

Master's Thesis Summary: Enhancing Reflective Learning in Ministry Supervision.

Neil Baker, August 2026.

A. Research Introduction:

“We do not learn by experience. We learn from reflecting on experience.”¹

These famous words are attributed to John Dewey, one of the pioneers of modern reflective learning practice and form the opening sentence of my Master thesis exploring the ways we can enhance reflective learning for pastors and leaders engaging in ministry supervision. This phrase suggests that reflective learning does not happen by chance, but through an intentional process of reflecting on, and thereby learning from, one's own practice and experience. It is my conviction that reflective learning is key to effective and meaningful ministry supervision and shifts ministry supervision from a box-ticking exercise or one of compliance to abuse in care recommendations to becoming something far more supportive, empowering, and beneficial to our pastors and leaders and the communities they serve.

This article is a summary of the key learnings from my thesis research and is an endeavour to provide accessible feedback to interested supervisors and pastors on the important topic of reflective learning in ministry supervision. This was requested by several supervisors and registrants, and I trust it will provide a helpful summary of my research. The full thesis can be found in the Carey Baptist College library as both a hard copy and online electronic copy.

My research question for my thesis was as follows:

“What are the qualities, practices, and approaches that enhance the reflective learning experience of New Zealand Baptist pastors and leaders engaging in External Supervision Support?”²

External Supervision Support is the term used by Baptist Union of New Zealand to describe the movements unique approach to the ministry supervision of Baptist pastors and leaders.³

In addition to a comprehensive review of ministry supervision literature, a key feature of the research was an extensive qualitative survey of supervisors and Baptist registrants engaged

¹ Carol Rogers, “Defining Reflection: Another Look at John Dewey and Reflective Thinking,” *Teachers College Record* 104-4 (2002): 842-866, doi: 10.1111/1467-9620.00181.

² Neil Baker, “Enhancing Reflective the Learning Experience of Baptist Registrants Engaging in External Supervision Support” (Master's Thesis, Carey Graduate School, 2026).

³ “Registration Development Agreement,” Carey Centre for Lifelong Learning, <https://www.lifelonglearning.nz/baptist-registration/registration-development-agreement/>.

in External Supervision Support. The purpose of the survey was to understand what supervisors and Baptist registrants identified as the important factors that either enhance or hinder registrant reflective learning supervision. 99 supervisors and 155 Baptist registrants took part in the respective surveys which were conducted in the first half of 2024. This was a very positive response rate and has added depth and breadth to the research findings. Thanks to the many of you who participated in the survey!

B. Key Survey Findings:

Each of the respective survey's entailed 14 questions. For the sake of this article I want to focus on the findings of 5 questions answered by supervisors and registrants that can be compared and contrasted to identify the key factors that enhance registrant reflective learning supervision. The respective responses by supervisors and registrants are shown in contrasting tables and has been colour-coded to show correlation in the survey findings.

1. What Are the Important Personal Qualities Supervisors Need to Support Pastors and Church Leaders to Engage in Reflective Learning?⁴

Supervisor Ranking	Area Identified	%
1.	Ability to listen well	71%
2.	Empathy	29%
3.	Ministry experience	28%
4.	Discernment	28%
5.	Self-awareness	26%
6.	Asking good questions	24%
7.	Supportive	19%
8.	Curiosity	19%
9.	Non-judgmental	17%
10.	Christian faith	17%

Registrant Ranking	Area Identified	%
1.	Ability to listen well	56%
2.	Asking good questions	29%
3.	Ministry experience	24%
4.	Empathy	19%
5.	Relational approach	19%
6.	Willingness to challenge	17%
7.	Facilitate reflective learning	15%
8.	Christian Faith	14%
9.	Wisdom	13%
10.	Non-judgemental	12%

⁴ Baker, "Enhancing Reflective the Learning Experience of Baptist Registrants Engaging in External Supervision Support," 120.

A highly significant correlation identified in the respective surveys of supervisors and registrants is supervisors' 'Ability to listen well'. In both groups this attribute was identified as the top ranked quality and was significantly higher than all other areas identified (noted as 71% for supervisors with the next quality 'Empathy' at 29%, and 56% for registrants followed by 'Asking good questions' at 29%). While I had anticipated that this response might be evident in the survey, the strength of this finding indicates the vital importance of supervisors listening well and employing active listening skills to enhance the reflective learning experience of Baptist registrants. It is often assumed that people trained in ministry supervision will have good active listening skills. However, the research shows that this assumption is just that – an assumption – and one that does not always bear out in reality. In considering this finding it is important to note that the ability to listen well can be both a personal quality of the supervisor and also a learned skill.⁵ As a personal quality, the ability to listen well enables the supervisor to be present, interested, and available to the registrant. These are important qualities that undergird the therapeutic nature of the supervisory relationship. It is interesting to note that registrants also identified the relational approach of the supervisor (ranked 5th on the registrant responses at 19%) as important for enhancing their reflective learning experience. As a skill, the ability to listen well is something that supervisors can consciously develop and purposefully utilise in supervision to support the reflective learning of registrants.

Significant correlations are noted in the survey regarding supervisor 'Empathy' (29% for supervisors and 19% for registrants), ministry experience (28% and 24% respectively), and asking good questions (24% and 29% respectively). Empathy can be simply defined as "the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation."⁶ Empathy for the registrant's experiences and an ability to relate in an understanding way appears to be an important personal quality of supervisors in supporting registrant reflective learning. It is interesting to note that ministry experience, which occurs as the third highest in both surveys, could be something that supports supervisor empathy. While some registrants noted their strong preference to see a supervisor that had previous ministry experience as a local church pastor or leader, ministry experience also includes supervisor awareness and understanding of the complex dynamics faced by registrants in their unique vocational roles. Given the importance of supervisor ability to listen well, it may be that the qualities of empathy and ministry understanding could in some ways support supervisors to take a listening posture.

⁵ Inger Ulleberg and Per Jensen, "Listening and Silence in Supervision," in *Supervision of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice*, ed. Arlene Vetere and Jim Sheehan (Cham: Springer Publishers, 2017), 69-90.

⁶ "Empathy," Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/empathy>.

Further to this, asking good questions is widely understood as an important feature of helpful supervision and reflective learning.⁷ The qualifier of ‘good’ denotes questions that are open in nature, express genuine interest, are considered and insightful, and invite registrant response and reflective engagement. Good questions of this nature potentially support active listening on the part of the supervisor and demonstrate genuine interest and empathy that help the registrant’s reflective learning process.

A reasonably significant correlation underscores the themes of supervisors being non-judgemental (17% and 12% respectively) and supervisors expressing a Christian faith experience (17% and 14% respectively). This may suggest that a non-judgmental attitude on the part of the supervisor promotes a safe space for registrants to be open and honest in supervision. Additionally, supervisors who share a Christian faith may be more understanding and facilitative of registrant spirituality in the context of supervision.

An interesting contrast in the responses by supervisors and registrants is that supervisors identify supervisor qualities such as discernment, self-awareness, being supportive, and curiosity as important to enhance the reflective learning of registrants. For their part, registrants identified the importance of the supervisor’s relational approach, willingness to gently challenge, and the sharing of helpful wisdom, as being valuable to their reflective learning experience.

2. What Are Supervisor Attitudes and Behaviours That Can Possibly Hinder Pastors & Church Leaders from Engaging in Reflective Learning?⁸

Supervisor Ranking #	Area Identified	%
1.	Know it all attitude	34%
2.	Advice giving	31%
3.	Judgemental attitude	24%
4.	Controlling behaviours	20%
5.	Talking too much	19%

Registrant Ranking #	Area Identified	%
1.	Advice giving	33%
2.	Projection of supervisor’s experience	25%
3.	Judgmental attitude	22%
4.	Know it all attitude	21%
5.	Failing to listen well	21%

⁷ Inger Ulleberg and Per Jensen, “Asking Questions in Supervision,” in *Supervision of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice*, ed. Arlene Vetere and Jim Sheehan (Cham: Springer Publishers, 2017), 45-68

⁸ Baker, “Enhancing Reflective the Learning Experience of Baptist Registrants Engaging in External Supervision Support,” 123.

6.	Tell their own stories	19%
7.	Failing to listen well	19%
8.	Too rigid in approach	19%
9.	Being anxious	12%
10.	Jumping to conclusions	10%

6.	Controlling behaviours	18%
7.	Rigid thinking	14%
8.	Lack of ministry experience and understanding	13%
9.	Talking too much	12%
10.	Lack of good questions	10%

A highly significant correlation identified in the respective surveys of supervisors and registrants is supervisor 'Advice giving'. This ranks 1st for registrants (33%) and 2nd for supervisors (31%). Many supervisors appear to be aware they can fall into presumptive and prescriptive advice giving that can have the effect of diminishing the reflective engagement of pastors and leaders. Registrants for their part view this kind of advice giving as pre-emptive, simplistic, and a form of 'telling' that hinders their reflective process. It is interesting to note, related to advice giving, that both supervisors and registrants identified supervisor telling/projecting of their own stories, talking too much, and failing to listen well, within to the top 10 causes of supervisor attitudes and behaviours that hinder the reflective learning of pastors and leaders. These may all contribute to the supervisor moving to premature advice giving. Advice giving might also be seen as a go-to intervention by some supervisors, particularly if they come from helping professions like pastoral ministry that can sometimes favour this approach. Additionally, it may be that some supervisors have not developed a good understanding of reflective learning processes and active listening skills necessary for effective supervision.

Registrants, for their part, are open to the wisdom of their supervisors. It appears, therefore, that the sharing of practice wisdom and advice by supervisors is a matter of 'how' and 'when'. When the sharing of advice is done sparingly, with care, with permission, and in a later part of the reflective learning process for illustrative purposes, then such advice may be received as helpful to the reflective leaning experience of the registrant. Additionally, it is noted that supervisors identified anxiety as a factor that hinders their ability to support reflective learning (9th at 12%). It is therefore posited that anxiety, along with inexperience, supervisor assumption that advice giving is a key intervention in supervision, and a lack of understanding of reflective learning processes, may all contribute to exacerbate this issue.

A significant correlation identified in the respective surveys of supervisors and registrants is the supervisor's 'know it all attitude' (1st for supervisors at 34% and 4th for registrants at 21%). This conscious or unconscious positioning by the supervisor as the

'expert' in the supervisory relationship may be a contributing factor to why some supervisors rely on advice giving in their approach to supervision. Registrants expressed their strong aversion to this approach and noted that when supervisors come across with an over-confident and authoritative attitude that it can result in a feeling of condescension and projection in the supervisory relationship that is detrimental to their reflective learning. The need for supervisors to have a teachable and 'competent-but-humble' attitude in their approach to supervision, is therefore of vital importance.⁹

A further significant correlation in both surveys was noted in the judgmental attitude of supervisors (3rd for both supervisors and registrants at 24% and 22% respectively). It may be that this is an outworking of supervisors overstating their influence and competency due to a 'know it all attitude' and feeling that they know best what the practitioner needs. The other frequently used descriptors by registrants of this attitude were that of arrogance and pride, attitudes that clearly diminish engagement with practitioners and the process of reflective learning.

A reasonably significant correlation was noted in the areas of supervisors telling/projecting their stories, controlling behaviours, failing to listen well, being too rigid in approach and thinking, and talking too much.

An interesting contrast in the responses is that supervisors appear to be more aware of internal process and boundary issues related to their role that can possibly hinder pastors and church leaders from engaging in reflective learning. These include being anxious (12%) which can be a feature of new and inexperienced supervisors, jumping to conclusions (10%), passivity (10%), and poor boundaries (9%). The latter can occur when the supervisor becomes overly familiar with the practitioner or if there are potential conflicts of interest or closeness of association that blur the supervisor's ability to be objective. Not identifying parallel process (9%) was also acknowledged by some supervisors. Parallel process can occur when supervisors are not aware of their own unresolved issues which can be unconsciously triggered by the practitioner's presenting of issues in supervision.¹⁰ Unrecognised parallel process has the potential risk of the supervisor trying to rescue or fix the practitioner related to their own unresolved issues. Further, this might result in a

⁹ Clifton Edward Watkins, Joshua Hook, David Mosher, and Jennifer Callahan, "Humility in Clinical Supervision: Fundamental, Foundational, and Transformational," *The Clinical Supervisor* 38-1 (2018): 58–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07325223.2018.1487355>.

¹⁰ Jan Grant, Margot Schofield, and Sarah Crawford, "Managing Difficulties in Supervision: Supervisors' Perspectives," *Journal of Counselling Psychology* 59-4 (2012): 528-541, doi: 10.1037/a0030000.

supervisor becoming anxious, stuck in the supervisory process, and lacking objectivity to assist the practitioner.¹¹

Additionally, registrants also identified supervisors' lack of ministry experience and understanding (13%), coupled with the supervisor not asking good questions (10%), and not understanding reflective practice (8%), as factors that hinder their engagement in reflective learning within supervision.

3. What Are the Personal Qualities of Pastors & Church Leaders That Support Them to Engage in Reflective Learning?¹²

Supervisor Ranking	Area Identified	%	Registrant Ranking	Area Identified	%
1.	Willingness to learn	58%	1.	Willingness/Openness to learn	68%
2.	Willingness to be vulnerable	53%	2.	Humility	46%
3.	Humility	38%	3.	Willingness to be Vulnerable	39%
4.	Self-awareness	20%	4.	Self-awareness	20%
5.	Ability to self-reflect	17%	5.	Willingness to engage in reflective learning	18%
6.	Teachable to other perspectives	13%	6.	Commitment to supervision	15%
7.	A holistic theology and spiritual life	13%	7.	Secure	13%
8.	Commitment to supervision	12%	8.	Trust in supervisor	10%
9.	Curiosity	10%	9.	Healthy church ministry focus	10%
10.	Trusting	8%	10.	Coming to supervision prepared	9%

¹¹ Henry Smith, "Too hot to Handle? Unthought Anxiety and Parallel Process in Social Work Supervision," *Journal of Social Work Practice* 38-1 (2024): 273–286, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2024.2377761>.

¹² Baker, "Enhancing Reflective the Learning Experience of Baptist Registrants Engaging in External Supervision Support," 127.

A highly significant correlation identified in the respective surveys of supervisors and registrants is the practitioner's 'Willingness to learn'. This ranks 1st for both supervisors and registrants as the most important personal quality of pastors and church leaders to support them to engage in reflective learning (58% and 68% respectively). Supervisors described this willingness to learn as their desire for registrants to be teachable and to see supervision as a place for growth. Registrants for their part expressed a desire for supervision to be a place in which they can be open to new perspectives, explore their blind spots and biases, and invite feedback and support. It is interesting to note that supervisors also identified practitioners being teachable to other perspectives (6th at 13%) and showing curiosity (9th at 10%) as attitudes that may undergird practitioner willingness to engage in reflective learning.

A significant correlation was identified in practitioners being willing to be vulnerable (2nd for supervisors with 53% and 3rd for registrants at 39%). Interestingly, an additional significant correlation was affirmed as practitioner humility in supervision (3rd for supervisors at 38% and 2nd for registrants at 46%). It could be posited that the ability of practitioners to be vulnerable in supervision is directly related to their willingness to be humble and teachable in supervision. Further to this, practitioner self-awareness was identified as a significant correlation in the research (4th for both supervisors and registrants at 20% each) which is arguably an important quality to enable practitioners to be open, honest, and vulnerable in supervision. For supervisors, the self-awareness of practitioners includes an awareness of their personal strengths and growth areas as well as the challenges they are facing and their part in, and their responses to, these challenges. Registrants identified the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ) as an awareness of their humanity, their limitations, and an openness to disclosing their faults and mistakes. It appears, therefore, that healthy self-awareness on the part of the practitioner, in the context of a safe and supportive supervisory environment, can support practitioners to be vulnerable and humble, which may in turn contribute to the development of practitioner curiosity, and a willingness to be responsive and open to learn as they engage in supervision.

A significant correlation was also noted in practitioners making a commitment to supervision (8th and 6th) and developing a trusting relationship with their supervisor (10th and 8th) as important practices that support their engagement in reflective learning.

In contrast, registrants noted that being secure, in the sense of having personal and vocational security (7th at 13%), was an important quality to assist their reflective learning. It is posited that having a sense of personal security is helpful to undergird all the important qualities practitioners have identified to assist their reflective learning. Having a sense of personal security opens the way for registrants to be willing to learn, to show humility, to be vulnerable, and to trust their supervisor and the supervisory process.

4. What Are the Attitudes and Behaviours of Pastors & Church Leaders That Can Possibly Hinder Them from Engaging in Reflective Learning?¹³

Supervisor Ranking	Area Identified	%	Registrant Ranking	Area Identified	%
1.	Pride	45%	1.	Arrogance	56%
2.	Not willing or able to reflect	34%	2.	Not teachable or willing to learn	19%
3.	Rigid beliefs and ideas	18%	3.	Rigid thinking	17%
4.	Not able to be vulnerable	18%	4.	Busyness	15%
5.	Fear of exposure	16%	5.	Lack of vulnerability	15%
6.	Don't value supervision	16%	6.	Lack of self-awareness	14%
7.	Not prioritising supervision	16%	7.	Not valuing supervision	14%
8.	Lack of self-awareness	13%	8.	Fear	11%
9.	Defensiveness	13%	9.	Close minded	10%
10.	Lack desire to grow and explore new ideas	12%	10.	Unwilling to engage the reflective learning process	10%

A highly significant correlation identified in the respective surveys of supervisors and registrants as hindering reflective learning was pastor and church leader attitudes of pride and arrogance (1st for both supervisors and registrants at 45% and 56% respectively). This attitude was much higher than the next identified areas in both surveys. Both survey groups identified other characteristics undergirding pride and arrogance including pastors and leaders exhibiting a 'know it all' attitude, having an inflated sense of their own importance, and presuming to be the expert in their own context. Supervisors expressed additional concern that practitioners may lack humility or are not open to learning or having healthy accountability in their lives. For their part, registrants expressed deep concern for pastors

¹³ Baker, "Enhancing Reflective the Learning Experience of Baptist Registrants Engaging in External Supervision Support," 129.

and leaders noting that pride might stem from overconfidence, self-sufficiency, and from cultural ideas that pastors are 'untouchable'. Additionally, and importantly, registrants noted that pride might also be a symptom of deeper inadequacy and insecurity which they described as practitioners feeling like they are 'unable to accept help' or 'unable to be wrong'. It is interesting to observe from the responses to this question that supervisors and registrants identified a number of other areas that may contribute to the hindrance of pride in ministry supervision. Of note in this regard are pastors' and leaders' lack of vulnerability, fear of exposure, not being teachable, and not being willing or able to reflect.

A significant correlation was identified as practitioner rigid beliefs and ideas that may hinder their reflective learning (3rd for both supervisors and registrants at 18% and 17% respectively). Supervisors described this rigidity as inflexibility on the part of the practitioners while registrants described this as practitioners being narrow minded and demonstrating fixed mindsets in their approach to supervision. A further significant correlation was identified as practitioners' inability or reluctance to be vulnerable related to their participation in ministry supervision (4th and 5th respectively).

A reasonable correlation was noted in the areas of practitioners not being willing or able to engage the reflective learning process, not being teachable or willing to learn, fear of exposure, and practitioners not valuing supervision.

In contrast, supervisors identified pastors and church leaders not prioritising supervision (16%) as a hindrance to their engaging in reflective learning. Whereas registrants identified busyness (15%) as hindering their engagement in reflective learning. It is possible that busyness by pastors and church leaders, while a plausible excuse, might be an important contributing factor to their not prioritising supervision or not engaging in supervision in an intentional or reflective manner.

Registrants also identified insecurity (11th at 10%) as another hindrance to their reflective learning. As noted in the previous question, insecurity like security appears to have an influence in the registrant's ability to engage in reflective learning.¹⁴ Insecurity can potentially lead to expressions of pride in the practitioner's persona, to a lack of vulnerability, to fear of exposure, and to defensiveness and avoidant behaviours. While insecurity does not rank in the top 10 identified hindrances by practitioners it is possible that this is a key underlying feature that hinders registrants from engaging in reflective learning. While supervisors may not be able to directly address a registrant's insecurity, it does highlight the

¹⁴ Salam Soliman, "Attachment in Supervision: Using a Relational Lens to Understand Supervisory Dynamics," *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia* 11-2 (2023): 1-23, <https://doi.org/10.59158/001c.90756>, 12.

importance of supervisors seeking to create a safe, relational, supportive, and trusting space in which the work of reflective learning can take place.

5. What Are the Approaches, Methods, and Models You Use and Find Helpful to Support Pastors & Church Leaders to Engage in Reflective Learning? Please Name/List/Describe These (Supervisor Question)¹⁵ *

*A related question asked of Baptist registrants was: What are some of the approaches, methods, and models you have identified being used by your supervisor to support your reflective learning experience in supervision? Please name or describe those you have identified.

Supervisor Ranking	Area Identified	%
1.	Reflective Learning Model of supervision	29%
2.	Asking good questions to trigger reflection	29%
3.	Active listening	19%
4.	Strengths-based Approach	16%
5.	Person Centred Approach	16%
6.	Seven Eyed Model of Supervision	14%
7.	Prayer	11%
8.	Coaching Approaches	11%
9.	Relaxed space	9%

Registrant Ranking	Area Identified	%
1.	Good questions	41%
2.	Reflective listening	34%
3.	Relational approach	16%
4.	Reflective Learning approaches	13%
5.	Supervisors follow up from previous supervision	12%
6.	Resources to assist reflection between sessions	12%
7.	Encouragement	11%
8.	Appropriate challenge	9%
9.	Prayer	8%

¹⁵ Baker, "Enhancing Reflective the Learning Experience of Baptist Registrants Engaging in External Supervision Support," 132.

10.	Discernment	8%
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10.	Starting with what the practitioner feels is most important	8%
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A highly significant correlation identified in the respective surveys of supervisors and registrants is the supervisor's use of asking good questions (2nd for supervisors at 29% and 1st for registrants at 41%).

A significant correlation was noted regarding supervisors' use of active/reflective listening approaches (3rd and 2nd respectively), reflective learning approaches (1st and 5th respectively), and person-centred/relational approaches (5th and 3rd respectively) to support the reflective learning of registrants.

A reasonably significant correlation was identified regarding prayer (7th and 9th respectively), being prayer by the supervisor for the registrant or the supervisor creating space for reflective prayer as part of the reflective learning process.

An understandable observation from the responses is that supervisors generally name the specific approaches, methods, and models they use (e.g., Reflective Learning model of supervision, Seven Eyed model of supervision, strength-based approach, Person-centred approach, Narrative approach) while respondents use more descriptive language to describe the supervisor's approach in supervision (e.g., good questions, relational approach, appropriate challenge, encouragement), rather than naming specific models.

An interesting consideration noted by registrants was their identification of supervisors following up from the previous supervision session (5th at 12%) and being given resources by their supervisor to consider between sessions (6th at 12%) to assist their reflective learning. This highlights the value of supervisors providing continuity between sessions to reinforce practice learning and providing tools and resources, where helpful and appropriate, for continued learning beyond the supervisory space.

C. Summary of key Research Learnings and related Recommendations for Baptist Registrant Reflective Learning Supervision.

Seven key learnings were identified from the survey responses and then compared and contrasted with the ministry supervision literature review to identify key recommendations to

enhance registrant reflective learning supervision. These 7 key learnings and recommendations are explored in my research thesis in full but are summarised as follows.¹⁶

1. Key finding 1 'Listen Well' leading to recommendation 1: *That supervisor training of ministry supervisors gives due focus to the development of comprehensive active listening skills to undergird reflective learning.*

Specific actions to implement this recommendation include:

- Incorporating Active Listening Skills training in the Certificate in Ministry Supervision micro-credential taught at Carey Baptist College (Completed)
- Provide feedback of this research recommendation to Baptist Union Approved Supervisors (Completed)
- Provide an Active Listening Skills webinar or article for Baptist Union Approved Supervisors as part of ongoing Professional Development (proposed)

2. Key finding 2 'The Issue with Advice Giving' leading to recommendation 2: *That supervisors are made aware of the importance of knowing how, when, and why to share practice wisdom without resorting to premature advice giving.*

Specific actions to implement this recommendation include:

- Incorporate an Advice Giving module into the Certificate in Ministry Supervision micro-credential taught at Carey Baptist College (Completed)
- Provide feedback of this research recommendation to Baptist Union Approved Supervisors (Completed)
- Provide an Advice Giving webinar or article for Baptist Union Approved Supervisors as part of ongoing Professional Development (Proposed)

3. Key finding 3 'Learning About Reflective Learning' leading to recommendation 3: *That supervisors should be trained in and receive ongoing development in using reflective learning approaches in ministry supervision.*

Specific actions to implement this recommendation include:

- The Reflective Learning Model of Supervision is now incorporated as a key model in the Certificate of Ministry Supervision micro-credential taught at Carey Baptist College (Completed)

¹⁶ Baker, "Enhancing Reflective the Learning Experience of Baptist Registrants Engaging in External Supervision Support," 158.

- Improve the online orientation process for already trained supervisors to ensure they are trained and familiar with reflective learning models and processes (ongoing)
 - Ongoing webinars and articles for professional development of Baptist Union Approved Supervisors in reflective learning practice (proposed)
4. Key finding 4 'It's All About Relationship' leading to recommendation 4: *That the supervisory relationship is recognised and cultivated as the primary context for meaningful reflective learning.*
- Specific actions to implement this recommendation include:
- Recommendation incorporated into the Certificate of Ministry Supervision micro-credential taught at Carey Baptist College (Completed)
 - Recommendation highlighted in webinar feedback to Baptist Union Approved supervisors (Completed)
5. Key finding 5 'Getting the Most Out of Supervision' leading to recommendation 5: *That registrants be educated in reflective learning practice and how to get the most out of their engagement in External Supervision Support.*
- Specific actions to implement this recommendation include:
- Review of Baptist Union training and orientation process for new Baptist Registrants regarding External Supervision Support (ongoing)
 - Research articles to envision and support registrant engagement in External Supervision Support (ongoing)
 - Better education and promotion of the importance of External Supervision Support at Baptist Regional Associations and Baptist National Hui (proposed)
 - Proposed Webinar for Baptist Union Approved Supervisors on educating registrants at the start of the supervision journey on what ministry supervision is and is not and getting the most out of supervision (e.g. effective use of a supervision agreement to set up the supervision relationship, clarifying ministry supervision expectations, use of Marcuccio's *Three Ringed Model* to explain the focus on ministry supervision – explored in Appendix 1) (Proposed).
6. Key finding 6 'Attitudes That Make a Difference' leading to recommendation 6: *That supervisors and registrants are made aware of the importance of attitudes of humility and vulnerability to position supervision as a reflective learning experience*

Specific actions to implement this recommendation include:

- Recommendation incorporated into the Certificate of Ministry Supervision micro-credential taught at Carey Baptist College (Completed)
- Recommendation highlighted in webinar feedback to Baptist Union Approved supervisors (Completed)

7. Key learning 7 'Sacred Supervision' leading to recommendation 7: *That the importance and practice of Christian spirituality in ministry supervision is recognised and cultivated to support reflective learning.*

Specific actions to implement this recommendation include:

- Recommendation incorporated into the Certificate of Ministry Supervision micro-credential taught at Carey Baptist College (Completed)
- Recommendation highlighted in webinar feedback to Baptist Union Approved supervisors (Completed)
- The Sacred Space of Ministry Supervision webinar provided in 2024 and available as a resource (completed)

While I consider these the most important learnings from the research, this list is not exhaustive. There is a wealth of additional insights from the respective surveys (Chapters 5 and 6 in my thesis) as well as the from the comparison with the literature review (Chapter 8 in my thesis) that can enhance the reflective learning experience of Baptist registrants engaging in External Supervision Support. These include, for example, the importance of supervisors being aware of psychodynamic approaches in ministry supervision and their own experiences of parallel process that can, when unacknowledged, be detrimental to supervision, but when acknowledged can become a source of 'pre-flection' that gives them insight into the process of reflective learning. Other learnings include the value of supervisors having ministry experience and awareness. While this does not preclude ministry supervisors who do not have a specific pastoral ministry background, it appears from the research that it is vital for supervisors to have a sensitivity and an understanding of the unique context and challenges of pastors and church leaders. It appears that this understanding and sensitivity is the basis of the 'empathy' which registrants described as an important feature appreciated in ministry supervisors.

A final additional learning from the research highlights the overall positive experience of Baptist registrants related to their engagement in External Supervision Support. While a few registrants expressed some reservations about the new process, the majority perspective was one of appreciation and support of the new supervision requirements. This

was also affirmed in the 88% of the Baptist registrants completing the survey who selected 'very good' or 'excellent' to rate their current experience of External Supervision Support. This is an encouraging finding and a validation of the Baptist Union of New Zealand and the Carey Centre for Lifelong Learning facilitating this change in the supervision requirements of Baptist registrants.

D. Personal Reflections

From my perspective as a researcher as well as my dual roles as a ministry supervisor and a Baptist registrant, three important learnings from the research have stood out to me for significant personal reflection which I will outline below.¹⁷

1. *'Listen Well'*

The priority on listening well appears to be one of the most important findings from the qualitative research. Both supervisors and Baptist registrants expressed the vital importance of supervisors 'listening well' and the corresponding hindrance of supervisors 'failing to listen well' as key factors influencing the reflective learning experience of registrants in ministry supervision. While I had thought this might be noted in the research based on my own personal experience of good supervision and my facilitation of ministry supervision for others, I was surprised by the strength of this finding. In considering a holistic view of the research, it appears that the failure of supervisors to 'listen well' may be influenced by a variety of factors. These include other findings in the research related to supervisors having a 'know it all' and 'judgmental' attitude towards the registrant. However, it also appears that the ability to 'listen well' is often taken for granted or assumed in some reflective learning approaches. It may also be that some supervisors, and possibly those from pastoral backgrounds, either unconsciously fail to listen well or assume that talking and advice giving is central to their role as supervisors. For this reason, the research appears to emphasise the importance of supervisors learning to 'listen well' as a primary skill to support the reflective learning of Baptist registrants. It is therefore a quality and a skill that I am conscious of cultivating in my own ministry supervision practice.

¹⁷ Baker, "Enhancing Reflective the Learning Experience of Baptist Registrants Engaging in External Supervision Support," 160-162.

2. 'It's All About Relationship'

The importance of the supervisory relationship is another finding from the research I personally resonate with in providing ministry supervision to pastors and church leaders. The research indicates that the supervisory relationship is the primary means through which good supervision and meaningful reflective learning take place. It may be inferred that the quality of the supervisory relationship, and the cultivation of trust and rapport between supervisors and registrants has a direct effect on the level of openness and willingness of registrants engaging in reflective learning.

For registrants, the 'fit' of their relationship with the supervisor is of vital importance and time needs to be taken to build rapport both at the beginning of the supervisory relationship and as part of each ongoing session of supervision. This is an intentional and cultivated practice and responsibility for this rests with the supervisor. Davys and Beddoe's comment is insightful: "The quality of the relationship between the supervisor and practitioner has been identified as the most powerful determinant of the success or quality of the subsequent supervision relationship."¹⁸ I completely agree.

3. 'Sacred Supervision'

One of the unique features of ministry supervision noted in the literature and research, and one that distinguishes ministry supervision from all other forms of supervision, is the practice, cultivation, and experience of Christian spirituality in the supervisory relationship. Christian spirituality is not just about Christian practices such as prayer, discernment, and reflective meditation, but it is also about the ethos and ethic shared between supervisor and registrant. Leach and Paterson affirm this clearly when they describe ministry supervision as "a relationship between two or more disciples who meet to consider the ministry of one or more of them in an intentional and disciplined way."¹⁹ It is my conviction that this is a needed and exciting area to be cultivated in the External Supervision Support of Baptist registrants, and one that has possibly been taken for granted and underutilised in ministry supervision. While rightly distinguishing ministry supervision from classic spiritual direction, it is my sense that the healthy cultivation and exploration of Christian spirituality in External Supervision Support can richly enhance the reflective learning experience of Baptist registrants.

¹⁸ Davys and Beddoe, *Best Practice in Professional Supervision*, 50.

¹⁹ Leach and Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook*, 1.

E. Final Research Reflections

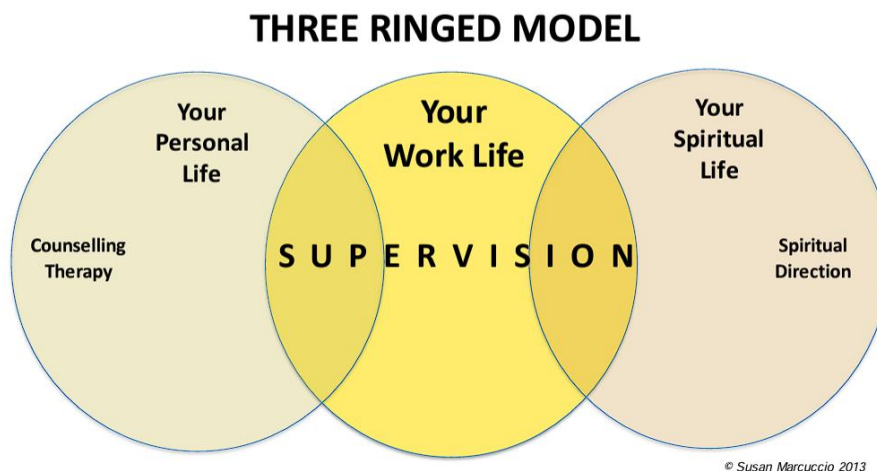
While it has been a joy to undertake this research it has also been a labour of love. A collegial love for my fellow Baptist registrants who, I believe, deserve effective External Supervision Support as together we seek to faithfully serve the purposes of Jesus in our churches, in our communities, and in our world. This is an immense task and, consequently, vocational ministry incorporates both the privileges and challenges of this task today. Far from being a magic wand that will wipe away all the challenges in our churches, it is my conviction that External Supervision Support can instead be a vital and lifegiving practice for the support and wellbeing of our pastors and the churches and communities they serve. To be effective, however, and to ensure that supervision is not just another box ticking exercise, it is my conviction that supervision needs to be reflective supervision, where the best reflective learning practices can be incorporated and utilised to enhance the reflective learning experience of Baptist registrants. This has been the stated purpose of my research and I now submit the findings of this research in the form of seven key learnings and seven recommendations that I believe the research affirms as the most important qualities, practices, and approaches that will enhance the reflective learning of Baptist registrants engaging in External Supervision Support.

It is my sincere hope that this research and the recommendations that have come from it will be of encouragement and value to supervisors and Baptist registrants engaged in External Supervision Support. To this anticipated end, let me finish this article with the insightful words of Leach and Paterson as to the value of reflective learning in ministry supervision: *“Having someone to help us stop jabbering, having someone who can help us listen to what is going on behind the scenes, beneath the words, around, among and within us, is worth its weight in gold.”*²⁰ I trust that this research will add value and ‘weight’ to enhance the reflective learning experience of Baptist registrants engaging in External Supervision Support over the years to come. Amen—Let it be!

²⁰ Michael Paterson and Liz Crumlish, *Pastoral Supervision Creativity in Action* (Edinburgh: IPSRP Publications, 2021), 24.

Appendix 1: The Three Ringed Model of Supervision

A helpful and visual way of describing what ministry supervision is, and importantly what it is not, is a ministry supervision model developed by Marcuccio known as the *Three Ringed Model*.²¹ This model is visualised by Marcuccio as follows:²²



The three rings visually represent three major areas of a ministry practitioner's life: their personal life, their spiritual life, and their work life, with the practitioner's work life being the primary focus of supervision, albeit integrative with the other dimensions. Marcuccio describes the *Three Ringed Model* in the following way:

The three ringed model is a visual picture that shows that the main focus of supervision is a person's work life or, put another way, their profession, vocation, business or ministry. It also shows that a person's work life overlaps with their personal life and their spiritual life. This model shows that for supervision to be holistic, we work in the overlap between work life and personal life but don't go so far that it becomes counselling or therapy. It also shows that we work in the overlap between a person's work life and spiritual life, but don't go so far that it becomes spiritual direction or takes the place of a person's faith community.²³

Marcuccio's model distinguishes between various kinds of professional, personal, and ministry support a pastor could receive, and then outlines a more integrated approach to

²¹ Susan Marcuccio, *New Perspectives in Supervision* (New South Wales: Perspective Supervision, 2022), 52.

²² Marcuccio, *New Perspectives in Supervision*, 52.

²³ Marcuccio, *New Perspectives in Supervision*, 50-51.

pastoral supervision. Whereas counselling therapy primarily focuses on a person's personal life and classic spiritual direction primarily focuses on a person's spiritual life, Marcuccio's model includes an understanding of both approaches while integrating a professional supervision approach which primarily focuses on a person's work life, similar to that of professional supervision for social workers and counsellors. In this model of pastoral supervision, a pastor's vocational experience regarding their work/ministry life, their personal life, and their spiritual life can all be given focus through reflective engagement. Marcuccio's model seeks to build upon and distinguish ministry supervision from other professional supervision approaches by highlighting the integrative nature of pastoral ministry.

Additionally, Marcuccio acknowledges the importance of practitioners understanding what ministry supervision is, and what it is not, so they can get the most out of their engagement with supervision. To this end she recommends supervisors providing a copy of the *Three Ringed Model* to practitioners at their very first supervision session to explain what ministry supervision is and to invite the practitioner's understanding and support of the supervisory process.²⁴ I have now started doing this as part of my own supervision practice and have found this to be a very helpful approach that informs and empowers the practitioner in their engagement in ministry supervision. I offer it here as a helpful way of describing the unique focus and nature of ministry supervision.

²⁴ Marcuccio, *New Perspectives in Supervision*, 52.