Chapter 5

The art of asking and presence: Authentic pastoral hospitality

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Introduction

Health and being healthy is the source of strength for life. Being healthy is more than just the absence of physical illness. Being healthy includes mental, social and spiritual well-being. The task of pastoral care and counselling includes meeting people in the spaces and places where they struggle to cope with the adversities that are part of life and make it difficult for them to live a healthy and whole life. Such pastoral care will include addressing lifestyle issues and environmental factors that affect people's health and well-being in the broadest sense.

Theories on asking and presence

In faith communities, the pastor cares for and counsels those who seek guidance and help. The quality of care and counselling is often influenced by the cultural context of the pastor. One such cultural expectation in the South African context is that the pastor, as a person with knowledge and status in the community, should 'give advice' to counselees.

In most societies across the globe and in Africa, men tend to have a higher social status than women (Mombo, 2020:221). In the context of faith communities that means that women largely occupy the pews and men occupy the pulpits. Mombo explains this male leadership as follows: 'Male leadership often depends on the use of power over people rather than power with people' (Mombo, 2020:228). When the point of departure of pastoral care and counselling is this 'power over'

position rather than a relationship of equals, the pastor will be seen as the one with the power and knowledge to decide and give advice on the lives of others.

In my experience as a pastor doing counselling with learners in the school's system, taking on the role of 'advice-giver' would not have been conducive to the effective care of those who come for counselling. It is in the art of asking them about their lives and listening to their experiences, that access can be gained to their story. In this way, they can be facilitated to find their own truths and path to healing. They can choose the lifestyle that is healthy and healing for them. The main aim of pastoral care and counselling is to empower people to have a voice.

The various images of pastors in pastoral care in the existing literature aim to position pastors in relation to counselees in such a way that the care is not perceived as 'power over', but rather as care focusing on the person's ability to tell, interpret and reinterpret their life story.

In his book, *Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings*, Robert Dykstra (2005) gives an overview, of pastoral models that describe this relationship. Dykstra distinguishes three types of care. The first type he calls the 'Classical Images of Care'. This includes Anton Boisen's 'The Living Human Document', Bonnie Miller McLemore's 'The Living Human Web', Seward Hiltner's metaphor of the 'Solicitous Shepherd', Alastair Campbell's 'Courageous Shepherd', and Jeanne Stevenson Moessner's 'Self-differentiated Samaritan' (Dykstra, 2005:15–68).

These models focus on the pastor as the one who listens to the story of the other. The pastor is a caretaker who is present and provides support. The pastor is not a dispassionate bystander and listener but becomes involved in the distress, pain, loss and confusion of the other. In these models, the pastor is not focused solely on the individual, but also in the broader cultural, social and religious context. Pastors are the ones who care, but in such a way that they do not neglect themselves in the caring of others. Pastors should be aware

of the need for self-care. They should carefully consider and evaluate their own story, in order not to project their presuppositions or own woundedness onto those to whom they are listening and for whom they are caring.

The second type of care identified by Dykstra is called the 'Paradoxical Images of Care'. This includes Henri Nouwen's image of the 'Wounded Healer', Heije Faber's image of 'The Circus Clown', Alastair Cambell's image of the 'Wise Fool', Donald Capps's image of the 'Wise Fool Reframed', Dykstra's image of the 'Intimate Stranger', and James Dittes's image of the 'Ascetic Witness' (Dykstra, 2005:69–150).

These models deal with the pastor's own story and woundedness. When pastors are comfortable in their own skin and their situation, their own house, it opens up a free and fearless space for the visitor who seeks care. The pastor can then become the host who pays attention to the guest. In this space, the hospitality of the pastor provides the healing space and community the visitor needs to heal and feel safe. The role of the pastor is to attentively witness the life experience of the care-seeker. The pastor attempts not 'to do', 'to save' or 'to resolve', but to regard the care-seekers, enabling them to become more (Dykstra, 2005:74–75)

The third type of care identified by Dykstra is the 'Contemporary and Contextual Images of Care'. These include Paul Pruyser's 'The Diagnostician', Gaylord Noyce's 'Moral Coach and Counselor', Edward Wimberly's 'Indigenous Storyteller', Donald Capps's 'Agent of Hope', Karen Hanson's 'Midwife', Margaret Kornfield's 'Gardener', and Brita Gill-Austern's 'The Midwife, Storyteller, and Reticent Outlaw' (Dykstra, 2005:151–227).

This type describes the pastor as a moral coach with a strong guiding function. The guiding function is understood as collaborative, noncoercive, non-judgmental moral exploration of an individual in need. It involves the mutual exploration of ideas, values and decisions that are free from coercion or compulsion. Edward Wimberly (1991) focuses specifically on the African-American pastor as an indigenous storyteller.

They use their own stories, stories from their ministry and stories from the Bible to help others to articulate their own stories. The pastor is not only a storyteller but also a story-listener – the one who listens to the stories of others.

Brita Gill-Auster (1999:159) uses the metaphor of a midwife in her feminist work on the role of a teacher in teaching pastoral theology. The main focus of the teacher is not to imprint her ideas on the minds of students, but in a co-creative relationship draw out what the students already have within them. With the metaphor of the pastor as midwife, the implication is that the pastor should 'catch' the ideas of the other and help to bring them to light. This is done by asking open-ended questions, without predetermined answers. It is not the task of pastors to 'deliver' their ideas, but rather to help others find their voice.

People approach a pastoral counsellor because they need someone to listen to their story. When pastors practise the art of asking, hearing and respecting others as people with their own language and integrity, a dialogical encounter can be facilitated from which a new and more hopeful story can be born. For this story of hope to be born, the pastor should focus on practising the art of listening.

The art of listening

To really listen to others is not something that comes naturally. It is an art that must be practised. It is a skill to be learned. Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger (2006:xi) points out that in pastoral counselling, pastoral caregivers 'learn how to listen to people in crisis and discern their needs'. To be truly present to people, the spiritual practice of prayer and listening is needed. The connection between prayer and listening can be described as follows: 'We listen to each other having first listened to God. Pastoral care for others begins with seeking God' (Van Deusen Hunsinger, 2006:xiii). Caring for others requires compassionate presence and attentive listening.

Listening inwardly to one's own heart is also essential. People succeed in listening to another's needs only when they

are aware of their anxiety and fear. Van Deusen Hunsinger (2006:xiii) puts it as follows: 'Paradoxically, we are able to focus on another's need apart from our own pressing concerns only when we are most self-aware.' The listening of pastoral caregivers and counsellors is a 'three-dimensional listening': listening to God, listening to the other and listening to the pastoral caregiver's innermost self. Through prayer, the pastor and care-seeker are bound together with God and one another. It is the responsibility of the pastoral caregiver to listen for what God might be saying in each situation and, after listening to the care-seeker again, turn to God in prayer.

Prayer is an expression of the relationship with God. Pastoral caregivers' practices of devotional reading and meditation on Scripture form part of their relationship with God. It is in the reading of Scripture and meditation that pastoral caregivers find the strength to listen to God and to listen to others (Van Deusen Hunsinger, 2006:39; see also Zimmerman & Meier, 1999:72). This practice of devotional reading and meditation on Scripture is one of the most ancient and traditional approaches to Christian contemplation, known as *lectio divina* (Dysinger, 2009; see Van Deusen Hunsinger, 2006:45). It entails the movements of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation (see Dysinger, 2009:5–8). It is in this listening to God that pastoral caregivers find themselves comforted or challenged, changed by a heart-to-heart meeting with God. The aim of contemplation and listening for the voice of God is not to use it for lectures or sermons, but to enable pastoral caregivers to come to terms with their woundedness. Bonhoeffer (1986:33) put it as follows: 'Do not ask how you should tell it to others but ask what it tells you.' It is in the theological conviction that God demonstrates God's love for human beings by listening when they pray that pastoral caregivers realise that their listening to others mediate the love of the listening God (see Bonhoeffer, 1996:98). Thus, pastoral caregivers demonstrate their love for God by listening to others.

Listening to others requires pastoral caregivers to be undistracted and fully present. They should be able to put

aside their preoccupations. When pastors pay more attention to themselves than to the needs of the other, they are not present, they are not listening. They then fail to hear the significance of what the other wants to share (Van Deusen Hunsinger, 2006:52; see Justes, 2006). Pastoral caregivers should be able to listen in a life-giving way. This can only be if God is the centre of their lives.

Pastoral caregivers are called to empathic listening. Carl Rogers describes empathic listening as:

> To sense the client's private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the 'as if' quality – this is empathy, and this seems essential to therapy. To sense the client's anger, fear, or confusion as if it were your own, yet without your own anger, fear or confusion getting bound up with it. (Rogers, 1990:226)

For pastoral caregivers to be able to listen with empathy to others they must be aware of their anxieties and fears, which often prevent them from providing the care that care-seekers need. To deal with their fears and anxieties the 'Focusing Technique' developed by psychologist Eugene Gendlin (1981) can be useful for identifying their unresolved issues and embodied emotional responses. This technique entails relaxing, breathing and focusing on the feelings that are experienced in the body when they think of a specific situation they had to face. They sense how they feel and how their body reacts to the problem. They then identify a 'word handle' with which to describe the 'felt sense'. The next step is to keep the focus on the word handle that describes the felt sense and ensure that it matches the feeling. They then ask themselves questions about the feeling and the situation. In waiting for and welcoming the answers to these questions a sense of release can be experienced. This enables them to let go of their fears and anxieties. Understanding themselves and their fears can clear the space for pastoral caregivers to truly listen to the other (Gendlin, 1981:173–174).

It is in listening to and praying for care-seekers in a life-giving way that pastoral caregivers invite care-seekers in to experience their pastoral hospitality.

Pastoral hospitality

The art of asking and presence is rooted in authentic pastoral hospitality. In his book, *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen (1979) emphasises that pastors should deal intentionally and deliberately with their woundedness, struggles, and pain, to be and create a safe space for others to heal. Nouwen uses the concept of 'hospitality' to describe the compassion, understanding, forgiveness, fellowship and community that are crucial to the healing task of a pastor (Nouwen, 1979:88–89). Nouwen (1979:89; see Pohl, 2002:34–35) finds the roots of hospitality in the Judeo-Christian tradition, especially in the life and ministry of Jesus. For Nouwen, hospitality is the response to the human condition of loneliness. In following in Jesus' footsteps hospitality becomes a Christian virtue.

> Hospitality is the virtue which allows us to break through the narrowness of our own fears and to open our houses to the stranger, with the intuition that salvation comes to us in the form of a tired traveller.... It requires first of all that the host feel at home in his[her] own house, and secondly that [s]he creates a free and fearless place for the unexpected visitor. (Nouwen, 1979:89)

Being the host (pastor) who practises hospitality as a Christian virtue, is about paying attention to the guest. This requires pastors to not be so preoccupied with their own needs and worries that it prevents them from being truly present to the other. In the practice of hospitality, concentration and community are relevant terms (Nouwen, 1979:89). Concentration entails that pastors discover the centre of life in their hearts. For Nouwen (1979:90), this concentration is about meditation and contemplation. Meditation and contemplation bring rest to the pastor's soul. It is in this coming to terms with one's own heart, that true hospitality flourishes. The self pulls

back to make room for the other. This is about pastors being at peace with themselves. This allows the other to enter freely into an open space, which is not cluttered with the pastor's expectations. The other can then enter on their own terms and find their own soul (Nouwen, 1979:91–92). For Christine Pohl (2002:37), hospitality is a way of life that should be learned and practised daily.

According to Nouwen, this practising of hospitality is healing,

> because it takes away the false illusion that wholeness can be given by one to another. It is healing because it does not take away the loneliness and the pain of another but invites [them] to recognize [their] loneliness on a level where it can be shared. (Nouwen, 1979:92)

Nouwen (1979:93) encourages pastors to offer themselves to others as a guide. For Carrie Doehring, the guiding role of the pastor entails a caregiving relationship based on trust, respect, and compassion. She describes it as follows:

> The process of stepping respectfully and compassionately into another's narrative world can be described with the metaphor of hospitality. We must embody compassionate respect as we step over the threshold and enter into another's religious or spiritual world, not knowing when we will encounter sacred images, meanings, and places within the narrative worlds of care-seekers. (Doehring, 2015:xvii)

When the metaphor of hospitality is used, the roles of the participants would be those of host and guest. However, to provide authentic pastoral hospitality in a contemporary context, the metaphor should also be approached critically. The early religious traditions from which this metaphor originated were patriarchal, with the host almost always male (McNulty 2007:xxvii). Ladislaus Bolchazy (1995) points out that the ancient Greek cultures with their strong codes of hospitality influenced Roman ideas of hospitality, both of which shaped Christian thinking on hospitality. This kind

of hospitality is what Derrida (2001) (see also Hamington, 2010:23) calls a 'conditional hospitality', that is hospitality which maintains existing power hierarchies. In contrast to this conditional hospitality, Maurice Hamington proposes feminist hospitality:

> Feminist hospitality drives at a nonhierarchical understanding of hospitality that mitigates the expression of power differential, while seeking greater connection and understanding for mutual benefit of both host and guest ...The feminist hospitality that I propose creates and strengthens relationships, but not at the risk that comes from the vulnerability of human sharing. (Hamington, 2010:23)

A pastoral approach that is critical of gender roles and the position of power assigned to pastors by culture, is needed. For this purpose, feminist insights will be utilised to develop authentic pastoral hospitality.

In his article, 'Toward a Theory of Feminist Hospitality', Hamington explains the implications of the socially prescribed roles of those who administer hospitality and those who receive hospitality as follows:

> Too often women have been unwilling hosts and unwelcome guests ... Both men and women have played the role of host but, in the case of women, 'host' is not always a freely chosen role nor does it always entail [the] power of decision-making ability. Similarly, for women, 'guest' does not necessarily translate into the subject of authentic hospitality, as the host often has ulterior motives reflecting power differentials and social-role constraints. (Hamington, 2010:23)

A feminist perspective on hospitality emphasises inclusive and nonhierarchical host and guest relations. Feminist theoretical work on identity, inclusiveness, reciprocity, forgiveness and embodiment can be used to move towards a feminist hospitality. How people extend hospitality to others reflects

their identity. Hamington (2010:24) puts it as follows: 'Acts of hospitality actualize identity'. This becomes problematic in cultures and religious traditions where the hosts are always male. When women are denied the opportunity to be a host, they are denied the opportunity to extend hospitality to another and in the process actualise their identity. This in turn prevents them from acts of self-assertion.

Feminist hospitality resists the notion that a host can provide hospitality while exercising power over the other (quest). According to Judith Butler (1988:519), acts of gender formation are prescribed by social frameworks. The task is then to displace acts that maintain gender identity by changing the gender norms that enable the acts that form gender identity. The implication of this is a 'feminist host can remain cognizant of not recreating acts that constitute identity through positions of power over others, but instead attempt to foster the atmosphere for lateral exchanges' (Hammington, 2010:25). In this way, acts of feminist hospitality can contribute to an alternative identity, namely one that is more empowering and less controlling than traditional hospitality.

One of the other limitations of a traditional understanding of hospitality is the role that property plays in the formation of the identity of the host. The host is the one who has the resources to offer or share with the guest. Here gender again plays a role. Traditionally and historically male persons were the holders of property. Women and children were seen as part of this property. The host's property would be utilised in the act of extending hospitality to others. The implications of this for women are that they are treated as objects or property of the host that can be given to and serve others. Hamington proposes the following course of action:

> I suggest that feminist hospitality should subvert hospitality-infused hierarchies and minimize the inferred power relations grounded in property to facilitate connections among people. In this manner, sharing is less instilled with hidden agendas and more directed toward the well-being of the guest. (Hamington, 2010:25)

An example of such caring with no hidden agendas is when women help other women with generosity, not to gain something or exercise power over the other, but because it will benefit the other.

Rethinking the role, position and relationship of the host towards the guest with insights from a feminist perspective, can facilitate the necessary shift in identity formation through acts of hospitality. The focus then shifts from acts that have the aim of '*self-valorizing* to acts of hospitality that value the Other in one's self' (Hamingtion, 2010:25). Feminist hospitality is about empathising with others. It is also attentive to inclusive definitions of who constitutes the guest.

Another dimension of hospitality that should be considered is that hospitality has a directional and hierarchical character. The host gives and the guest receives (Hamington, 2010:28). From this perspective, hospitality is a gift from the haves to the have-nots. Feminist hospitality resists this. Exchanges between host and guest are to be seen as reciprocal. Such reciprocal exchanges between host and guest make the shift to a reciprocal relationship that can be described as follows: 'Reciprocity implies a flattening of the relationship out of mutual respect and humility; the distinction between guest and host is blurred as both learn and grow together' (Hamington, 2010:28). Judith Green describes this reciprocal relationship between guest and host as mutual hospitality (Green, 2004:213). It places the host and the guest in a horizontal relationship. Both benefit from the other and treat each other with dignity.

This horizontal and equal relationship is important for authentic pastoral hospitality. Pastoral hospitality in which the pastor (host) and the care-seeker (guest) accept the ideology that the pastor has the power and right to give advice or decide on behalf of the care-seeker what they need and what will be good for them amounts to hegemonic pastoral hospitality.

Hegemony is about exercising power over others. Hegemony is a cultural reality that results from ideologies – the granting of permanent absolute normative authority to

the ideas and concepts according to which people understand their world (Gramsci, 1971; see Berger, 1967; Lears, 1985:568). Hegemony is a kind of indirect dominance, which determines the internal experience of subordinates.

Ideological hegemony is the result of a social process in which consensus between the dominant and subordinate groups gradually develops. Consensus is expressed in the approval by subordinate groups of the dominant values, symbols, beliefs and opinions (Lears, 1985:569). Social institutions, such as the educational system, religion and the mass media, contribute to producing the hegemonic culture and promoting the evolution of social consensus. To illustrate how embedded hegemony is in the way people think and act, Phillis Sheppard describes the following incident in her article, 'Hegemonic Imagination, Historical Ethos, and Colonized Minds in the Pedagogical Space: Pastoral Ethics and Teaching as if our Lives Depended on it*:*

> A White male student once made the request that I, in our pastoral care and counseling class that involved discussion, community engagement, and pastoral counseling practice, teach more like the history professor. I asked, 'What would this look like here?' The student uncritically stated, 'You would tell us what the reading means and we would take notes. We would just learn from you.' (Sheppard, 2018:188)

Authentic pastoral hospitality should free itself from hegemonic pastoral hospitality where the pastor (host) has power over the care-seeker (quest).

Another aspect of hospitality that is of consequence, is how hospitality is embodied (Hamington, 2010:32). This pertains to acts of hospitality that are closely linked to attending to the body of the guest – giving food and drink and providing rest. Hospitality is shown by the host to the guest also through body language. Carrie Doehring emphasises the importance of being aware of the message conveyed by the body of the host (caregiver) to the guest (care-seeker). She puts it as follows:

> Our bodies convey a lived theology that may not be fully integrated with what we say we believe and value – our espoused theology. Our tone of voice, facial expressions, and posture all communicate our theology to care-seekers. Embedded values expressed through our bodies are shaped by our families, communities, and culture – often outside of our awareness. (Doehring, 2015:53)

An example is how the caregiver shakes the hand of the care-seeker at the end of the conversation. This one gesture can communicate a variety of messages. For some, it can feel like the closing of a business deal. For others, it can be reassuring. For elderly bedridden patients, it can feel as though they are being 'handed off' to the nursing staff (Doehring, 2015:54).

Authentic embodied hospitality requires that caregivers understand what they could be communicating through their tone of voice, how they listen, and their body language. Authentic embodied listening requires that caregivers be aware of how they and their bodies respond to the other's pain, emotions and story. Crossed arms, furrowed brows, and pulling back, can confirm a care-seeker's anticipation of judgement. Self-reflection on their communication skills can help caregivers to become aware of when they are 'enacting values associated with social oppression and life-limiting theologies' (Doehring, 2015:54). The self-reflexive work of caregivers can become a spiritual experience when they deal with their woundedness and, in the process, become more authentic in their personhood.

Authenticity

In moving towards authentic pastoral hospitality, what is understood under 'authenticity' should be clarified. 'Authentic' has the meaning of being true to oneself, trustworthy, and genuine. According to Jongman-Sereno and Leary (2019:133), authenticity is about behaviour and motives for behaviour. They suggest that: 'Authenticity refers to the degree to which a particular behaviour is congruent with a person's attitudes, beliefs, values, motives and other

dispositions.' This means: to be who you are and includes being aware of one's self-worth. Being authentic can also be described as a way of life. Dreyer maintains that an authentic life is a life without distortions in relationship with God, yourself and your neighbour (Dreyer, 1998:372).

An authentic life is a life lived as God created that life to be. Authentic life also involves being critical – self-critical of what one thinks and believes of oneself, critical of the world and the messages from outside that attempt to dictate who and what a person should be. Authentic life means that all people in the church and society will have equal freedom and space for choices and responsibilities (Dreyer, 1998:373).

Authentic pastoral counselling aims to enable people to live authentically in God's presence and in relationships with others (see Dreyer, 1998:378). To achieve this, pastors should be authentic in their relationship with the care-seekers. Equality and relational authenticity are key. In their measurement tool, the *Authenticity Inventory*, Kernis and Goldman (2006) identify four aspects of authenticity, namely, awareness, unbiased processing, behaviour and relational orientation. Relational orientation pertains to relational authenticity, which is of great importance to the relationship between the pastor and the care-seeker. According to Gan and Chen (2017:466), relational authenticity can refer to subjective feelings of authenticity in the context of specific relationships, because people behave and experience themselves differently in different relationships. For example, people behave differently when they are with their parents, than when they are with their friends. People need to feel relationally authentic. They are relationally authentic when their relational self more or less concurs with their actual self – who they are in general, across most contexts (Gan & Chen 2016:466). This becomes possible in relationships of trust.

In the context of authentic pastoral counselling, the compassionate response and empathic connection of the pastor to the care-seeker's life story is what creates a safe space for the care-seeker to be authentic. According to

Reinard Nauta (2003:427), pastors can find it challenging to be authentic in a counselling situation. They tend to withhold their views and fears for the sake of not disturbing the other. This is also partly due to what the care-seekers expect of the pastor. This can lead to the pastor feeling obligated to enact the role that is expected of them to please others. This can detract from the pastor's sense of authenticity in their relationships with others. As a solution, Nauta proposes that pastors should create some distance between themselves and their role as pastors and reflect on it. This reminds me of the meditation and contemplation of Nouwen (1979:90) that brings rest to the pastor's soul. Pastors who come to terms with their hearts, can be authentic and create the space for relational authenticity. Nancy Ramsey emphasises the importance of empathic connections when she avers that: 'Relational authenticity relies on the skillful practice of empathic connections' (Ramsey, 2000:269). For Ramsey, relational authenticity is part of the pastoral identity: 'Relational authenticity is a primary motivation and goal of pastoral identity.' When relational authenticity becomes part of pastoral identity, it 'involves a capacity for and commitment to full affective and cognitive connection in relationships' (Ramsey, 2000:277). This is authentic pastoral counselling that can focus on the total well-being of the other. The pastoral relationship is then subject-subject communication. Pastors know that they are not counselling an object (see Dreyer, 1998:378). Authentic pastoral counselling takes place where pastors and care-seekers meet as people who both have free and direct access to God's grace.

Authentic pastoral hospitality

Authentic pastoral hospitality creates a safe space for care-seekers to share their life story. Authentic pastoral hospitality empowers care-seekers to find their voice. It empowers care-seekers to interpret and reinterpret their life story in a healing space. Authentic pastoral hospitality requires compassionate presence and attentive listening from the pastoral caregiver. It requires the pastoral caregiver to be present for the other.

Authentic pastoral hospitality is sensitive to the role, position and relationship of the pastoral caregiver (host) and care-seeker (guest). Authentic pastoral hospitality enables people to live authentically in God's presence and in relationship with others.

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