



Anglican
Diocese of
Ottawa

Learning Commons Introductory Pastoral Care Module

What Is Pastoral Care?

The word *pastoral* comes from *pasture* – the field where sheep graze. In the Bible, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, the one who knows and loves his sheep.

When the Church offers pastoral care, we are sharing in that same love and care of the Good Shepherd. We are called to notice those who are lost, hurting, or in need, and to bring them comfort, hope, and belonging in Christ.

In our worship, bishops carry a shepherd's crook to show their calling to care for the flock of God. All clergy, bishops, priests and deacons share in this calling and help to care for people in every parish.

But this work does not belong only to the clergy. All Christians are part of Christ's body, and all of us are called to show love and care for one another. In fact, regular pastoral visits by lay team members are a mark of a thriving parish, as they can be done more frequently than by clergy only, and they allow for continuity in the community when clergy are called to another parish. Clergy are called to pastoral care **with** a community rather than **for** a community.

Pastoral Care: A Vocation and Calling

While we are all called to the Body of Christ, in pastoral care clergy have particular and distinct responsibilities.

Clergy lead worship, celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and preach the Word of God. These are not only acts of worship but also acts of care – moments when we meet God together and are reminded of God's love for us.

Clergy also offer care in other ways: by listening, praying, visiting, teaching, or offering a calm and faithful presence in difficult times. They teach the faith through Bible study, sermons, and by their lived example. They help lead our Christian communities, whether that means planning a service, leading a Vestry meeting, or resolving disputes within the parish.

Clergy are called to live with honesty and integrity, showing in their lives the same faith and goodness they preach. This is a great responsibility and a holy calling.

As a Church, we need to keep praying for new leaders to answer this call. We must also support those already serving and hold them accountable through the healthy structures of our Church and Diocese.

Pastoral Care: The Ministry of All Believers

To be a Christian means to see Christ in one another – and to show Christ's love in how we live. This is not only the work of priests and deacons; it is the work of the whole Church.

When we love and care for each other, we live out what it means to be the Body of Christ. This care may take many forms. Traditionally, pastoral care within the Church consists of clergy and members of a pastoral care team visiting parishioners who are ill or lonely, but pastoral care also exists in other forms: praying together, reading Scripture, or standing up for what is right in our world.



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Traditional Pastoral Care

Traditional pastoral care is often led by clergy and supported by a dedicated group of lay pastoral care team members. These team members are identified and invited to participate in this ministry based on their natural gifts of being a calm presence, their ability to listen without judgment and to value confidentiality and discretion. They receive formation, often through the Ottawa Pastoral Care Training program <https://ottawapastoralcare.com/> and are carefully screened according to Screening in Faith protocols <https://ottawa.anglican.ca/resources/safe-church>. Team members are assigned parishioners who would benefit from regular visits, and regular meetings of the team are held to allow for the sharing of concerns and needs. Team members also convey urgent concerns to clergy who can follow up.

It's important to note that pastoral care is fundamentally different from friendly visiting. Pastoral care is about being in the moment with the person being visited, whatever that person is experiencing, be it positive or negative. It requires that the pastoral visitor suspend their own feelings or opinions in order to fully be present with the person being visited. Friendly visiting, on the other hand, is a pleasant experience where both people exchange mutually.

Pastoral care also happens outside of these formal structures when we simply listen. We don't have to be trained counselors to care for someone. When we take time to be present and really listen without judgment or hurry, we make space for healing.

Jesus often cared for people just by being with them, hearing their stories, and seeing their worth. We can do the same.

Praying Together

One of the most powerful ways we care for each other is through worship. We pray with our families and friends, and sometimes even with strangers who need comfort. When we pray for the sick, the dying, or those in trouble, we offer God's peace and presence in a deep and healing way.

Everyday prayer at home, in church, or in our hearts is one of the simplest and strongest forms of pastoral care.

Holy Scripture

Reading the Bible together helps us know God and understand one another. This can happen in a Bible study group, through *lectio divina* (prayerful reading of Scripture), or even in a short conversation where someone shares a verse that gives them hope.

When we open the Scriptures, we open our hearts to the wisdom and love of God – and we remind one another that no one walks alone.

Prophetic Word and Action

Caring for others also means standing up for truth and justice. Sometimes pastoral care looks like speaking out when someone is being treated unfairly, or helping those who have been forgotten.

We are called to love not only with our words, but with our actions. The world needs Christians who are brave enough to live with compassion and integrity, even when it is hard.



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Church Leadership

Church leadership can also be understood as a form of pastoral care, when it is done well. When church councils make decisions about budgets, buildings, or worship, these choices affect real people and shape the health of the community.

Leaders offer pastoral care when they:

- make decisions with kindness and fairness,
- communicate openly and honestly,
- create safe and welcoming spaces for all, and
- work together in prayer and respect.

Good leadership is not only about managing a church, it is about serving God's people. When leaders listen well, care deeply, and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, their leadership itself becomes pastoral care.

Conclusion

Pastoral care is the shared life of the Church. Whether clergy or lay, young or old, we are all called to care for one another with the love of Christ. In our worship, our words, and our actions, we are invited to be shepherds together, following the Good Shepherd who knows each of us by name.

Recommended Reading:

1. *Lay Pastoral Care: A Narrative Approach* by Joretta L. Marshall & Christie Cozad Neuger
2. *Pastor* by William Willimon
3. *Pastoral Care Teams in Churches* by Rev Dr Robert Mackenzie