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Courageous Conversations:  
The Teaching and Learning of Pastoral Supervision  

As William DeLong acknowledges in the preface, “there are few books that speak to the specialized practice and profession of pastoral supervision.” This book is a substantial contribution “to fill that gap” by providing a worthy update to the literature of pastoral supervision. Pastoral supervisors in all venues and specializations will benefit from this book, including CPE supervisors and those to whom they report, pastoral counseling supervisors, field education supervisors and spiritual direction supervisors. Courageous Conversations is an excellent resource for all skill and experience levels of pastoral supervisors, from those in training to those with years in the field. In sixteen diverse chapters, experienced and knowledgeable clinicians address topics such as the following: reflecting theologically, power and the supervisory relationship, supervising in a modern and postmodern age.

The writing in this book is consistently sophisticated and challenging, yet informative and practical. The chapters bring diverse perspectives on difficult topics while maintaining an underlying cohesiveness to a worldview that values postmodernism and multiculturalism. I was both intrigued and challenged by the material. For example, the chapter on sexuality in clinical supervision challenged me to look more deeply at my own Protestant bias when reflecting on the supervision of students who are vowed to a life of celibacy. My awareness of the foreign and the unfamiliar was enhanced. Using this knowledge, I could appreciate and supervise such a student with more integrity and expertise.

While the writing style varies with each author and topic, the quality of the writing is consistently high which allows thoughts, ideas and arguments to shine. The end notes for each chapter are thorough and professional.

Courageous Conversations is challenging to read on several levels. The ideas are complex, holding the potential to evoke thoughtful reflection and inform professional practice. To hold this potential, the writing assumes a level of knowledge and a firm grasp of the vocabulary from several fields; therefore, reading this text is intellectually demanding.

For example, in an intriguing chapter titled “From Object to Subject: Pastoral Supervision as an Intersubjective Activity,” DeLong explains intersubjective theory as a “psychological and epistemological framework by which supervisors may utilize their sense of self” in pastoral supervision. He traces psychoanalytic history and draws on several theologians to inform his reflections on pastoral supervision.

Overall this fine book serves as a worthy witness to the multifaceted complexity of our unique and challenging field.

Reviewed by M. Catherine Hasty MDiv ThM BCC, Director, Health Ministry and Pastoral Education, Chaplaincy Department, Presbyterian Hospital, Charlotte, NC.
Women Out of Order: Risking Change and Creating Care in a Multicultural World
Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner and Teresa Snorton, Editors (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2009, 434 pages, softcover)

Are words or phrases like interreligious soul care, disembodied spirituality, cultural imperialism, critical race theory, meritocracy and hegemony, a part of your everyday chaplain’s nomenclature? Do you desire to increase your working knowledge and competency of behavioral science, theology and pastoral care with persons of various cultures? Do you sometimes feel you lag behind in understanding various cultures that you meet on a daily basis in your ministry? If you answered yes to any of these questions, Women Out of Order, the most recent in a series, provides a wealth of information to assist in your continuing education efforts.

Clinicians, chaplains and clinical pastoral education (CPE) supervisors will be challenged by this book. It will enlarge the perspective of the chaplain who may not have had the opportunity to read the previous volumes in this series and who may have been out of CPE for a while. Pastoral educators and supervisors will find it a good reference for their trainees who seek to become more informed about issues facing women outside the dominant culture. The reader's vocabulary will be stretched with a whole new language that surrounds multicultural issues.

Clearly, the editors sought extensive racial ethnic representation. While several contributors are Euro-American, the list also includes representation from Native American, Middle Eastern, Latino, African American and Asian cultures. Each contributor brings a depth of experience, expertise and critique of traditional pastoral care understanding and theory. Together, they invite the reader to explore responses to a woman's call for pastoral or spiritual care from a different template. Several of the contributors have served as chaplains, pastors, pastoral counselors and/or pastoral educators.

The volume is divided into four parts. Part one follows the book’s title: Women Out of Order. Moving beyond the traditional way of referring and writing about pastoral care for women, these contributors identify ways that women may be perceived or cared for in stereotypical or harmful ways. As traditional pastoral care methodologies fall short of the complexity of issues facing women in crisis, the authors provide new lenses, perspectives, approaches and worldviews that aid in helping women who may be perceived as being “out of order.” APC readers will recognize contributors such as Pamela Cooper White and Teresa Snorton, as they have been headliners at national conferences.

In part two, “Risking Change,” the editors point out that typical pastoral care approaches fail to involve the woman’s experience. In addressing a “do no harm” ethic of care, the contributors in this section provide other expansive theoretical constructs and methods to care for women whose dominant culture is not Euro-American. While most contributors write from a social or liberal theological perspective, the reader also will discover more centralist theologies, especially from Korean and Latino perspectives.

Part three addresses the changing world with its emphases on globalism, experiences, models and case reviews. These assist the reader in developing a vision of what care looks like in a multicultural—rather than a monocultural—world. Issues faced by African American women and recent high profile media situations, such as the shooting at Virginia Tech University, are addressed and analyzed.

While much effort has been given in this volume to inform, educate and expand the reader's perspective, the final section, “Challenges Ahead,” concludes with words of “caution and prophetic vision of the emerging frontier of multicultural care.” (p. 291) Patterns of domination, interreligious nomenclature and power analysis are addressed as a part of understanding where all of this is
headed. Questions addressed include the following: Are there limits to multicultural inclusion? Can we work within a culture rather than without?

With 363 pages of reading material and 40 plus pages of footnotes and reference citations, it will take a while for the reader to digest. However, helping the reader to become more culturally competent and sensitive is clearly a strength of this book.

Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner is professor of pastoral care at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX. Teresa Snorton is executive director of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education and adjunct instructor in pastoral care at Chandler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, GA. Dr. Stevenson-Moessner participated in editing three previous volumes on pastoral care and women's issues: Women in Travail and Transition: A New Pastoral Care (2000), Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care (1996) and In Her Own Time: Women and Developmental Issues in Pastoral Care (2000).

Reviewed by Beverly C. Jessup DMin BCC; CPSP Diplomate, Pastoral Supervision; Clinical Director, Pastoral Care, FirstHealth Moore Regional Hospital, Pinehurst, NC.

Talking with God in Old Age: Meditations and Psalms
Missy Buchanan (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2010, 96 pages, softcover, large print)

I have one major quarrel with this book: it is not long enough. Missy Buchanan has produced a wonderful set of meditations based on selected psalm verses. She succinctly and successfully captures the thoughts of many in their elder years. Whether the subject is concern over limited financial resources, the difficulties and indignities of rehab, the inability to get a good night's sleep or the closeness of God, the author knows her elders and their innermost thoughts.

Talking with God in Old Age may be used as the basis for discussions at long-term care facilities. It may be part of a creative worship service. Selections woven together would form a wonderful sermon. It could be part of a handout setting the mood for a meeting of chaplains or used as a way to complement the agenda of an interdisciplinary team meeting.

Most of the mediations/psalms are only two pages in length. All of them are in large print so that individuals with limited sight should be able to read them.

Since the author limits her “proof texts” to the Psalter, this work will resonate with readers—and listeners—within both the Christian and Jewish communities. Here are two examples:

From “Rehab”: I don’t like rehab very much…. / Then you remind me, Lord, that we were not intended to carry our burdens alone. / Lift up my head so I can see the face of the therapist who goes beyond kindness…. The poem is followed by Psalm 121:1-2: I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

From “Kleenex in My Sleeve”: I have a Kleenex in my sleeve…. / In an odd way, it makes me think about you, Lord. / About how you are always within reach / whenever I need you…. These words are then followed by Psalm 34:18 (34:19 Hebrew): The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

The simplicity and felicity of this book is profound. It will lift your spirit and cause you to smile. It is a work to be bought and shared. It will make a great present for others.

Reviewed by David J. Zucker PhD BCC, Director of Chaplaincy Care, Shalom Park, Aurora, CO.
We Do Remember You

Steve Butler has written We Do Remember You as follow up to his earlier book, A Letter from Heaven (2008). This book will be helpful to ministers and laypersons as they equip parents with books and resources that provide coping tools following the death of a baby. Butler’s suggestions for creating rituals are “good medicine” for grieving parents who also may need to help a grieving, surviving sibling as Butler shares stories that illustrate ways for parents to establish rituals of remembrance for both themselves and their other children.

We Do Remember You is full of theology dispensed through both stories and pictures that present a Christian worldview, especially related to beliefs about afterlife, death, heaven and a remembrance motif that is associated with the sacraments of the Christian faith. This fact may limit its use by chaplains.

Butler’s purpose is to address questions a surviving child may ask as to where a deceased sibling goes after death and even more importantly, how to remember or “talk” to the deceased child. The question of “how do we remember” is the foundational question. Don’t let the pictures of children fool you into thinking the book is for children. Instead, this resource provides specific activities and rituals to help grieving parents and other adults.

In the forward, Butler makes the case that rituals must be established and acted out so that the living may remember their loved ones—especially infants and babies—in concrete ways. He uses stories and conversations between children in heaven’s garden to draw parallels to places like gardens, cemeteries, church nurseries and rooms in the house that help the grieving to create rituals that allows them to remember and to stay connected.

Butler offers many suggestions for such rituals, e.g., buying and donating a baby rocker to a church nursery, making a concrete marker that is decorated and placed next to a bush or tree in memory of one’s baby/child, planting a rose bush and allowing children—especially surviving siblings—to help with the planting.

Finally, Butler provides a resource list of organizations and their Web sites that help parents and families cope with the death of a baby. He includes favorite blessings and prayers that he uses for his own family and his ministry.

Reviewed by George M. Rossi MDiv MA BCC, Clinical Chaplain, Medical University of South Carolina Hospital, Charleston, SC.

Just Conflict: Transformation through Resolution

This book is a tool for professionals who want to learn first about their own behavioral standing in dealing with people and creating new maps to approach conflicts—especially chaplains, pastoral counselors, nurses, counselors, human resources personnel.

As we travel through life, we experience conflicts, and the possibilities to create resolution are endless. We need to discern, think clearly and decide how to create “maps” to transform our broken connections. There is not a formula to fix all conflicts. We need to create opportunities to learn and conditions to interact in this world of relationships.

The author analyzes human behavior from the inside out. We were not born in a vacuum. We are the human expression of your own physical growth, needs, cultural elements, traditional
expectations and the ability we have to survive over the years. Everyone has the same rights, responsibilities and accountabilities in a relationship.

Conflict resolution by no means is an easy task but it is about learning simple steps to increase the possibility to be successful. The biggest barrier to change is our own set of expectations. However, it is good to learn that not all conflicts are fixable. Learning and naming our feelings increases our capacity to interact and comprehend our human core in relationship, first with ourselves and then with others. The overall purpose is to help us learn to solve conflicts, with a new insight. We may be very clever at identifying an issue and attaining new tactics to solve the conflict, but the decision to change our behavior is the key.

Reviewed by Neris Diaz-Cabello MDiv, APC associate chaplain, Manager of Spiritual Care, Sherman Hospital, Elgin, IL.

Coming Out, Coming Home: Making Room for Gay Spirituality in Therapy

Kenneth Burr’s Coming Out, Coming Home deserves a place in the national and local discussions of homosexuality that are taking place in the media, university and seminary classrooms. CPE supervisors, clergy, therapists and chaplains may enrich their ministries through the insight received.

This “is a book written to increase the potential for spiritual growth and development in our society.” Burr illustrates convincingly how “there are members of the GLBTIQ [gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, intersex, queer] community who have been quite successful in their spiritual growth and development.” Readers will discover that “setting this book aside because you are not a sexual minority would be a lost opportunity, because this was designed for anyone who has had their beliefs and values challenged by the topic of homosexuality.” (p. XV) Burr’s clarification of his title’s meaning is insightful: “Coming out and coming home are very different processes; one is a person’s right to be equal and respected for their differences, and the other is a gift society gives to those who are different by offering a place at the common table.” (p. 15)

In “Thank God for Change!” (Chapter 1), Burr presents a brief history of the social changes for oppressed minorities that have occurred during the last five decades and acknowledges that social change for sexual minorities has not advanced at the same pace. Significant changes have taken place in science, legislation, psychology and religion that have helped to advance a better understanding of sexual minorities. He observes that changes in institutional policies and civil laws are examples of the outward change that may alter external behavior; however, transitions are inward and may alter attitudes and understanding.

“Spiritual Connections,” the focus of Chapter 2, reveals how Burr made his own transitions. Through his workshops, ministry to AIDS patients and counseling, he began to understand the deep spirituality of homosexuals; however, he still felt that homosexuality was sinful behavior. Although his own denomination “believed homosexual orientation was not a sin, it continued to label homosexual behavior ‘sin,’ which was making less sense to me all the time.” (p. 51) He began to evaluate his understanding of scripture and to be informed by behavioral science. The close connections had created strong bonds, and he writes that “once it became personal and I knew that we were talking about my dear friends and loved ones, it necessitated a change in my thinking.” (p. 34) His own theology was shifting to being more inclusive.

Burr cited President Obama’s similar transitional experience in relationship to a lesbian who was a mother, businesswoman and loyal supporter. This experience is documented in Obama’s book, The
Audacity of Hope (2006). Burr describes the President’s response to a phone message that this supporter left for him: “As she shared her hurts about his polarizing statements from a previous public debate, he began to understand life from her perspective. Later when he reflected on his words, he returned her call and told her he was sorry. Christians who claim to “hate the sin but love the sinner” are often unknowingly inflicting pain and condemning very good people who are also made in the image of God.” (p. 54) After admitting his own prejudices and limited understanding he said: “When I read the Bible, I do so with the belief that it is not a static text but the living word and that I must be continually open to new revelations—whether they come from a lesbian friend or a doctor opposed to abortion.” (pp. 54, 55)

After revealing his change of heart, Burr turns to his readers and suggests how they might move away from some of their “toxic” attitudes. He seeks to engage them in dialogue by asking that they suspend their stereotypes, be open to guidance from the voice within and learn how that voice resonates with homosexuals listening for their individual “still small voice.”

Chapter 3, “Development of Sexuality and Spirituality,” and Chapter 4, “Hindrances to Gay Spirituality,” provide a realistic sequence that coincides with the way sexual minorities experience their development. Burr helps readers to understand development through the models of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, James Fowler, Vivienne Cass, Richard Troiden and Eli Coleman. Insights emerge that may be integrated into the work of therapists, clergy and chaplains.

Chapter 5, “Embracing the Possibility of Gay Spirituality,” reveals the relevance of the theory of cognitive dissonance. Burr explains that “because our brain wants so much for things to be resonant, it will override new ideas that challenge former ways of thinking, which explains why it is so difficult to change our minds once we have taken a position.” (p. 139) In Chapter 6, “Coming Out Is a Spiritual Experience,” he shares his belief that gays can integrate spirituality into every aspect of their lives—that they can move beyond self-judgments that promote an unhealthy self image.

Chapter 7, “The Search for an Inclusive Theology,” encourages individuals to have theological conversation and evaluations of new knowledge about themselves and sacred text and to discover hope by encouraging sexual minorities to honor their sexuality and by affirming their place at a common table.

Reviewed by Michael G. Davis DMin BCC (retired), Hernando, MS.

A Sacred Walk: Dispelling the Fear of Death and Caring for the Dying

Donna Authers shares her personal walk, a journey that took her from being terrified of death to being fully present to the dying. She is actively involved with Stephen Ministries and presents at churches and caregiver trainings. A training manual to accompany the book is listed on her Web site. The perspective is exclusively Christian and clearly stated. While the author cautions caregivers not to preach or provide answers, she at times ignores her own advice in an attempt to offer comfort. Biblical quotations are scattered liberally throughout the book.

While the book’s topics are relevant to many chaplains, A Sacred Walk is part guidebook and part memoir. The vast amount of deeply personal stories requires sifting through this book for generally applicable insights. Many of the author’s vignettes should have been left for family gatherings or personal diaries. Paring away the excess, eliminating chattiness and jumbled metaphors would greatly enhance Authers’ contribution. With that caveat, there are sections in A Sacred Walk that will be useful in training hospice or spiritual care volunteers.
Authors gives a personal account of care for the dying and lessons for living. Being called to care for relatives and friends near the end of life lessened her deep-seated fear of death and this in turn better equipped her to accompany others on their final journey. Most instructive for this reviewer was the author’s firsthand account of complicated grief stemming from her early childhood exposure to numerous deaths, several of them traumatic. Speaking from experience, Authers makes a strong plea to attend to children’s fears and questions surrounding a death in the family. Also useful for chaplains is the glimpse into some complex family dynamics. In the case of her mother’s death there is the added strain of her stepfather’s mental illness and beginning Alzheimer’s. Where health care providers, maybe even chaplains, see “demanding” relatives, there may well be a harried family stretched by conflicting loyalties.

The second section includes the concise “seven fears of dying” and practical suggestions for completing advance directives, which may persuade even those resistant to getting their affairs in order. In the third and final section, the author narrates the moving “sacred walk” of her mother’s last days as the family and community pull together and freely share fears, hopes and faith. The author and her mother make the caregiver-caretaker transitions with grace and in doing so may light the way for others.

Reviewed by Astuti Bijlefeld MDiv BCC, Staff Chaplain, St. James Mercy Hospital, Hornell, NY.