Studying Pastoral Care in Congregations: 
A Hermeneutical Approach

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Presents a new case model for studying pastoral care in the congregational setting.
The model is developed in a critical dialogue with the older verbatim and makes use
of contemporary hermeneutical theory. It includes an understanding of the case, the
case writer, and what is needed for case writing.

If pastoral care in the congregational setting is to be studied, cases must be
written. A case is a text, or written discourse, representing an area of reality
that is being studied for some purpose such as education or research. There never has been a case specifically developed for studying pastoral care
in the congregational setting. Rather, cases used for pastoral care education in
seminaries and divinity schools have been imported, primarily from Clinical
Pastoral Education in the form of verbatims but also from different professions
such as psychiatry. Some contemporary pastoral theologians have expressed
discontent with cases used for studying pastoral care. For instance, according
to Donald Capps in The Poet's Gift, the verbatim has contributed to a trivialized,
watered down use of the client-centered psychotherapy approach of Carl
Rogers in pastoral care and counseling. The verbatim, says Capps, gives the
false impression that the Rogerian approach "is largely a matter of paraphrasing
the parishioner's or client's words, as though one is engaged in a kind of
wordplay." Likewise, Carrie Doehring, in Taking Care, is critical of "case stud­
ies" that she has read in "clinical texts" because they often "seem to be written
by a disengaged clinician...and with a one-up, one-down power dynamic (the
client being clearly the inferior one)."

I also am critical of cases used for studying pastoral care, particularly the
verbatim which is the primary type of case used for studying pastoral care in

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'The verbatim was called a note, or note-writing, originally. It was created by Russell Dicks in
the early 1930's, so that he could study his hospital chaplaincy, his clinical pastoral training
students quickly began using it. Dicks called notes of multiple visits with the same hospital
patient, "histories." Verbatim terminology did not become dominant until the second half of
the twentieth century. For the original note-writing model, which was patterned after a social
work model, see Richard C. Cabot and Russell L. Dicks, The Art of Ministering to the Sick (New
York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1936), pp 244-261. For a contemporary description of the
verbatim as used in clinical pastoral education, see Kathleen Odgen Davis, "Working with
Clinical Materials," in David A. Steere (Ed.), The Supervision of Pastoral Care (Louisville, KY
Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989). Quite a lengthy bibliography could be given if space
permitted it.

See Donald Capps, The Poet's Gift Toward the Renewal of Pastoral Care (Louisville, KY
Westminster/John Knox, 1993), p. 40, for a criticism of the verbatim. He uses poetry rather
than cases, which makes for vastly more interesting reading.

See Carrie Doehring, Taking Care: Monitoring Power Dynamics and Relational Boundaries in
Pastoral Care and Counseling (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 19, for a criticism of
"case studies." She uses novels rather than cases. Also, see Rodney J. Hunter, "The Future of
the congregational setting. Based on my pastoral experience, I believe that the main problem with the verbatim is this: it simply fails to portray pastoral care as it actually is practiced in congregations. Pastoral care is a ministry of the church in which clergy and laity reach out to suffering people. The verbatim is a one-size-fits-all case model that causes the diverse ways pastoral care can happen in churches to be ignored, including ongoing care situations that may involve many people over weeks and months. It often portrays pastoral care as if care happens in a vacuum, allowing little or no discussion of relevant congregational and communal circumstances, and it discounts the multifaceted relationships that pastors have with the church members for whom they care. One educational result of using verbatis is that pastoral care students sometimes are put in the awkward position of having to seek out a private conversation with a church member, often in the youth group, in order to get verbatim material. Since this manufactured conversation is split off from what they actually are doing in their ministry, such students may become pastors never having connected pastoral care with the rest of ministry or the church.

My thesis is that a new case model designed specifically for the congregational setting is needed for studying pastoral care practiced in congregations. Below, I will set forth such a case model conceived as an educational and religious text and named the "pastoral care case." The case writer will be viewed as a religious author who tells the story of pastoral care being practiced in the congregational setting. In terms of case writing, I will address the source of the case content, style, and the case format.

The four main parts of my professional experience have brought me to the point of writing this article: a) When I was a Ph D student in Pastoral Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, I became interested in the philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur seen in relation to pastoral care, b) When I taught pastoral care and counseling for five years at Memphis Theological Seminary, I began experimenting with case formats and case writing instructions to help students better write about what they really were experiencing in their pastoral care. Also, my study of the history of the verbatim led to years of studying the history of the modern pastoral care movement. A focus on the verbatim provides a great perspective from which to explore virtually every aspect of the field historically and in the present, c) Following several years of pastoral counseling supervision, I also received four and one half years worth of pastoral counseling training and experience in two training centers, one in Atlanta and the other in Indianapolis. The point here is that I had the opportunity to do my own case writing, and I sat in weekly case discussion groups for this entire period, d) Finally, and most importantly, I have been pastoring churches periodically since I was ordained in 1979. Currently, I am pastor of my fourth congregation. Years of experiencing pastoral care in congregations have taught me that important aspects of care in the church simply are not addressed in the literature and teaching of pastoral care. Thus, in this article, I am presenting a case model that I believe is suited to care in congregations and that gives case writers freedom to express more of what they are experiencing as they practice pastoral care in the congregational setting.
The Case: An Educational Text

The verbatim, one form of case, has roots in the case method of teaching, created in 1870. This educational method was based on an original analogy between the case method of teaching law and natural science method. The part of scientific method that this analogy emphasized was the exploration of empirical reality and the use of inductive reasoning to develop scientific laws or principles. The scientific analogy came ready-made into clinical pastoral training through the verbatim with its historical roots in the case method of teaching. Within this analogy, pastoral care in hospitals was the part of empirical reality that could yield information leading to the development of pastoral care laws, or principles, through inductive reasoning. The way to study this empirical realm was through data that reproduced it as closely as memory would allow. Consequently, the verbatim was viewed as empirical data that reproduced a pastoral care event, and studying these data were seen as a way of getting back to that event as closely as possible.

It is important to remember that the analogy with natural science method was an educational analogy and that, consequently, pastoral care education in this century, even clinical pastoral training, never has been the same as scientific research. Thus, the verbatim never was literally co-equal with scientific empirical data. Instead, understanding the verbatim as such data has involved creating an educational metaphor that can be stated as follows: "the verbatim is scientific empirical data." This means that the verbatim remains an educational text literally. Metaphorically, it is empirical data suitable for scientific research.

It is tempting to leave the educational analogy in place and simply view the pastoral care case as a new form of empirical data suitable for studying pas-

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The case method of teaching originated at the law school of Harvard University. See Christopher Columbus Langdell, *A Selection of Cases on the Law of Contracts With References and Citations, prepared for Use as a Text-Book in Harvard Law School* (Boston, MA Little, Brown, and Company, 1871). In the preface of this casebook, the first of its kind, Langdell explained how he developed the case method of teaching law. By 1888, Richard Cabot, who taught at Harvard's medical school, was experimenting with this new case method, using it to teach medical students how to diagnose illness. This resulted in his medical casebook, published in 1906. It is patterned after the one by Langdell. See, Richard C. Cabot, *Case Method in Medicine A Series of Graduated Exercises in the Differential Diagnosis, Prognosis and Treatment of Actual Cases of Disease* (Boston, MA D. C. Heath and Co., Publishers, 1906). Cabot later worked with and influenced, Anton Bosen and Russell Dicks. In 1908, the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration was started but the first business casebook was not published until 1920. Russell Dicks authored the first pastoral care casebook, about hospital ministry exclusively. In this book, he switched from note-writing terminology and called notes "source material." See Russell L. Dicks, *And Ye Visited Me: Source Book for Ministers in Work with the Sick* (New York, NY Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1939). In the tradition of casebooks, Dicks described how and why he created note-writing in the introductory section of his casebook. Over the years, a handful of pastoral care casebooks by different authors have been published, but this genre really never has flourished.


*The notion of getting back to a past event through a text about that event is not seen as hermeneutically viable today.

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toral care in the congregational setting. The truth of the matter, however, is that, regarding case writing in pastoral care education, this implicit, aging analogy with nineteenth century scientific method is long overdue for revision. It was, perhaps, a precursor of more contemporary times that as early as 1914, the original analogy between the case method of teaching law and natural science method was criticized, and the alternative of viewing the law in analogy with the intellectual sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) was proposed. A similar alternative is needed in contemporary pastoral care education with regard to case writing. According to this alternative, natural science is replaced with the intellectual (spiritual or social) sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) in which the human world is studied historically, culturally, etc. Along with this replacement comes a corresponding change in method. These sciences often use a hermeneutical, or interpretive, method as opposed to a method originating in natural science.

In the hermeneutical method, empirical data and its analysis are replaced with the text and its interpretation. Educationally, then, the pastoral care case can be viewed as a text to be interpreted as opposed to being seen as empirical data to be analyzed. This educational shift fits well with the view that the pastoral care case is a particular type of text, a religious text.

The Case: A Religious Text

In modern pastoral care education, several generations of pastors have been taught to create verbatimts by writing down the words spoken in a pastoral care encounter. What could be more simple and straightforward? One important piece of information missing in this process, however, is that the form of the written discourse determines how pastoral care is represented in a case. A biblical illustration will be helpful for explaining this. Paul Ricoeur has discussed the subject matter of the Bible, emphasizing that it has many different forms, or what in literary terms are called genres, such as historical narratives, proverbial wisdom, and parables. A genre is one type, or form, of literature having a composition and structure that others do not have. For instance, narrative tells...

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8Redlich, The Common Law and the Case Method in American University Law Schools, pp. 55-56

9The whole issue of case interpretation, its process and educational possibilities, follows on the heels of creating a case model in which the case is seen as a text to be interpreted. Since giving adequate attention to the issue of case interpretation would require at least the space of an additional article, I am confining myself to the case in this article. The two main pastoral care and counseling books in which hermeneutical theory has been drawn upon are Donald Capps, Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics (Philadelphia, PA Fortress Press, 1984), and Charles V Gerkin, The Living Human Document Re-Visiting Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode (Nashville, TN Abingdon Press, 1984). The main difference of this article from these books is that I am addressing a literal text about pastoral care with the help of hermeneutical theory (of Paul Ricoeur) whereas both authors are drawing analogies between hermeneutical theory and pastoral care and counseling. They do not address case theory. In A Fundamental Practical Theology (Minneapolis, MN Fortress Press, 1991), Don Browning discusses hermeneutics in relation to practical theology. However, his use of hermeneutical theory does not pertain to creation of a case model for studying congregations. Instead, he focuses on interpretation issues within the context of developing a practical theology method. A focus on developing a case model for studying congregations in practical theology would precede interpretation issues and would have implications for them. For instance, one case model issue having implications for interpretation in practical theology concerns naming the kind of case being used. Is the case a sociological text, a cultural anthropology text, a religious text, a scientific text? Determining this is important because the possible meaning that a case may disclose through case interpretation depends upon the genre of text that is being interpreted, not on the perspective being brought to the case.
a story typically having characters, a plot, and a beginning, middle, and end. It is very different from a proverb that may be only a sentence or two in length and have no characters or sequence of events that would form a story. Ricouer says that the different biblical genres have something very significant in common. They all refer to, name or reveal, the same ultimate reality, God. Yet, each one of the biblical genres names God differently from all the others. Using musical imagery to communicate this point, he says that “the naming of God...is not simple but multiple. It is not a single tone, but polyphonic.” Each biblical genre names God in a certain tone, so there are as many tones as there are forms of biblical literature. For instance, biblical narratives such as the Exodus story name God through the unfolding of events that bear the “imprint, mark, or trace of God’s act” during the course of the story. The genre of prophecy, however, reveals God differently, as “the speech of another [God] behind the speech of the prophet.”

Like the biblical genres, the pastoral care case exists in various forms, or genres, all referring to pastoral care. Yet, each one refers to care differently, in its own unique tone. Even a single pastoral care case may contain several genres of discourse. Consider, for instance, that one very common aspect of pastoral care is prayer and that experienced pastors find themselves praying regularly in pastoral care circumstances. When prayer is represented in a case, it constitutes a certain type of discourse—conversation with God—that differs from all other types of discourse found in that case. Therefore, a single pastoral care case contains at least two types of discourse when prayer is included unless there is no discourse other than the prayer, which is relatively rare.

Even when prayer is excluded, the subject matter may assume more than one form, rather like the New Testament Gospel. When looked at as a whole, the gospel genre is seen to have a narrative form. Yet, as the gospel story unfolds, the reader happens upon a number of additional genres that have been woven into the story, such as Jesus’ parables, his wisdom sayings, and his proclamation about the coming kingdom. Similarly, the pastoral care case contains a gospel-like narrative in which the case writer becomes a narrator telling the story of pastoral care. In this story, people are undergoing personal crucifixion and resurrection, suffering and hope. The story may contain gospel-like events, such as the healing of broken relationships and comforting the bereaved, and there may be gospel-like characters and groups in the congregation who are waiting in the wings to pass judgment. As the story progresses, the reader may come upon additional genres woven into the story. One of these may be a proverb-like wisdom saying spoken in a pastoral response. Another may be a parable-like story about seemingly mundane events that disclose new and profound meanings, or proclamation-like sayings as caring people bear witness to God’s love.

In a certain congregation, there was a weekly Bible study group led by the associate pastor. This was a relatively small group, and often their discussions
about the text included examples from their own lives. One group member was the grandparent of a four-year-old child who had been diagnosed with a brain tumor one month before the latest meeting of the group, so that all the group members knew about the diagnosis. So far, the grandparent had not discussed the situation with the group. However, in the most recent meeting this grandparent could hold back no longer, and the nightmarish story of the previous month began spilling out. The words were directed to the associate pastor as their eyes locked, but the group as a whole entered into what had become pastoral care.

As this instance of pastoral care unfolded, two distinct types of discourse, a proverb-like wisdom saying and prayer, could be discerned, woven into the narrative unfolding within the Bible study group. The grandparent told a story that began at the doctor’s office. The test results were in, and the family gathered in the office to hear what turned out to be devastating news of the tumor. The grandparent told the group about the shock and the tears as the family attempted to cope with this news, and then the grandparent told them about the next few weeks of medical treatment, the parents’ long hours at the hospital, and lost sleep. At this point, the story took a certain twist, leading to the proverbial type of discourse. Rather than continuing to focus on the recent past, the grandparent shifted to the present and revealed an ongoing inner conflict. The grandchild was in a life and death struggle and was suffering greatly. The conflict involved praying for an end to the suffering, which meant death, versus praying for recovered health against great odds. After the grandparent expressed this torturous conflict, there was a short silence. Then, the associate pastor said spontaneously, with a gut level kind of intensity, “pray for what you really want.” This proverb-like statement freed the grandparent to respond in turn, saying, “then I want my grandchild to live.” This interchange gave birth to the next type of discourse as the grandparent accepted the associate pastor’s offer to pray for the child. In this prayer, the pastor expressed the grandparental desire that the child would live and then went on to pray for the grandparent and for the rest of the family.

This illustration is an excerpt, or a chapter, from a larger case involving the senior pastor as well as the associate, other individuals and groups in addition to the Bible study group, the congregation as a whole, and of course the sick child and the entire family. It illustrates the existence of multiple genres of pastoral care discourse seen in analogy to genres of biblical discourse found in the gospel story. As a religious text, the case reveals, or names, the ministry of pastoral care in differing tones.

The Self-Understanding of the Case Writer

If the pastoral care case is a religious text, then who is the case writer? The self-understanding of the case writer involves the question of authorial identity, or who one is as a case writer. This is a significant issue because it determines how the case writer understands the relationship between case writing, ministry, and the congregation.

As seen above, the verbatim has been viewed scientifically, as empirical data, in accord with the analogy between the case method of teaching and natural science method. If the verbatim is empirical data, the verbatim writer is a

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1 I would like to thank the pastor who kindly allowed me to use this case. The child did live and is doing fine.
scientist who gathers such data by practicing pastoral care and then writing about it in a verbatim. This understanding of the verbatim writer involves creating another educational metaphor—"the verbatim writer is a scientist," meaning that the verbatim writer literally remains engaged in an educational process as a student of pastoral care. Metaphorically, the verbatim writer is a scientist gathering data.

The self-understanding of the pastoral care case writer differs from that of the verbatim writer. One who writes a pastoral care case is a "religious author" rather than a "scientist." The case writer is a religious author in the sense of being one who creates a religious text representing pastoral care practiced in the congregational setting.

The religious author image is more appropriate than the scientist image for several reasons. The first reason involves the setting in which pastoral care is practiced. In the hospital setting where the verbatim was created, the chaplain was in a scientific and medical environment. The congregational setting is different because it provides an explicitly religious environment where scientific images seem misplaced. Paul Tillich once wrote that a primary difference between churches and secular institutions involves the church's conscious representation of its "Spiritual" foundation through "manifest religious self-expression." So, in order to be congruent with the church as an explicitly religious institution, the pastoral care case writer needs to develop the self-understanding of a religious author.

The second reason is that the self-understanding of the case writer should be congruent with that writer's larger self-understanding as a pastor (or lay person). Educationally, this means that the case writer understands case writing to be an integral part of what a pastor does for the preparation and practice of ministry, and more specifically for growth in the ministry of pastoral care, without stepping outside one's developing pastoral identity. Conversely, the scientist image is not part of pastoral identity, or pastoral self-understanding, but instead takes the case author outside ministry to a scientific identity associated with the professional role of the scientist.

The third reason takes account of what pastoral care is like in the congregational setting. For example, pastoral care often occurs intermingled with other facets of congregational life and ministry. Its scope may range from a focus on individuals, to families, groups, and the congregation as a whole, and it may involve one or more areas of suffering out of countless possibilities. Consequently, the case writer's self-understanding is that of one who is concerned with the entire extent of pastoral care as it is manifested in congregations.

As a religious author, the case writer naturally is concerned with the concrete issue of how to write a case. This concern leads to three issues that case writers must address. The first one is the source of the case content. The second is its style, and the third is the format in which it is to be written.

The Source of Case Content

The ministry of pastoral care practiced by the case writer in the congregational setting forms the basis on which the subject matter of the pastoral care case is created. Thus, the case writer's own pastoral care is the source on which the case writer draws for creating the case content, or subject matter. Understanding how...
this source and the case content are related is critical for case writing because
the writer must figure out how to use this source to facilitate writing.

According to the understanding of this issue associated with the older verbatim, the verbatim writer approaches pastoral care from the perspective of the one doing the speaking in pastoral care. In this perspective, the speaker produces discourse, or speaking, that appears as a verbal, empirical event. It happens and then is gone. The verbatim writer uses memory to reproduce this pastoral care discourse in writing, which becomes the content of the verbatim. One problem with this approach is that it puts a tremendous burden on the verbatim writer’s memory. Given that perfect memory is an unreachable ideal, every verbatim is flawed to some unknowable degree by imperfect memory and, as such, becomes suspect as scientifically acceptable empirical data. Nevertheless, such flawed content traditionally has been deemed acceptable for education because going through the process of writing and analyzing a verbatim has been seen as most important for learning regardless of the imperfect content.

The pastoral care case writer sees the relationship between pastoral care and the case differently. Instead of viewing pastoral care discourse from the perspective of the one doing the speaking, the case writer adopts the perspective of the one or ones doing the listening. When one person is listening to another person speak, the words being spoken are not comprehended simply in terms of their being a temporal event. Instead, they are heard and understood in terms of what they mean, both in terms of what the words themselves mean and in terms of the message being communicated. Seen in terms of their meaning, words do not just disappear in time; they remain available to those who are conversing in the sense that everyone in the conversation can talk further about this meaning. They can clarify it, explore it, correct it, challenge it, or repeat it. They can even paraphrase the meaning.

Pastoral care discourse, like all speaking, is comprehended in terms of the meaning of the words being spoken. This discourse seen as meaning forms one fundamental part of the source used for creating case content. In addition to discourse, however, the source includes all other aspects of pastoral care also, which may be anything from the physical appearance of the care participants to relevant congregational circumstances. Since the source of case content includes more than speaking, it is helpful to think of gaining access to this source through self-reflection rather than through memory focused exclusively on talking. Self-reflection does include remembering, but it is a more wide-ranging kind of remembering that is typical of human beings as they recall events, circumstances, and conversations. It is the kind of remembering that enables the case writer to narrate the story of pastoral care.

Out of this self-reflection, the case writer creates new written discourse comprising the content of the pastoral care case. This content is not fiction.

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For the hermeneutical theory underlying this discussion about pastoral care discourse, see Paul Ricoeur. Interpretation Theory Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976) pp. 11-12. This book neatly sets forth the overarching framework of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical theory which begins with oral discourse moves to textual discourse and concludes with text interpretation. Also see Paul Ricoeur. Time and Narrative 3 vols. trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, 1988).

Seward Hiltner held this educational view expressed in his book Pastoral Counseling (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1949). (Understanding that literally the verbatim is an educational text helps to explain the field’s traditional lack of concern over strict scientific standards for the verbatim.)

Ricoeur Interpretation Theory p. 12
made up out of thin air, as if the only source were the case writer’s imagnation. Nor is it data in the scientific sense. Rather, it is a religious text about the case writer’s pastoral care. Thus, the case writer has the responsibility of developing writing skills so that the story of pastoral care can be told.

**Style and Case Writing**

Style can be very revealing. There is nowhere to hide when it comes to style because it is about individuality, or uniqueness. Each pastoral care case has style, or a unique configuration of discourse distinguishing it from all other cases. As an example, consider two of the Synoptic Gospels, Mark and Matthew, and imagine for a moment that they are pastoral care cases. Mark begins his case by quoting Isaiah, and then he moves directly to John baptizing people in the Jordan. In this very first chapter, Jesus is introduced as one who is baptized by John and who travels to the wilderness immediately following the baptism, in vv 12-13 (NRSV).

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.

At first glance, Mark appears to be presenting the bare bones of a story that could be passed over quickly in the context of reading the entire chapter. A closer look shows that this passage contains description that raises many questions but provides no answers. There is no elaboration or explanation of what it means to be driven somewhere by the Spirit, or to be tempted by Satan, or to be waited on by angels. More importantly, the reader is told neither the nature of the temptation nor whether Jesus succumbed or resisted.

Matthew, writing within the same gospel genre, tells the same temptation story quite differently. He begins his case with a genealogy of Jesus and follows this with the story of Jesus’ birth. Not until the third chapter does he introduce John the Baptist who baptizes Jesus. Then, like Mark, Matthew tells about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, in 4 1-11 (NRSV).

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Matthew develops the story in much more detail than Mark through additional description and by adding dialogue. Now, Jesus not only is driven into the wilderness by the Spirit, he is driven there for the purpose of being tempted by the devil. In addition to being there for forty days, he is fasting during this time. Ultimately, the reader finds out about the temptation and its outcome through its presentation as a discussion between Jesus and the devil, complete with quotes.
The contrast between the styles disclosed in Mark and Matthew is great. Each contains a unique configuration of discourse that cannot be mistaken for the other. One gives minimal descriptions while the other provides details and extensive discussion. So it is with the pastoral care case. Each case reflects a certain style, or individuality, distinguishing it from other cases. One case may resemble Mark, leaving the reader with many questions, while another may be more like Matthew.

Style is associated with the case writer because writing is what produces that unique configuration of case discourse. During the course of writing a case, the writer makes decisions that help determine the style. A decision as simple and seemingly mundane as whether to place a period or exclamation point at the end of a sentence can contribute to style, and it certainly affects the meaning disclosed. In its modern translations, Matthew provides an illustration of the dramatic difference punctuation can make by injecting an exclamation point into the middle of a sentence spoken by Jesus at the end of the temptation story. In 4:10, Jesus says, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written…” The inclusion of this exclamation point helps disclose the force in this statement. Jesus is speaking with the force of a command, or at least an exasperated request. He is very animated, full of feeling as he speaks. Omission of the exclamation point would reveal a very different image of Jesus, one in which he is not as emotionally involved when he speaks. The same would be true of any character in a case.

Another type of decision affecting style involves the way in which sentences and paragraphs are constructed in a case. Everything from the title, to the introduction, to descriptions, to quotes can be written in a variety of ways. A mechanical and seemingly factual style can be used to represent a smile, for instance. The case writer may write, “the church member smiled,” but this may not be as factual as believed because human beings exhibit a broad range of smiles, from very slight to a big grin. The smile may be congruent with the words being spoken, or it may be a thinly veiled mask hiding pain. Thus, in some instances a more creative style is called for, even to the point of using metaphor. For example, instead of just writing, “the church member smiled,” the writer may use “Mona Lisa smile,” or “sly smile,” or “grinned from ear to ear.” Such decisions as how to describe something that happened in pastoral care may not seem huge in themselves, but they do affect the style.

A third type of decision affecting style involves editing the content of the case in the sense of deciding what to include, what to omit, and what to summarize when there is more material than fits into the prescribed length of the written case. For example, a particular instance of pastoral care may have involved a lengthy conversation that could fill up seven or eight pages if written out in its entirety, while the case format may call for only two or three pages of conversation. Such a circumstance requires the case writer to make editing decisions, and these decisions contribute to the uniqueness of each case.

These kinds of decisions affecting style are not escaped even when an audio or video tape is being transcribed. A transcription supposedly contains only the words being spoken on tape. Yet some arrangement for ordering the material must be chosen. Punctuation must be chosen and any introductory and descriptive sentences must be constructed. Furthermore, audio and video tapes contain more than the words being spoken. The audio tape of a pastoral counseling session may reveal that the church member begins the session with a quiet, flat tone of voice that gradually increases in loudness and intensity during the course of the conversation. Description must be added to quotes if this aspect of what is heard on tape is to be included in the written transcription. The same is true regarding what can be seen as well as heard on video tapes.
The Format and Case Writing

A format is a set of rules, or instructions, used to guide writing so that what is written will be arranged in a particular way. For instance, when a professor tells a class that a term paper must be no longer than twenty-five pages, the professor is giving an instruction that is the part of the format governing the length of the paper. Since the case writer is telling the story of pastoral care, the pastoral care case format is designed to help case writers do just that, tell the story in writing. The format outlined below is suggestive and invites case writers to include any part of congregational life and ministry associated with their care.

The Title

The initial part of the pastoral care case is the title. Much as a good sermon title in the worship bulletin lets church members know something about the upcoming sermon, so the pastoral care case title should tell the reader about the main theme of the case, such as “Pastoral Care with an Engaged Couple.”

The Introduction

In the initial part of the narrative, introduce yourself as the case writer. Tell a little about yourself and how you are related to the congregation. Are you a pastor, an associate pastor, or a seminary student who leads a youth group? How long have you been in this position? Next, provide an overview of what you perceive as the main theme of the case. Here is a brief example from one pastor: “I was sitting at my desk last Thursday afternoon when I received a phone call. It was Ruth asking if she and her fiance, Mark, could stop by the office to talk to me about their upcoming wedding. We made an appointment for 4:00 p.m. the next afternoon, and during our discussion, the main focus of the conversation was the couple’s concern about the participation of Mark’s family in the wedding.”

The Congregational Setting

In this part of the story, focus on the congregation in relation to the pastoral care. Name the congregation and its denomination. Briefly identify the pastoral staff and the characteristics of the congregation, including such things as its size, its community setting, its socio-economic status, and its racial and ethnic make-up. Are any of these things directly related to the pastoral care? Discuss the congregation, or any relevant aspect of it, seen in relation to the pastoral care situation. Is there a piece of congregational history, some conflict, or a group or committee in the congregation that is involved in the pastoral care situation?

Next, discuss what you have experienced as the theological orientation of the congregation. Is it a good fit with your personal theological beliefs? Is there a theological theme related to the pastoral care? For example, in the pastor’s care of Ruth and Mark mentioned above, the church’s theological understanding of marriage turned out to be an important factor.

The Characters

The story of pastoral care includes a discussion of those who are participating in the pastoral care. Who is the person, or who are the people, involved?
Are they young or old, male or female, single, married, divorced, parents, grandparents, etc. How are they related to the congregation? Are family members in the church also? What about them?

Briefly, discuss the history of your relationship with each pastoral care participant. When did you first meet? How do you usually relate to each other? Have you cared for the person before? Do your children play with their children? Are you relative strangers? How did your relationship affect the pastoral care, and how did the pastoral care affect your relationship?

The Pastoral Care Encounter

Tell what happened during the pastoral care, including relevant circumstances, events, and information in the narrative as well as conversation. Since the source of the pastoral care case includes conversation typically, the case may contain quotes, or dialogue. If the case writer is to continue telling the story of pastoral care at this point, it will be necessary to arrange quotes in a narrative format rather than in the standard verbatim format, which can be called the transcribing arrangement of pastoral care dialogue.

The Transcribing Arrangement

The verbatim has a standard way of arranging quotes of what was said in pastoral care. It looks like this:

Pastor 1 "It sounds like you"

Parishioner 1 "No, what I meant was (at this point she looked distressed)

Pastor 2 "Oh, I see what you mean"

This standard arrangement of pastoral care discourse imitates the transcription of dialogue from an audio taped psychotherapy session seen as scientific data. The psychologist, Carl Rogers, pioneered this taping and transcribing practice beginning in the late 1930's, when electronic recording equipment became available. In the transcribing arrangement of quotes, there is no narrator who tells a story. Instead, the speaker is named before each quote in order to let the reader know who is speaking, and any descriptions accompanying quotes are placed in parenthesis and are very brief. A number after the speaker's name may be included, providing a reference system for discussion.

The transcribing arrangement is valuable for isolating and examining individual quotes but it also has certain limitations. For instance, it may give the impression that all pastoral care discourse consists of short sentences divided evenly between the pastoral care participants. The speaker says only a sentence or two and then waits for an equally short response. Pastoral care discourse certainly does include the back and forth flow of conversation but it is not always divided so neatly and evenly. This suggests that the transcribing arrangement discourages verbatim writers from including any pastoral care discourse that does not fit into brief quotes. Accordingly, lengthy responses often are summarized or omitted, which can be seen in many published pastoral care books and articles.

The transcribing arrangement has been used for so long that no other arrangement for organizing pastoral care dialogue seems possible. Yet, a different arrangement was used originally.

The Narrative Arrangement

Quotes were organized according to a narrative arrangement originally.
Russell Dicks arranged quotes and accompanying descriptive sentences in the form of a story, sometimes even including a title. The pastoral care case uses the narrative arrangement because it enables the case writer to tell the story of pastoral care more fully than the transcribing arrangement allows.

One way to demonstrate and explain the narrative arrangement is to examine a case of Russell Dicks, the hospital chaplain who created the verbatim. Though it would be desirable to use a contemporary case from the congregational setting, I have chosen to use the Dicks case in order to show that the narrative arrangement really was used before the transcribing arrangement came along. This reveals that there is historical precedent for using a narrative arrangement for quotes. I hope that readers will use their imaginations and think of cases in their congregations in terms of this arrangement.

The case I want to use is entitled *Bitterness*. This title includes the initials of the hospital patient followed by a word describing that person, which is typical of Dicks’ case titles. This case includes nine visits with a sixty-year-old woman, Miss E, who entered the hospital one July and who died of cancer the following October after being transferred to a nursing home. In the beginning of the case, Dicks says that a social worker brought Miss E to his attention soon after she had been admitted to the hospital suffering from a growth in her stomach. In the initial visit, Dicks and Miss E are getting to know each other. After finding out that he is a chaplain, she asks about his denomination. Then, following his response that he is Presbyterian, she talks about her denomination.

“I was brought up to be a Baptist but I lived in a country where there were many Presbyterians. They ran the schools and hospitals.”

“Where was that?” I asked.

“In China. I saw a good many of the missionaries there.”

(\(f\)) “What sort were they?”

(\(e\)) “Oh, they were fine. My father did a good deal to help establish missions in foreign lands. I am not like you are. Being a Presbyterian you are absolute, but as the years have gone on I have dropped off a great deal. You think a great deal and come to believe many other things. I have made all the arrangements for my funeral, have written my own prayer. I want something very simple. It’s hardly a funeral; it’s a disposal. When the light goes out, I think it’s out. But I have no regrets. I have lived my life.” (Here she came near weeping but with determination turned it into an unnatural smile.) “My prayer is simply, ‘Eternal Presence, we thank Thee for the years of happiness and of peace. We thank Thee for the friends we have had and acquaintances we have known. We are thankful for the bounties Thou hast given us and for all the joys of life.”

I think this is a general rendition. There may have been another sentence but the prayer was notable for its unity of thanksgiving. Later she said, “I think of the Eternal Presence as something always here. You probably were brought up as I was that God was on a throne away off somewhere.” (\(h\)) Again she said, “It is a waste of time for you to talk to me. I cannot be brought back to the formal. I should not talk that way about my religion, but I cannot believe—my prayers have not been answered. I believe in letting people be what they want to.”

The conversation comes to a close as Miss E tells Dicks that he will not be able to comfort and pray for her because she is resigned to her impending death.

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\(^{19}\)Cabot and Dicks, *The Art of Ministering to the Sick*, p. 332

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This narrative arrangement of quotes and accompanying description does not require naming the speaker before each quote. Instead, the case writer becomes a narrator, the “I” in the story, who is telling what happened. Adding a narrator enables the case to read like a story in which the speakers are identified easily. There are very short paragraphs, sometimes only one line, mixed with longer paragraphs that together convey the unevenness of the conversational flow. Placing letters or numbers in the paragraphs provides a reference system for discussion.

**Description in the Narrative Arrangement**

The narrative arrangement encourages more extensive use of description than the transcribing arrangement. This includes any aspect of the pastoral care not contained in quotes, such as relevant circumstances, events, or other information, as mentioned above. Description increases the possibility of understanding quotes of pastoral care conversation because it provides context that contributes to their meaning.

In one type of description, the narrator describes the nonverbal behavior of those participating in the pastoral care conversation. Here is an example from Dicks' fifth visit with Miss E.

She was becoming more hysterical, with a determined effort she bit her lip, shaking her head as if fighting off an inclination to weep. Then with great calm she said, 'This is a great hospital, a wonderful system, but they are so busy they can't do the little things that are needed, to fix your pillow, to straighten your sheets.'

In the transcribing arrangement, Dicks would not have written the first sentence or the initial descriptive part of the second. Instead, he would have written:

Miss E: This is a great hospital, a wonderful system, but they are so busy they can't do the little things that are needed, to fix your pillow, to straighten your sheets.

The reader would be left to wonder whether she was making chitchat with the chaplain or whether she was perhaps mildly annoyed because “the little things” were not being done. In an attempt to find significance in this quote, the reader might be tempted to hypothesize that her annoyance about “the little things” reflected an unconscious anger having to do with her illness. Such a hypothesis would provide the basis for figuring out a pastoral response. Stereotypically, this would be an empathetic response designed both to communicate acceptance and to invite her gently into deeper exploration of her feelings.

In the narrative arrangement, however, the first sentence and the initial part of the second are included. The reader first finds out what Dicks is observing about Miss E., that she is becoming “more hysterical.” Then, he describes what he means. He sees her fighting off “weeping” as she bites her lip and shakes her head, and he experiences her achieving a “great calm” in order to speak. Now what Miss E. said must be understood in light of her “hysterical” demeanor. As a result, the reader must consider whether she is attempting to garner Dicks’ sympathy through her behavior or whether, for instance, she is struggling mightly to maintain control even as she is feeling very distraught.

*Ibid* p 337
and fragile inside. Or, perhaps both of these things are going on simultaneously. In any event, including what Dicks observed about Miss E leads to a different hypothesis and new implications for pastoral responses.

Another type of description involves summarizing part of the pastoral care conversation rather than presenting it all in quotes. The next part of Dicks' fifth visit with Miss E illustrates this.

She told of being lifted up into a chair without notice, of needing "medications" and of no one being able to give them to her, just why I could not gather. She went on to say, "I know how difficult I am to take care of and ..."

In this description, Dicks writes a one-sentence summary containing some of Miss E's complaints, and he follows this with a quote. In the narrative arrangement, there is a natural place for summary. It can fit within a paragraph and can be mixed with quotes or it can become a separate paragraph, depending on the amount of material and how the story can best be told.

A third type of description involves telling about relevant circumstances affecting the pastoral care discourse. Continuing the fifth visit with Miss E, Dicks introduces another character, a patient who has been listening to the conversation.

Another patient was sitting near. I was standing at the foot of the bed and could see the other patient as well, while Miss E could not for the partly closed curtains. This patient said, "The will of God," nodding toward Miss E, "the will of God is that she is like this, suffering." Miss E did not pay much attention to the other patient. I said, "These things are very difficult to understand as the will of God."

Miss E went on talking, thanking me for being "so patient and listening to all these terrible things."

I came nearer. "You must not hesitate to say anything you want to when I see you."

She lightened up, trying to smile. "It is nice of you to come—and you will remember me with a prayer."

In this description, Dicks conveys the circumstance in which he finds himself. After introducing the patient, he says where he is standing and tells that he can see both Miss E and the other patient. He also tells readers that a partially drawn curtain is blocking Miss E's view of the patient. This description, in addition to conveying an awkward circumstance, sets up a way to include what the patient said without disrupting the story.

It is not difficult to recognize that pastors (and laity) can write about many different pastoral care situations if the arrangement used to organize quotes and descriptive material gives them enough flexibility. The narrative arrangement gives case writers the flexibility they need in order to narrate the story of pastoral care in their congregations. Without the narrative arrangement, those who study pastoral care in the congregational setting will be deprived of the rich and diverse pastoral care stories that this arrangement invites case writers to tell.

**Conclusion**

Hopefully, this article conveys that case writers are free to write about their pastoral care without being bound by the older verbatim. They are free to tell the

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21 Ibid
22 Ibid

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story of pastoral care, complete with all the circumstances and interconnections with other aspects of ministry and church life that come with the territory of pastoral care in congregations. This story deserves telling and studying not only because of the difference effective pastoral care can make in human lives but also because pastoral care is a historic ministry of the church that teaches us about bearing one another's burdens in the context of community.