

Brief description of Karen's Gestalt pastoral counselling model

The following summary is taken from Karen's PhD thesis, in which the developed pastoral model was founded in the work of Prof. Daniel Louw (reformed theologian) and Gestalt theory. The study itself involved the spirituality and identity development of Registered Counsellors who completed the Gestalt Masters in Play Therapy. Brief comments are added here to include the work with the human spirit.

1. The frame of the pastoral counselling model

The model is undergirded by the eschatological perspective that includes both counsellor and counselee. The pastoral encounter represents an expression of lives lived in the presence of God. Dialogue (through prayer and Scripture) becomes a triologue among God, the counsellor and the counselee. Counselling goals help to frame the encounter towards the outcome of change that is anticipated.

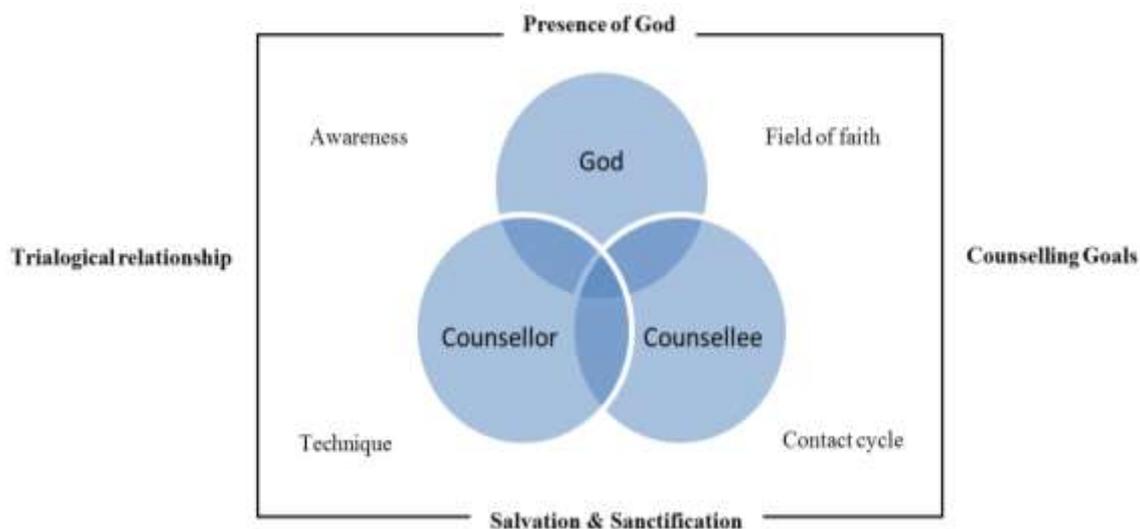


Figure 1: Pastoral counselling model for the exploration of calling and identity

1.1 The self

The counsellor and counselee are both created in the Image of and as representatives of God. Their lives are both assumed to have purpose and meaning in context of having an earthly as well as eternal destiny.

Every individual has a spirit created from the same light as the Holy Spirit which can be described as a unique fingerprint of God. The human spirit reflects the seven-fold reality of the Holy Spirit, described in Roms 12 as prophet, servant, teacher, exhorter, giver, ruler and mercy. Each person is uniquely designed by God for the particular task or calling He has for them. When individuals' spirits are directly engaged with and God brings healing and growth, there is an increased sense of "legitimate self" (worthiness and identity).

The experience of legitimacy, worth and competence is intricately linked to not only our early childhood experiences and ways of relating to people, but to how we relate to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

1.2 Techniques

The unique pastoral counselling techniques involve *prayer* and *Scripture*. The use of the Gestalt technique within the pastoral counselling model, involves awareness and the contact cycle (or cycle of experience) together with various techniques which may be applied. The overarching "field" of this pastoral counselling model is the *field of faith*.

In Karen's practice there is awareness of and contact with both the spirit and soul of individuals.

Specific techniques in working with the human spirit, include cleansing individuals' timelines, breaking various forms of trauma bonds (to time, places, people, events), healing old wounds and shame, brain deliverance and examining principles of life from the Word to live by. Arthur's techniques for dealing with PTSD and developing the "office of personhood" (see www.theslg.com) include the deliberate use of sensory awareness and contact, which is so central in understanding the way individuals make "contact" in their realities within Gestalt.

1.3 Theoretical underpinnings for the Gestalt pastoral counselling model

- Human beings are created in the image of God
- Goal setting occurs within the tension between the “here and now” being of the counselee and the process of “becoming” in the context of sanctification through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- The paradoxical or dual realities of the faith field and the “regular field of life”, and the many paradoxes within Scripture, may be explored effectively with Gestalt techniques.
- Within the **eschatological awareness**, the paradox is ultimately between the sinner and the sinner who is saved by grace, as well as between who one is in Christ and who one is becoming within the faith perspective. Self-acceptance includes the awareness of being made into the image of God, of being “a sinner saved by grace” as well as the “not yet” dimension.
- The inherent moment towards change and growth is not rooted in evolution or existential theory within the pastoral counselling framework, but in the belief that God reaches down to human beings and calls them into relationship with Himself.
- The pastoral counsellor’s stance is one of being within the “*theological middle*” where the gospel and other Scriptural truths are normatively proclaimed while at the same time allowing the counselee to exercise free will in his/her particular process of experience.
- The overarching pastoral counselling outcome aimed at is spiritual growth and maturity. Within this context distorted or negative perceptions of God will be explored towards spiritual health and the reframing of current situation, with a view towards transcending the current reality and generating new hope.
- The role of pastoral counsellor necessitates a *submission to God* taking the lead as Wonderful Counsellor. At the same time healing comes from both the triological encounter (the work of God through the Holy Spirit) and the authentic dialogical encounter between the counsellor and counselee.

- As the *Holy Spirit* is invited into the counselling process, the dialogical encounter is encapsulated within (not extended to) a **trialogical encounter**. In this triologue, God is “Other.” It is an encounter in which the “fear of the Lord” facilitates intimacy and the experience of relationship facilitates a covenant with Him as God (Ultimate Transcendent).
- The pastoral *counsellor’s effectiveness* is enhanced or limited by personal growth and maturity.
- The *field of faith* is the meta-realm of life which “comes into play between the factor of *genesis* and *thanatos*, with *eros* as the in-between of life” (Louw, 2015:28). Hope and the significance of life emerge “within the awareness of transcendence” (Louw, 2015:28).
- *Hope* entails a stance in life, a new mode of being that transcends optimistic speculation, and instils an existential mode of trust and being (Louw, 2015:28).
- Within this pastoral counselling frame, *awareness* includes and starts from a meta-physical realm of the reality of God, relationship with Him, beliefs (include God images), interactions and communications with Him. Awareness shifts among the realm of faith, the realm of contact and experience and the normative guidelines of Scripture.

The spirit and soul of man have separate streams of awareness and operation which are to function as a team optimally.

- Specific *cycles of contact* within this pastoral counselling process would include contact with God through life experience, Scripture and experience of God’s presence. Due to the nature of the pastoral counselling model, which is contractually defined between the counsellor and client, the contact with the realm of faith and Scripture form a starting point and a normative point of reference.
- The *techniques* used within this pastoral counselling model are both specific (involving Scripture and prayer) and general (Gestalt and other techniques).
- *Scriptural exploration* may be used within the context of the client’s reality.

- *Prayer* is used within the pastoral counselling encounter as an inviting of God's presence as well as dialogue with Him.
- Specific areas of meaning that can be explored within this pastoral counselling model, may involve: the counselee's understanding and experiences of God and the meaning of relationship with Him; expectations in terms of God's involvement in human life; facing obstacles; and the exploration of global and contextual belief systems.
- Other tools or techniques suggested include: the Gestalt exploration of selves or inner conflict, through "two-chair" work for example (see MacKay, 2011) (cf. section 3.3.2); projections using clay or sand work (see Schoeman, 2012: 77-78, 80-83), working with dreams (see Schoeman, 2012:59); or experiments (see Perls, *et al.*, 2009 [1951]).

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