PAPER ON 'SUPERVISION'

For Supervision Hui at Te Kakano o te Aroha Marae, Lower Hutt, 9 JUNE 2025

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Thank you for your kind invitation to share a few insights on the issue of 'Supervision'.

It is humbling to know that there is an awareness and a willingness to learn of perspectives that can contribute to the process of discerning other relevant patterns and meanings associated with the art of 'Supervision'.

Some thoughts:

'Supervision'… in the way it is understood and performed in our Church… is a process determined and approved by the Church to offer pastoral help to a minister in the exercise of his or her ministry. It is a process that is loaded with assumptions and expectations regarding outcomes and likely courses of actions.

From a Pacific perspective, specifically Samoan, there are a number of issues that seemed to have been pre-determined and taken for granted as the acceptable norm without any input from the Supervisee.

There is an undeniable cultural gap in terms of understanding and relevancy.

The framework of the agenda is far too one sided. This is not the fault of the Supervisor. But it is a limiting factor. A Pacific Island Supervisee can never really raise any Pacific Island issues. There is a gap regarding knowledge and perceptions. There is an unfortunate imbalance in the information available. This raises some crucial questions:

- How qualified is the Supervisor to supervise a Pacific island minister?
- What area s of competency must the Supervisor have?
- Who determines the suitability of the Supervisor for such a task?

Story telling is the context wherein we Samoans share things about ourselves and our work. But telling one's story is never a straight forward exercise, especially when the contexts of the Supervisor and the Supervisee are different. For the Supervisee, it is a laborious exercise and at times a painful experience, especially when you know that the Supervisor is not familiar with your context. The pressure of being responsible falls on the Supervisee to decide how much should the story be edited…what to tell and what to with-held…decision-making creates tensions…how are these resolved?

Issues surrounding 'trust' needs also to be carefully considered. A 'relationship' is born.

- Based on what? Not on equality. Not on balance.
- So, what exactly is this kind of relationship?

In reality, it is a relationship that portrays elements of superiority and inferiority. The Supervisor is perceived as the teacher. It is a symbol of status and to some extent, authority. It has the

potential to silence the Supervisee. It is conceivable that 'power' dynamics may also come into play under this kind of model.

It is worth noting that in the area of responsibilities, the Supervisor under the current Supervision Contract is expected to have been trained and be competent as a Supervisor. Two crucial questions come to mind:

- Is a Pacific Island component of this training and competency in terms of personnel and content available for aspired supervisors?
- If not, who carries out these responsibilities for training and competency?
- What about the issue surrounding language? The supervision is conducted in the language of the Supervisor…what are disadvantages of this for the Supervisee? Are there any realistic expectations and alternatives?
- What about 'goals' and 'objectives' …who determines these?
- The key issue seems to be: 'Who benefits from this kind of arrangement?

There is a real need for supervision to evolve to better meet the needs of Pasifika ministers and lay people. It is a need that has emerged out of a bigger picture of our Church wrestling with the sensitive issue of how to accommodate life-giving changes that minority groups in our church are offering for our wellbeing.

Given that our church operates within the framework of a so-called democratic state, the adoption of the majority rule principle as the norm for decision making, alienates minority groups. This state of affairs raises the delicate question:" Who is the Church for?

Whether we acknowledge it or not, there is a dominant view, a prominent perspective, that determines the final outcome of what our Church regard as 'truth'. What I find disturbing is our tendency to regard this so called 'truth' as the only official legitimate truth in the church.

What about other perceptions of truth that are held and advocated by minority groups? This is not just an issue of who has the right and the privilege to interpret doctrinal teaching and defined what is the purpose and mission of the church. It is also an issue that challenges the prevalent theological understanding of what is 'just'.

Thank you for the opportunity to share a few thoughts.

Blessings and Peace.

Fele
9 June 2025