

Pastoral Counseling  
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Pastoral Counseling is a unique form of psychotherapy that complements social science. As pastoral counselors, we take seriously the whole person in practice: body, mind, and spirit. We operate on the common model that psychology and psychiatry typically use in terms of pathology and illness. We are most often licensed professional counselors, as well as pastoral counselors.

Some problems involving physical or mental illness can also be spiritual. Such spiritual problems may include uncertainties and life experiences, which threaten to exhaust a person's emotional resources. Common examples of such spiritual problems may include the loss of a loved one, a job change, the ongoing care of an elderly family member, or a lifestyle change/move. These are just a few of the many life transitions and crises that can be depleting. While some people turn to a psychologist, social worker, or psychiatrist, others seek the opportunity to discuss these problems in a spiritual context. Working with a pastoral counselor can offer such guidance, help reframe such troubling experiences, and calm the storm. Many people who come to pastoral counseling, realize that forgiveness can include not only the forgiveness of others but also forgiving one's self for past events. We are able to help people discover their beliefs about God and integrate their thoughts and feelings with their spiritual knowledge.

Pastoral counseling uses the spiritual resources as well as the psychological understanding for healing and growth. Across the US, more than 3000 pastoral counselors provide a variety of treatment for people with all types of problems. We work with folks of all ages and in different kinds of relationships: adults, children, couples and families. We welcome people of all faith traditions. We can be found working in different settings, including some churches, which have counseling centers with pastoral counselors on staff. Many pastoral counselors have private practices, or work in association with other therapists.

One of questions I am often asked is, "What is the difference between a clergy person, who offers guidance to parishioners, and a pastoral counselor?" People often turn to their clerical leader for guidance through life's mazes. Clergy can help ease the pain of those who come to them. But not all clergy have professional training in counseling and psychology to look at behavior patterns, and at the emotional scars that people bear all too silently. If clerical guidance requires more than a couple of sessions then perhaps it is time to call a pastoral counselor. Some individuals may choose to seek out a pastoral counselor on their own, given their desire for spiritual support as well as professional counseling. Others may be referred by their clergy person, their family physician, or nurse practitioner.

In my practice I tend to see clients with common psychological problems like depression, relationship concerns, personality disorders, marital conflict, and parent/child issues. Many clients present symptoms that may be grief related or are from past abuse.

Some of my clients face ailments such as headaches, impaired sleep, or are ineffectively handling their life stresses. They may have tried traditional medical treatments and medication. When such medical treatments have not worked, their doctors referred them to me. By looking at other factors in their lives such as troubled relationships, the lifestyle being lived, and the choices they make, people often have found greater relief from the problems they had perceived as medical. In the process they have been able to be more relaxed, happy, and can enjoy life again.

Cindy Hickman Ray graduate from Loyola College in Maryland with a Masters of Science in Pastoral Counseling. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor in the State of North Carolina. She is a Christian and she and her husband of 32 years are actively involved in a large local congregation.

Pastoral Counseling began at Loyola about 30 years ago when the Jesuit priests, who were also clinical psychologists, began to realize there is often a spiritual piece to healing and wholeness. They began to develop the pastoral counseling program, which includes not only the entire didactic mental health curriculum, (CACREP accreditation,) and a strong clinical program, but also a theological reflection growth experience for their students. Loyola also has a strong research program which seeks to link healing and spirituality. The religious affiliation of faculty, students, and graduates includes as many different denominations as one might imagine.

If you are interested in learning more about Loyola's program please visit the website at [www.loyola.edu](http://www.loyola.edu).

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