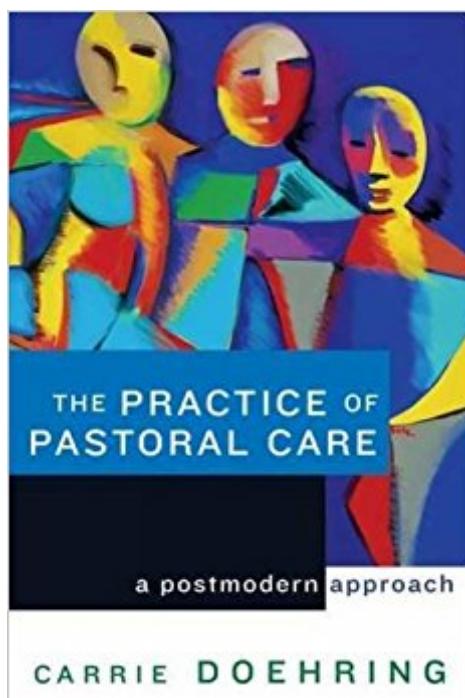


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# The Practice Of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach



## **Synopsis**

Drawing on psychological, theological, and cultural studies on suffering, Carrie Doehring encourages counselors to view their ministry through trifocal lenses and include approaches that are premodern (apprehending God through religious rituals), modern (consulting rational and empirical sources), and postmodern (acknowledging the contextual nature of knowledge). Utilizing strategies from all three perspectives, Doehring describes the basic ingredients of a caregiving relationship, shows how to use the caregiver's life experience as a source of authority, and demonstrates how to develop the skill of listening and establish the actual relationship. She then explains the steps of psychological assessment, systemic assessment, and theological reflection, and finally she delineates the basic steps for plans of care: attending to the careseeker's safety, building trust, mourning losses, and reconnecting with the ordinariness of life.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 198 pages

Publisher: Westminster John Knox Press; 1 edition (February 16, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0664226841

ISBN-13: 978-0664226848

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.4 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 27 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #108,306 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #94 in Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Church Administration #186 in Christian Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Counseling & Recovery #304 in Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Pastoral Resources

## **Customer Reviews**

"Every pastor needs to study this book so that new generations can learn the meaning of Christian care in a transformed world." -- James N. Poling, Professor of Pastoral Care, Counseling, and Theology, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary "This is a rich resource for ministries of care and counseling that I will use in teaching." -- Nancy J. Ramsay, Executive Vice President and Dean, Professor of Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Care, Brite Divinity School

Carrie Doehring is Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Iliff School of Theology in

Denver, Colorado. She is an ordained Presbyterian minister.

I found this book to be the best pastoral care book or counseling source. It answered questions on pastoral care that helped me to change my strategy in guiding my staff and colleagues. I recommended it to several pastors and many lay ministers. It has been a great help in helping me to fine tune my witnessing skills.

Carrie Doehring is a Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at ILIFF School of Theology in Denver, CO. According to her bio, “Carrie Doehring joined the Iliff faculty in 2003, having taught for eleven years in the masters and doctoral programs at Boston University’s School of Theology, and in the Counseling Psychology and Religion Ph.D. Program in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. She is a licensed psychologist in Massachusetts and Colorado, and a diplomat in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors.” She is ordained through the Presbyterian Church. Before becoming a teacher, she worked in congregational ministry in Ontario, Canada and Boston, Massachusetts. Content Summary Doehring believes pastoral caregivers should “view their ministry through trifocal lenses that include premodern, modern, and postmodern approaches to knowledge.” For her, a premodern approach relies on the sacred that is revealed through religious texts, rituals, and traditions. A modern lens uses rational and empirical methods like higher criticism of religious texts, medical knowledge, and social science. The postmodern approach is concerned with a patient’s unique history and social identity like her gender, race, religion, social class, sexual orientation, and age. Doehring examines seven steps that pastoral caregivers can use. First, listen empathically to the care seeker’s story. Second, examine the helpful or unhelpful ways in which one’s own story is engaged. Third, establish the contract of care by reviewing whether there are or may be limits to the confidentiality of the pastoral care conversation. Fourth, assess psychological issues to do with loss, violence, and ways of coping with the resulting stress, and proposing initial strategies for healing. Fifth, assess the strengths and liabilities of the care seekers cultural, community, family systems, and close relationships. Sixth, reflect theologically. Seventh, develop strategies for healing and justice. In this book, she gives the basic ingredients of caregiving relationships. She examines empathy, relational boundaries, and power dynamics. She explains how to write a verbatim and how to do self-reflection to improve one’s caregiving skills. The first step to giving care is to be a careful listener by paraphrasing for

clarification, asking clarifying questions, by interpreting the care seeker's emotional state, and by using appropriate self-discloser. She points out that body language can speak as loudly as words and tone of voice. In a chapter on establishing a caregiving relationship, she examines the limits of confidentiality. In cases of sexual or physical abuse, the caregiver may be required to report the situation to the police. The caregiver must also learn to recognize the limits of his or her expertise and turn to professional help in difficult situations. In making a psychological assessment, the caregiver is encouraged to listen to the care seeker's story. Her story can provide clues to the care seekers ability to deal with loss. People in a crisis situation experience various phases of grief. The more change that people are dealing with the more difficult it is for them to process the change. Some people respond with violence, others respond by turning to substance abuse or addictive behaviors. Another important element of making a systemic assessment is to find out about the care seeker's culture, community, and family. Asking questions in these areas can provide clues concerning possible treatments. One tool that can be used to do this is a genogram. Doehring also does theological reflection. She points out, "the use of theology is what makes pastoral care distinct from other forms of care." She uses two theological models that can help the caregiver. The first is a theology of broken symbols proposed by Robert Neville. He believes that God cannot be known directly, but can only be described in the language of symbols. The second model is Poling's theology of evil. He defines evil as "the abuse of power." Doehring gives three steps to help people seek healing or justice. First, attend to the care seeker's safety and build trust. Second, mourn losses. Third, reconnect with the ordinariness of life. Finally, Doehring uses a book and a movie named *Affliction* as a case study. She explains how to use each of her techniques to bring peace to a family that is plagued with violence, abuse, and addiction. In the story, the family ends up with several dead family members but if a well-trained pastoral care practitioner had been present, the story could have ended much differently. Evaluation Doehring does not seem to believe in God, or if she does believe in God, He is nothing but a presence or a feeling. She advises, "pastoral caregivers can use a premodern lens to focus on such practices as if direct apprehensions of the divine are possible." The words "as if" imply that it is not possible to know the divine. Later she dismisses pastoral caregivers who use religious sources "as though they are direct revelations of what they name as God, and not interpretations of religious experiences and construction of theological knowledge." For those who believe in God, these words are offensive. A pastor who does not believe in God

should not be a pastor, and pastoral care given by such a pastor is not really pastoral care, it is simply secular care that occasionally misappropriates the vocabulary of faith. Since Doehring does not believe in God, her next step is to disbelieve in sacred texts given by God. In reflecting on how to handle the modern transgender confusion that comes when a male thinks he is a female, she chooses to ignore what sacred texts might say and instead focuses on developing a theological construct that would excuse the sinful behavior. She does the same in the next paragraph when talking about cohabitating couples. She is happy to use sacred texts to comfort, to encourage, and to raise awareness of the spiritual, but she evidently does not really believe in anything as the divine inspired words of God. She is a liberal theologian who has lost her God, and lost His book, and she is left wondering in the barren desert of her own mind desperately grasping at the ancient symbols that once brought hope but now are cobwebs floating in the wind that shrink away to nothingness when one tries to grasp them. She tries to keep her feet firmly planted on shifting sand.

Doehring’s philosophy is quite liberal. She talks about various aspects of social identity issues like gender, race, religion, social class, sexual orientation, and age. In talking about postmodernity, she says “knowledge is socially constructed, particularly through systems of power and privilege.” It is tiring to hear this type of liberal thought bandied about. It is an attack on Western thought and it makes minorities feel like victims. She mentions, “white privilege.” She writes, “Without critical reflection upon lifelong social privilege, white middle-class caregivers will not recognize their inevitable participation in systemic racism.” This liberal tendency to promote a victim mentality among people of color and self-flagellation among white people for nonexistent racism should be rejected. Pastoral care that promotes a victim mentality is of little help to anyone. Other than these issues that are caused by Doehring’s liberal blinders, the book is a good book. Her ideas about listening to the care seeker and responding with empathy are quite good. Her book is full of techniques and ideas and examples that will help pastors deliver better pastoral care. Overall, the author of this paper disagrees with her theology, but can learn from her methods of delivering pastoral care.

I bought this book for school!! Amazing!! Arrived before the expected delivery date.

One of the best and most practical texts for clinical pastoral education. Doehring is more than an academician; she is a mature pastor with a shepherd’s heart. Should be required reading for all pastors and church leaders.

Excellent book for a particular perspective of pastoral care. The views of this book should be woven with other sources, however, as this is only one approach.

I am not a professional care giver at this time but am a student studying for ministry. I have read the reviews and agree there is a lack of Biblical reference. It would be helpful for pastoral care studies to actually have scriptures to reference. Also, I understand the age of the writing, 2006, but it has a slant on women and leaves out much of what men may be needing in pastoral care. Doehring's constant use of pronouns for women was distracting for me. She uses "her, she" etc. throughout and has not arrived at the all inclusive language that is encouraged today. There are many good points in the book but I feel that they are somewhat outdated. I am hoping that Doehring's new edition coming out in 2015 will update these issues. If it had not been an assigned text book for the class I am taking I would not buy it.

Great book. It is so easy to understand. Writer used great care in planning the contents. Very useful reading and applications to use in Pastoral care studies.

Good book for incoming CPE students.

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