the treasures of faith and upon the resources of behavioral science in order to help people to do better in coping with emotional and relationship problems. Pastoral counselors are trained to consider the spiritual-religious dimension of life in general and of problems in living in particular. As they do this, they respect the spiritual-religious beliefs and practices of their clients, and do not try to impose their own beliefs on those who receive their care.

Pastoral counselors have advanced training in how behavioral science can be of help. For this reason, pastoral counselors can assist people with marital and family problems, anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, work related problems, complicated bereavement, etc., as well as with spiritual issues such a crisis of faith or feelings of doubt, shame, or guilt. When clients wish to deal with their problems without discussing matters of faith, pastoral counselors are prepared to provide what behavior science can offer.

At Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center (PPCC) our regular staff are Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists and/or Licensed Professional Counselors. Some have a recognized competency in working with children and youth. Many counselors are providers for major health insurance companies. PPCC has a particular emphasis on framework for care that emphasizes family relationships.

Our pastoral counselors are ordained clergy or laity who are active in their churches. We see pastoral counseling as a way of being present with clients rather than as only a series of techniques. In pastoral counseling, spiritual-

religious resources and relationships are considered in terms of the particular issues that clients bring to counseling. This dimension may be discussed more or less often, depending on what a client needs at a particular time.

Pastoral counselors tend to see both the heritage of faith and the findings of behavioral science as gifts from the same God. The kind of practical wisdom seen in the Book of Proverbs often is paralleled in modern theories of counseling. The interaction between faith and behavioral science can provide a powerful channel for healing to occur.

IV

There is a continuum among three basic approaches to counseling. Many of the secular approaches see spiritual-religious issues as a symptom of other problems, as irrelevant, or as part of what's wrong. Secular therapists may be people of faith themselves, but may or may not have been trained to integrate the spiritual dimension into their model of care.

At the other extreme is the religious approach that starts with the spiritual-religious beliefs of the counselor. Clients typically are invited to adopt and apply the counselor's beliefs as ways to help with their problems.

An alternative to both of these approaches starts with the spiritual-religious beliefs of the client, when this is relevant for their issues. Then clients typically are invited to consider how their own spiritual-religious beliefs, practices, and community may help with their particular problems. This approach typically takes place when counselors see people from a variety of spiritual-religious backgrounds, as we do.

At PPCC, our counselors are from a range of Christian traditions. We tend to encourage dialogue between clients and the spiritual-religious leaders and communities of their choice. We see our role as being complementary to the role of the church, as clients seek to discern for themselves what God's guidance may be. Thus, we tend more toward the third alternative.

V

Relationships are important in human life. In times of trouble, relationships can be extremely valuable to help people to do better. People's relationship with God can be the most important of all. That's one reason why so many people want counseling that's open to consider their resources of their faith and their religious community.

At Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center, that's what we're about: helping people in their relationships with people and with God. We're partners with the various

churches of our various clients, respecting the proper role of the church in preaching and teaching, and providing the advanced levels of skill that pastoral counselors are trained to offer.

Our hope is that people do better with their problems. More than this, we hope that people may live more abundantly.

Pastor Carl A. Jensen, M. S. Ed.
Executive Director
Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center
707 Gum Rock Court
Newport News, VA 23606
757/873-2273