

Pentecostal Pastoral Care

A Qualitative Study of Understanding and Practice among Pentecostal Pastors

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Pentecostal pastors in Norway and Sweden understand and practice pastoral care. The study is based on qualitative interviews with 11 Pentecostal pastors, analyzed through systematic text condensation (STC). Across the findings, four pastoral-care perspectives emerge: relational, pastoral, biblical-theological, and pneumatological. These perspectives demonstrate how Pentecostal pastoral care integrates listening, theological reflection, and belief in the Spirit's work. The article concludes that Pentecostal pastoral care may be understood as a relational-pneumatological practice and regarded as a triological meeting place where the good conversation is central, marked by implicit or explicit prayer, and shaped by an expectation of the presence of the Holy Spirit as an active third party in the conversation.

Keywords: Pastoral care, Pentecostal movement, triological pastoral care, pneumatology

INTRODUCTION

Although pastoral care has been central to the church's practice, research on how it is understood and practiced varies considerably across traditions. While Lutheran pastoral care in Scandinavia has been the subject of extensive theological reflection and empirical studies, Pentecostal or Pentecostal-charismatic pastoral care has not been sufficiently systematically explored. This article builds on a quantitative study among Norwegian Pentecostal pastors (Waldemar, 2026), which suggested that Pentecostal pastoral care has a distinctly relational and pneumatological character and indicated the need for further research. The present article follows this trajectory by examining how Pentecostal pastors in Norway and Sweden describe and interpret their pastoral-care practice. In this context, the term "practice" refers to how the pastors interpret and communicate their own practice as expressed in their reflections and descriptions; it does not indicate observed actions in the pastoral-care setting. The research question of the article is as follows: *How do Pentecostal pastors understand and practice pastoral care in Norway and Sweden?*

Research Context: Scandinavian and Pentecostal Pastoral Care

To situate the project within a broader academic and theological context, this section presents selected central contributions and scholarly positions that have shaped pastoral-care thinking in Scandinavia, particularly contributions from a Lutheran context. This overview does not comprise a comprehensive literature review but a scholarly contextualization that reveals the trajectories and understandings with which contemporary practice is in dialogue. The Lutheran pastoral-care tradition in Scandinavia is marked by both theological reflection and empirical research, constituting a rich and complex field. By contrast, there is little systematic research on Pentecostal pastoral care in a Scandinavian context. Therefore, to illuminate this dimension, relevant American contributions are also included, since Pentecostal pastoral care has received greater academic attention in that setting. The review thus clarifies the need for an empirically and theologically grounded analysis of Pentecostal pastoral care within a Scandinavian framework—a contribution this study seeks to offer.

Scandinavian Pastoral Care

Pastoral care in the Scandinavian countries shares several common features, and central contributions have often circulated across national borders. In the Norwegian context, Okkenhaug, Grevbo, and Engedal are examples of recent influential pastoral-care literature (Grung, Danbolt & Stifoss-Hanssen, 2016). Moreover, Sundberg (2024b) reveals that Okkenhaug, Grevbo, Bergstrand, and Wikström are among the authors frequently referred to in Swedish pastoral-care literature, while Grevbo's work has been significant for Danish pastoral-care reflection (Vesterdal & Gudbergesen, 2021). These contributions should thus be considered as part of a broader Scandinavian scholarly tradition. In this section, the Norwegian authors Okkenhaug, Grevbo, and Engedal; the Swedish author Wikström; and the Danish author Falk are highlighted as selected reference points to outline central developments in Scandinavian pastoral care.

Traditionally, pastoral-care approaches are categorized into kerygmatic orientations, counselee-centered pastoral care, and ecclesial care for faith and life (Okkenhaug, 2002, p. 14). Kerygmatic, or message-oriented, pastoral-care practices held a prominent position throughout much of the twentieth century (Grevbo, 2006, p. 308), emphasizing pastoral care as the communication of God's revelation to individuals. In more recent times, various disciplines and approaches have challenged and enriched the field of pastoral care, including impulses

from psychodynamic psychotherapy, systemic practice, and narrative therapy, which have, in different ways, helped direct attention toward the counselee's experiences, relationships, and story. Within this development, counselee-centered pastoral care emerged as an alternative approach, where the counselee—the person seeking pastoral care—is the center. This approach argues that kerygmatic pastoral-care practice often hindered attending to human existence, experience, and subjective perception. Counselee-centered pastoral care emphasizes active listening, asking open questions, and exploring the individual's life experiences. Nevertheless, critics claim that this approach has become too therapeutic (Okkenhaug, 2002, p. 17).

Grevbo (2006) employs a roadmap to describe different basic types within international pastoral care. He identifies eight traditions—kerygmatic, evangelical, charismatic, spiritual, ecclesial, analytical, therapeutic, and sociopolitical—placed along an axis from right to left to illustrate the different underlying ideas that characterize the approaches, from message-oriented kerygmatic pastoral care to the counselee-centered, more therapeutic approach. Between these two poles, several have attempted to identify various mediating positions, such as *ecclesially oriented care for faith and life* (Okkenhaug, 2002) or *viatoric pastoral care* (Grevbo, 2018). Okkenhaug argues that the pastoral caregiver must both listen to the reality in which the person lives and point the way to God (2002, p. 17). This care entails being both a conversation partner and a fellow traveler, where the counselee experiences being seen, accepted, and met as they are (Bergem, 2011, p. 27).

Grevbo's typology has nevertheless been criticized for failing to capture the diversity of pastoral-care practice (Jakobsen & Jakobsen, 2022). Similarly, Stifoss-Hanssen et al. (2019) challenge the traditional division of pastoral care into kerygmatic and counselee-centered approaches. They question whether these labels remain fruitful and suggest that they are dated, since pastoral care in practice is counselee-centered (Grung et al., 2016). Alternatively, they propose terms such as *dialogical and relational pastoral care*, which provide a more accurate description of contemporary practice. Additionally, they note that the pastoral caregiver still brings a type of *kerygma* into the conversation—not necessarily in the form of classical proclamation but through faith, experience, professional grounding, and religious identity. One question that arises in this connection is how this tension between kerygmatic and counselee-centered pastoral care unfolds in Pentecostal practice.

Wikström (1999) explores the task of pastoral care in the tension between empathy, existential reflection, and spiritual guidance. He describes pastoral care as an empathic and reflective encounter rather than as work with unconscious conflicts, highlighting four dimensions that together express its task. *Care* concerns the giving of warmth and understanding, particularly in contexts such as grief, crises, hospitals, and prisons. *Reflection* indicates existential questions such as time, death, suffering, and meaning, where the pastoral caregiver guides the counselee toward reflection and awareness. Through *interpretation*, a boundary is drawn toward psychotherapy, since pastoral care actively connects the individual's experiences to the narratives, symbols, and language of the Christian tradition. The fourth dimension, *deepening in Christian conviction*, specifies spiritual guidance and a process that helps people grow in faith. Wikström therefore defines pastoral care as “supporting a person's psychological and spiritual development through the individual conversation, on the basis of the Christian church's faith and understanding of reality” [own translation] (1999, p. 175).

Falk (2010) highlights attentive presence, clear boundaries, and the relational character of the helping conversation as core pastoral care elements, emphasizing that the most important part of the helping conversation is not doing something but simply being present—with attentiveness, presence, and boundaries. The pastoral caregiver meets the other as a human being rather than an adviser, contributing empathy, clarifying questions, and life experience—not solutions. Falk warns against wanting something on the other person's behalf and

stresses that the decisive resources are found within the counselee. This approach resonates with a relational and listening ideal in the Scandinavian pastoral-care tradition.

One contribution that seeks to summarize the distinctive character of pastoral care is Engedal (2018). Using “God’s heart” and “the human soul” as metaphors, he describes pastoral care as a process in which the actual reality of human life is interpreted and worked through in encounter with God’s creative and redemptive actions. Therefore, he emphasizes that Christian pastoral care has a clearly relational concern and is grounded in the saving work of the triune God. This article focuses not on developing a new normative definition of pastoral care but on examining how pastoral care is actually understood and practiced in a Pentecostal context.

Pentecostal Pastoral Care

While folk-church pastoral care in Scandinavia has received considerable academic attention, pastoral care in Pentecostal-charismatic contexts has been systematically explored to a much lesser extent. Sundberg (2024a, 2024b) provides an interesting historical perspective on Swedish Free Church and Pentecostal pastoral care. In his overview of the development of pastoral care in Swedish Free Church traditions (Sundberg, 2024a), he explains how pastoral care has developed in the tension between revival heritage, congregational life, and modernity. In the early revival movements, pastoral care was closely connected to conversion, confession of sin, prayer, sanctification, and guidance into Christian life. Over time, pastoral care was also influenced by psychological and therapeutic perspectives, particularly in response to new forms of modernity and changing understandings of the individual. In *En introduktion till själavårdslandskapet* [An Introduction to the Pastoral-Care Landscape], Sundberg (2024b) develops this view further. He describes how pastoral care in the Swedish Pentecostal movement has historically been connected to the perspective of sanctification and the following of Christ, emphasizing the power of the Spirit to live the new life in Christ. He also demonstrates that pastoral care in the Pentecostal movement long had a clearly congregational and intercessory character, before it was gradually influenced by more psychologically grounded knowledge of human life and formalized pastoral-care training. This development does not represent a simple break with the revival heritage but rather a movement in which a biblical view of humanity, intercessory prayer, conversation, psychology, and pastoral guidance are increasingly held together. For Pentecostal pastoral care, this is particularly notable because Sundberg describes a tradition that preserves continuity with a revival-oriented spirituality while simultaneously being influenced by more recent pastoral-care and psychological impulses. A similar congregational and intercessory character is also evident in the Norwegian Pentecostal movement, where pastoral care has historically been connected to practical care, conversation, intercessory prayer, and spiritual guidance (Waldemar, 2026). This similarity helps illuminate why contemporary Pentecostal pastoral care may appear both distinctly faith-oriented and simultaneously relational and process-oriented.

In a recent article, I demonstrated that, in the Norwegian context, Pentecostal pastoral care has been the subject of research and systematic theological reflection only to a limited extent (Waldemar, 2026). Lacking a broader research field, practice-oriented sources, interviews, popular-level contributions, and wider studies of Pentecostal spirituality provide important insights into how pastoral care has been understood and practiced in the Norwegian Pentecostal movement. The same article also functions as an initial empirical mapping of the field through a quantitative survey among Norwegian Pentecostal pastors. The study found that Pentecostal pastoral care is primarily a threefold practice characterized by (1) listening and empathy, (2) guidance and counseling, and (3) spiritual support and intercessory prayer. The

pastor emerges as both a fellow traveler and a spiritual guide, and the conversation is understood as a possible arena for God's work. The study suggests that Pentecostal pastoral care may be understood as a *trialogical practice* in which the pastoral caregiver, the counselee, and the Holy Spirit participate in a relational and spiritual conversation—an approach that differs from the counselee-centered ideal that often characterizes folk-church models. It also suggests that Pentecostal pastoral care is seemingly more explicitly faith-oriented and marked by a fundamental expectation of the presence of the Holy Spirit than is typically described in the Church of Norway. *Expressive ecclesial resources*, such as intercessory prayer and explicit use of biblical texts, are often naturally integrated into the conversations. Moreover, the findings indicate that counselees in this context are more likely to seek God's active intervention and therefore wish to discuss faith-related questions connected to an experienced absence of God or a longing for God's concrete presence. The findings highlight the need for further empirical research that can explore more closely how Pentecostal pastoral care is practiced and understood in light of the movement's theological and pastoral distinctiveness. To situate this practice within a broader international and academic context, this article reviews more recent literature that addresses Pentecostal pastoral care.

Mathew (2020) argues that there is limited written literature in the field of pastoral care from an explicitly Pentecostal/charismatic perspective available to congregations and theological institutions. In *Ministry Between Miracles*, Mathew addresses this lack by demonstrating how developments in pastoral care moved from a focus on conversion to a broader understanding of and care for spiritual needs, and how training in pastoral care became crucial in this development. Three factors particularly hindered early Pentecostals from developing the field of pastoral care (Mathew, 2020, p. 137). First, the charismatic dimension of their worship was dominant. Ministry often occurred in the church, and since the desire was for the Holy Spirit to be the primary agent, the pastor's skills were not prioritized. The second factor was the Puritan holiness to which most Pentecostals were committed; many problems requiring pastoral care were regarded as disciplinary issues. Concern for the pain of a divorced person, for example, was often given lower priority than the concern to discipline divorced persons to prevent further divorces. For Pentecostals, pastoral care was not the focus in such cases. The third factor was Pentecostals' commitment to eschatological evangelism, which encouraged evangelism at any cost and on every occasion. Therefore, a funeral was not primarily seen as an opportunity to provide care for the bereaved and affected but rather as an opportunity to win the lost souls among those attending the funeral. Since they believed that Jesus could return at any moment, no one should leave the funeral unsaved. Mathew therefore describes a model that he calls a *Spirit-led Model of Pastoral Care*, based on biblical and theological assumptions such as a theology of hope and the belief that God is at work in the world, while also including various psychological and pedagogical principles. The model assumes that God cares and is concerned with reconciliation, restoration, and healing. Mathew argues that ministry is effective only when it occurs through the Spirit's equipping and empowering presence (2020, p. 38).

Benner (2003) argues that pastoral care is a legitimate part of Christian ministry because it provides a particular opportunity to connect the words of the Bible to people's concrete life experiences and needs. He also emphasizes that pastoral care should not be reduced to preaching directed toward one person but must be understood as biblical guidance regarding concrete life situations. This perception forms the basis for the model of *Strategic Pastoral Counseling*, which is brief, structured, holistic, ecclesially grounded, task-oriented, spiritually oriented, and explicitly Christian. Although Benner does not write within an explicitly Pentecostal framework, his contribution is used here because the model has been influential in Christian

pastoral-care thinking more broadly, and because his work is used as course literature at several Pentecostal educational institutions.

Other scholarly articles worth mentioning from an American Pentecostal context are Cartledge (2001), Decker et al. (2021), Parker (2016), and Decker et al. (2022). When Cartledge (2001) highlights two central aspects of the Pentecostal approach. First, Pentecostal pastoral care is primarily rooted in the context of the church and is practiced mainly within this framework rather than as clinical pastoral care. Second, Cartledge emphasizes the importance of asking questions about the Holy Spirit's role in the pastoral-care process. Cartledge indicates that many Christian authors who write about the Holy Spirit's role in pastoral care or therapy often fall into one of two traps: either they adopt a doctrinal position that in practice cannot be distinguished from personal experiences or convictions, or they develop a fixed methodology that in practice undermines the desire to be led by the Spirit.

Decker et al. (2021) note that attempts to develop a theological-practical framework for Christian therapy which centers the Holy Spirit have been few. Although some Pentecostals have reflected on therapeutic tasks (e.g., Decker, 1996, 1997; Parker, 2016), Johnson et al. (2013) emphasize that a formal Pentecostal/charismatic model of psychotherapy has yet to be developed (p. 339). In response, Decker et al. (2021) present a theoretical and theological model called *Spirit-centered counseling*, based on three fundamental assumptions: that the Spirit permeates all creation (ontology), that human beings can experience the work of the Spirit through discernment and participation (epistemology), and that the Spirit brings the world from chaos to order (function). These assumptions form the basis for four practices: (1) the pneumatological imagination, (2) belief in the Spirit's presence throughout the process, (3) narrative reinterpretation of life stories, and (4) holistic integration of faith and science. The model is expressed through methods such as relational interaction in a "triological meeting place" involving the pastoral caregiver, the counselee, and the Spirit, narrative practice, and reflection on God's redemptive story.

Parker (2016) explores how *Pentecostal pneumatology* shapes the understanding of therapy and pastoral care. He notes that while Pentecostalism shares much with other traditions regarding the view of the Holy Spirit, it emphasizes the Spirit's work as life-giving power and personal experience. Parker highlights the practical character of Pentecostal theology, which includes not only orthodoxy, or right belief, but also orthopraxy, or right action, and orthopathy, or right affections. Moreover, Parker notes that because reflections on the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal tradition often begin from subjective experiences rather than theological precision, many Pentecostals have developed a terminology marked by ambiguity and lacking conceptual nuance.

In continuation of Pentecostal pneumatology, Decker et al. (2022) analyzed how *Pentecostal spirituality* shapes pastoral care, employing Pentecostal theologians (Land, 2010; Smith, 2010; Yong, 2002) who emphasize theology in light of practice. Central here are experiences of prayer, worship, laying on of hands, and speaking in tongues. The article identifies five aspects of Pentecostal spirituality with implications for clinical work: (1) the pneumatological imagination, a way of "knowing" shaped by the Spirit; (2) narrative structures, in which testimony, prayer, the Bible, and prophecy are seen as participation in God's story; (3) religious affections, understood as holistic dispositions marked by gratitude, compassion, and courage; (4) the Spirit's empowerment, a radical openness to the work of the Holy Spirit; and (5) the Spirit's transforming power, in which healing and restoration occur through Spirit-led processes.

Utilizing international research on Pentecostal pastoral care, this study explores how the emphasis on the Holy Spirit is expressed in a Scandinavian context. Notably, the most influential contributions within Pentecostal theology—such as those of Hollenweger, Land,

Macchia, Vondey, Cartledge, Yong, Kärkkäinen, and Smith—have largely been systematic-theological and conceptual in form. Although some of these theologians have been open to empirical methods, empirical research has only minimally shaped the contributions with the greatest scholarly impact. This disparity underscores the need for empirically grounded studies that can illuminate how Pentecostal theology is expressed and experienced in a lived ecclesial reality.

Together, this literature shows that Pentecostal pastoral care moves within a tension between congregationally based care, biblical-theological grounding, psychological and pedagogical insight, and expectation of the Holy Spirit's presence and guidance. My basis in this study is that this tension must be investigated empirically and not merely described theoretically. The study therefore asks how Pentecostal pastors understand and practice pastoral care in concrete conversations, and how relational care, pastoral role understanding, use of the Bible, prayer, and the work of the Spirit are included in this practice.

Pentecostal Pastoral Care: Typological Location and Analytical Clarification

The introduction presented Grevbo's (2006) typology of different basic types of pastoral care. Pentecostal pastoral care may be located within several categories, depending on context, understanding, and practice. It may be *kerygmatic* since it focuses on the proclamation of the biblical core message; *evangelical* in its emphasis on biblical truths and norms; *charismatic* through its emphasis on spiritual gifts, healing through prayer, and the pastoral caregiver's spiritual equipping; or *spiritual* in highlighting the guidance of the Holy Spirit and spiritual direction. Grevbo emphasizes that this spiritual approach is based on the conviction that God is present in all human situations and desires to support people both in crisis and in joy. The ecclesial tradition is also relevant for Pentecostal pastoral care, understood as congregationally grounded care connected to faith and life, closely related to dialogical pastoral care and care for faith and life.

In this article, references to the work of the Holy Spirit are understood as a theological interpretation of experiences as the pastors describe them. I do not claim to be able to determine from the outside when a thought, impulse, insight, or change is actually caused by the direct action of the Spirit. Rather, the study analytically examines how the pastors interpret such experiences, what language they use to describe them, and how this interpretation shapes their practice of pastoral care. What is described as the guidance of the Spirit in a Pentecostal context may, in other scholarly vocabularies, be described as empathy, intuition, relational sensitivity, or therapeutic process. This study focuses on how Pentecostal pastors interpret such experiences pneumatologically, and how this interpretation has practical and ethical consequences in the pastoral-care setting.

With this scholarly contextualization as a backdrop, the empirical work that forms the basis of the study is now examined. The following section presents the methodological approach, sample, data collection, and analytical process, emphasizing how the informants' experiences have been interpreted in light of the study's research question.

METHOD AND MATERIAL

The study is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, which focuses on understanding people's experiences and meanings as they themselves perceive them. The interpretive paradigm utilizes social-constructionist, phenomenological, and hermeneutical perspectives. This concept is reflected in this article, since I examine how Pentecostal pastors understand and describe the content and practice of pastoral care, and how meaning is created in the tension between their

experiences, my interpretation, and the contextual framework within which I read the material. The data were collected through what Kvale and Brinkmann (2021) describe as semi-structured life-world interviews. This interview method is inspired by phenomenological philosophy, as it seeks to elicit the informants' own experiences and descriptions of reality as they perceive and live it (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021).

The research project utilizes thematic analysis, which is not tied to a specific theoretical framework, but which identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns in the empirical material (Malterud, 2017, p. 95). In the analytical process, I began with an inductive profile, where the structure emerges from the findings in the material. The chosen method of analysis is systematic text condensation (STC), a pragmatic method for thematic analysis of qualitative data (Malterud, 2017). This method was chosen because it provides a clear and transparent path from raw data to condensed findings, and because it is established in both health-science and practical-theological research. Moreover, STC helps preserve an inductive character in the analysis and strengthens my researcher position by combining systematic procedure with openness. The use of the informants' own quotations is significant, as this supports the interpretations and ensures empirical fidelity and credibility in the presentation.

The analysis followed Malterud's four-step model for STC. First, the data material was studied to gain an overall impression and identify preliminary themes. Next, meaning units were identified and sorted into thematic groups. The content was then condensed in my own words to capture the essence of the informants' experiences. Finally, a synthesis was developed, in which patterns and new understandings were formulated as four overarching perspectives on Pentecostal pastoral care. Malterud notes that this process is dynamic, involving continual back and forth movement to attend to all relevant information. After the STC analysis, the findings were discussed in light of relevant theoretical perspectives. As Anker (2021) notes, theory can help sharpen attention to interesting patterns and possible tensions in the material. Due to an apparent unanimity in the findings, I chose to add a fifth step to the analysis, in which I actively searched for contradictions, tensions, and nuances. This process entailed a shift toward a more abductive analysis, where both empirical material and theory have dialogical significance in the interpretation.

Eleven Pentecostal pastors were selected through a strategic sample to ensure variation in gender, congregation size, geographical context (urban/rural), and nationality (Norway/Sweden). Of the participants, 64% were from Norway and 36% from Sweden, while the gender distribution indicated 36% women and 64% men. The majority of the interviews (73%) were conducted in person, while 27% were conducted digitally via Zoom. The interviews were conducted between June 2024 and May 2025. Notably, the study does not claim statistical generalization to all Pentecostal pastors in Norway and Sweden, but it is qualitative and interpretive. Its purpose is to examine how a strategic sample of Pentecostal pastors describe, experience, and interpret pastoral care within their concrete ministry contexts. The findings must therefore be understood as analytically transferable rather than representative in a quantitative sense. Through variation in the sample, transparent methodological choices, and the use of the informants' own descriptions, the study seeks to identify patterns, tensions, and theological forms of interpretation that may have relevance beyond the individual interviews.

The data were collected using the University of Oslo's Nettskjema [online form] and audio-recording application, and all interviews were transcribed. The analytical work was conducted in Atlas.ti. Meaning units were developed, analyzed, and systematized, forming the basis for the findings presented in the next section. The research project was assessed by Sikt, and research-ethical principles were safeguarded through anonymization of data, informed consent, and confidentiality at every stage. The interviews were anonymized, and quotations were reproduced with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Moreover, the pseudonyms were

used to preserve part of the informants' individual voices in the material and to highlight that the findings emerge from the experiences of concrete pastors, not merely from an aggregated analytical category.

As a researcher, I am not a neutral observer. My background as both a Pentecostal pastor and pastoral caregiver makes me an active participant and interpreter in the process, where meaning is co-created in the encounter between myself and the informants. Interpretation occurs on several levels: through the informants' own reflections, my interpretation as researcher, and the theological interpretation that frames the work. This process creates a polyphonic hermeneutic in which I, as researcher, must be particularly attentive to balancing proximity and distance. While my pastoral experience gives me a deeper resonance with the participants' language, theology, and experiences this proximity may risk making me blind to alternative interpretations or lead to an overly strong identification with the field. It is therefore essential to be aware of one's own blind spots, prejudgments, and preunderstandings, and to adopt an attitude that Kaufman (2022) calls "intentionally naive," because one may easily take one's own assumptions for granted. The methodological challenge therefore lies in maintaining empirical fidelity—allowing the informants' voices to be clearly expressed—while simultaneously lifting the gaze analytically and theologically and situating the findings within a broader research and tradition context.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the empirical findings from the interviews with Pentecostal pastors concerning how they understand and practice pastoral care. The findings are based on systematic text condensation of the interview material, in which meaning units were condensed and analyzed across the participants' voices. The purpose is not to provide a complete reproduction of all statements but to highlight patterns, tensions, and nuances in the material. Quotations from the pastors are used to support the interpretations and to offer insight into the atmosphere and experiences as the pastors express them.

Four central dimensions emerge in the interviews and reflect the Pentecostal pastors' understanding and practice: relational presence; spiritual practice between biblical use, prayer, and the guidance of the Spirit; the pastor's role understanding; and the purpose and process of pastoral care. These dimensions partly overlap because relation, responsibility, theology, and the presence of the Spirit appear in the material as closely interwoven in the pastors' descriptions of pastoral care. This aspect illuminates how the pastors conceptualize pastoral care and reveals how experience, theology, role understanding, and Pentecostal tradition together shape the framework for practice.

Relational Presence

Pastors claimed the power of pastoral care is in human closeness and in the ability to create genuine contact. When conversations are marked by honesty, openness, and acceptance, it becomes possible to touch deeper layers of life and to create a space for deeper understanding. Pastoral care describes the good conversation—a place for natural and trusting openness. The pastor's role is to make themselves available through presence and fellow humanity, knowing that God may work through them. As one pastor emphasized: "I do not meet your life with my theories. Or with my fine theological thoughts—but life meets life" [own translation] (Lisa). Presence itself—the act of "being there"—is described as healing.

The pastors emphasized that pastoral care requires active listening, the ability to tolerate others' processes, and taking the counselee seriously. Thus, practice is shaped not only

by explicit theological convictions and charismatic expressions but also by relational and ethical qualities such as empathy, love of neighbor, and humility. One pastor stated: "... this matter of taking people seriously, we must meet them and listen to them, also listen to the pain, feel the pain ..." [own translation] (Frank). The good pastoral caregiver exhibits humility, the ability to listen more than speak, and a willingness to carry some of the counselee's burden—without taking ownership of the process from them. They also emphasize that God has a warmer heart for people than they themselves are able to have, and that God's love can melt coldness and open new possibilities. "I may have empathy ... but God has an infinitely greater heart ...," one of the pastors says [own translation] (Johan). Moreover, life experiences—both good and difficult—are resources that provide balance and realism in the encounter with counselees. This perspective also includes the power of faith to lift people up, but it is combined with the recognition that solutions do not always appear quickly.

Pastors described pastoral care as a process in which the counselee's life experience, choices, and emotions are given importance. Acknowledging pain and difficulties is understood as fundamental, while the pastor may also help to de-dramatize misunderstandings or exaggerated perceptions. Pastoral care is often considered a long-term journey, in which the counselee must own their situation and find their own answers. This process requires the pastor to meet the counselee with care; avoid forcing quick conclusions; and facilitate reflection, wonder, and gradual growth. A central ideal is that the space of pastoral care should be open to the whole person—all emotions, thoughts, and experiences of faith are allowed. "But one can acknowledge that life is difficult, and I understand that this is hard. And then I think it is important not to try to explain everything" [own translation] (Erling). The pastors also stated that a conversation partner may have significant influence over the person seeking help, which can lead to unhealthy dynamics. It is important to avoid steering the conversation too much and instead guide so that the counselee feels safe and not manipulated.

Additionally, the material demonstrates that the relational orientation does not necessarily imply an unproblematic continuation of earlier Pentecostal pastoral-care practice. Some pastors expressed a clear distance from the historical heritage, describing "pastoral care" as a burdened term because of experiences with manipulative or over-spiritualized practices. One pastor stated that there has been "so much strange pastoral care" that she would prefer to "move away from the term," even though she understood her work as care for the whole person [own translation]. Therefore, a tension emerges between a strong relational ideal and a critical view of earlier Pentecostal practices. For several of the pastors, a tension also exists between the desire to protect the open, relational conversation and the desire to open clearly for the spiritual dimension in the pastoral-care setting.

Spiritual Practice between Biblical Use, Prayer, and Guidance of the Spirit

The pastors described pastoral care as a place where faith, theology, spirituality, and biblical principles are naturally interwoven but also as a space where God's presence is often understood and experienced pneumatologically—through the guidance, comfort, reminder, and promptings of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, a possible tension arises between clarity and humility, and between the relational and the spiritual. As one of the pastors stated: "That is the challenge of being church in a secularized society. If you do not stand for a strong conviction, then no one comes to faith. But if you have a strong conviction, you may also push people away. Because it is easier to preach a 'Jesus loves all the children' theology" [own translation] (William). The pastors described pastoral care as a space where spirituality is always present, either explicitly through prayer and biblical use, or implicitly through a fundamental theological understanding. As one pastor described: "I absolutely count on God ... But I myself take

responsibility for what I say, without placing it on God and in His name” [own translation] (Elin).

The pastors consider the Bible as a source of life and freedom while also emphasizing that they do not use it for oppression. Several pastors stated that they rarely read directly from the Bible in conversations; rather, they want the Bible to shape both language and attitude. As one pastor clarified: “It is rare that I sit and read from the Bible ... but ... I hope ... that the Word of the Bible is ... in the back of my mind” [own translation] (Frank). Other pastors noted that they may mention biblical stories or refer to the Bible when these resemble or may be helpful in the counselee’s situation, to provide new perspectives or hope:

For example—if I meet a woman who finds it very difficult to relate to men, because she has had several men, then I do not need to enter into spiritual warfare. I can use God’s Word. Do you understand what I mean? I feel like I am fumbling a little now, but the point is that there are concrete situations where one can use God’s Word—without opening too much for speculative interpretations. One can actually use it with boldness. Yes, like this: “This is God’s Word. This is not just me. This is not just my opinion” [own translation] (Lisa).

In Lisa’s account, the Bible may be said to function as a theological grounding that both guides the pastoral caregiver and is used in guidance with counselees. However, the pastors acknowledge the tension in a secularized society, where clarity in faith may both attract and push people away.

The pastors described prayer as a central part of pastoral care but practiced in different ways. For some, prayer is a natural framework around every conversation—both at the beginning and at the end—while others pray silently along the way or pray outside the conversation room. Several emphasized that prayer is a way of inviting God in and revealing His presence. They also stated that the Holy Spirit is the third participant in the conversations and that they try to be conscious of the counselee’s vulnerability and previous experiences. The difference thus becomes clear: some are more open and integrate the spiritual dimension directly into the encounter, while others are more cautious to avoid over-spiritualization or imposing unwanted pressure on the counselee. One pastor explained: “And then it is natural to say that I think we are three in the room, not just two. So I want our conversation to be prayerful” [own translation] (Rune). The work of the Spirit is understood as concrete support: the Spirit may give insight, questions, Bible verses, or words, which may create release, introduce new perspectives, or even be understood as miracles. Several indicated experiences of spiritual gifts that naturally find expression in the conversations and to an expectation that God may also intervene with miracles. One Pentecostal pastor expressed: “More than once after a pastoral-care conversation I have sat there wondering where that came from ... this must be a trace of the Holy Spirit” [own translation] (Elin). Several pastors were concerned that the communication must be toned down to avoid spiritualization or authoritarian proclamation. Some indicated the strength of pastoral care as precisely that of speaking God’s truths, while others warned against the danger of poor theology, over-spiritualization, or abuse of power. Ultimately, they share an awareness of meeting people in a way that retains the content of faith while simultaneously safeguarding the other person.

The experience of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit was frequently highlighted by the pastors. A basic understanding that emerged is the pastors’ belief that the Holy Spirit is present in the conversation as a third party working in both the pastoral caregiver and the counselee. The pastors explained that the Holy Spirit may offer words, impulses, and wisdom that exceed their own competence and understanding. “So I really want the presence of the

Holy Spirit to be evident in the room ...,” one of the pastors explained [own translation] (Lisa). They thus described experiences of receiving thoughts, formulations of questions, or words that are perceived as traces of the Spirit. Moreover, humility and balance were expressed—they acknowledged that they may be mistaken and that they ask the counselee to test what they express. Charismatic expressions are not understood as spectacular phenomena but as expressions of God’s care, words of knowledge, or intercessory prayer that meet concrete needs. However, they share the belief that the Spirit’s presence indicates a possibility that makes pastoral care more than an ordinary conversation, where God Himself may touch, guide, and release. One of the pastors stated: “So I think that the human presence and the divine presence are the framework for the pastoral care I wish to practice as a pastor” [own translation] (Lisa). Additionally, the importance of being cautious when opening up the spiritual dimension was emphasized. The pastors wish to avoid imposing their own perceptions of God on the counselee, since this may create a tension between the desire to include spirituality in the conversation and the need to respect the counselee’s own faith and experiences. Another perspective that emerged is the importance of not placing responsibility for one’s own mistakes on God; rather, the pastoral caregiver must personally accept responsibility for their statements in the pastoral-care setting.

Pastoral care in a Pentecostal context is characterized by a dynamic and flexible practice, which entails both strengths and challenges. The pastors highlighted the clear spiritual dimension as a healthy resource, marked by openness, adaptability, and expectation of the Spirit’s work. However, they also reflected on unhealthy patterns and oversteps, describing a tension between the danger of becoming toothless when one is overcautious and the risk of spiritualizing the counselee’s situation and experiences. One pastor specified the following: “I myself grew up with that tradition of ‘Thus says the Lord’ ... but one has turned somewhat against this ... We may become too vague about God and have a little too little faith—precisely because the Word of Faith movement took it to the extreme” [own translation] (Lisa). Healthy pastoral care involves giving room for process and time, while unhealthy practice arises when the pastor uses theological phrases, prophecies, or intercessory prayer as quick “solutions” instead of meeting the other person’s reality and allowing room for their emotions and experiences. One pastor explained: “And then I think an unhealthy aspect is if you spiritualize a solution far too quickly ... Even though we believe in prayer, that must not become the quick solution” [own translation] (Erling). The pastors also explained that there is a tension between being open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and being careful about how this is expressed in conversations. The pastors agreed that while it is important to create space for God’s presence, this must be done in a non-intrusive and non-manipulative manner. Unhealthy practice arises when the pastoral caregiver becomes too dominant, does not listen, projects their own experiences, or turns pastoral care into an arena of performance. One Pentecostal pastor explained: “What is unhealthy is when leaders begin to act as masters instead of servants. I would say it is about abuse of power as a pastoral caregiver ... So when I speak about unhealthy practice, I think of three things: abuse of power, lack of knowledge, and poor theology” [own translation] (William). One pastor expressed concern that the pastoral caregiver may become an actor with their own agenda, which may lead to manipulation of the counselee. They stated: “For in immature and unqualified pastoral care there is a lot of manipulation, ... where the pastoral caregiver has their own agenda in order to reach a goal. [...] I think that the pastoral caregiver should be a catalyst for initiating processes, and not the main actor” [own translation] (Elin). Although all the pastors count on God’s presence, there is considerable variation in how explicitly the work of the Spirit was thematized in the conversation. Some described experiences with intercessory prayer, words of knowledge, and prophetic impulses as natural elements in pastoral care, while others emphasized a more “low-key” pneumatology. One pastor empha-

sized that she has never received revelations or words of knowledge but has experienced questions that she later interpreted as “traces of the Holy Spirit.” Moreover, she takes full responsibility for her own statements and does “not place it on God” to avoid burdening God with her own misjudgments. This notion illustrates an important nuance in the material: while the presence of the Spirit is understood as both concrete and active, for some pastors, the explicitly charismatic language is suppressed out of consideration for the counselee’s vulnerability and previous negative experiences.

Role Understanding and Responsibility

Pastors understand themselves as co-agents whom God uses in pastoral care, where they represent His presence and remind people of His promises. The role is experienced more as a mandate than as a personal achievement, emphasizing the importance of being professional in the relationship, clarifying boundaries between pastoral care and informal conversations, and practicing confidentiality. Additionally, they warn against naivety in encounters with people and note the need to be realistic about power and responsibility. One pastor stated: “When someone comes to a pastor, they do not meet God directly, but indirectly. We can be God’s hands and feet. We can be there and see people. Listen to people” [own translation] (Lisa). They thus see themselves as co-agents in God’s process, but with a responsibility to safeguard boundaries, integrity, and professional awareness.

Pastors described their personal faith as an important source of security and credibility in encounters with counselees. They see preparation through prayer and inner calm as crucial for being present with quality and emphasize the importance of placing pastoral care in God’s hands rather than carrying it themselves. Experiences from church and from their own lives may be drawn upon as testimony. Many emphasized the ability to live with unanswered questions and paradoxes and to meet counselees with hope without having to explain everything. One Pentecostal pastor emphasized: “The practice is probably that I turn to God beforehand and ask for help: ‘How can I be of help? Can You show me things?’ ... One tunes in a little, then” [own translation] (Johan).

Pastors clarified that pastoral care has boundaries: when needs enter areas that require professional healthcare, they refer onward. One pastor elaborated by saying: “If someone comes with a broken leg ... you also need to go to an orthopedist ... in the same way that there are medicines and treatment for the body, there are also for the mental” [own translation] (Lucas). They also experience their own sustainability as a challenge, particularly when counselees “empty themselves.” To avoid unhealthy practice, they emphasize the importance of knowledge of human life, competence, and continuous learning. Lack of knowledge and poor theology may harm both pastoral care and the counselee, and awareness of this is considered crucial for a healthy pastoral ministry.

Pastors experience both confidence and vulnerability in encounters with people. Several regard themselves as personally suited and find motivation in being of help and pointing people toward God. One Pentecostal pastor explained: “Even though I do not have credits in pastoral care ... I am confident in my own personal suitability to meet people” [own translation] (Johan). However, they also live with experiences of disappointment when counselees, for various reasons, withdraw from the church community after one or more conversations. Moreover, they emphasize that pastoral care is not about delivering quick solutions but about listening and being a fellow traveler. This humility balances the experience of personal strength and the calling to serve. Pastoral care is therefore seen as a ministry that requires both personal suitability and long-term sustainability.

The material also reveals an underlying ambivalence connected to the pastor's role. While the pastor is described as a possible representative of God's presence—"God's hands and feet"; there are strong warnings against becoming the "main actor" in the pastoral-care setting. Some pastors described unhealthy practice precisely as situations where the pastoral caregiver "stands forth on God's behalf" and speaks categorically into another person's life, which may be experienced as both manipulative and boundaryless. This tension between calling and power, and between co-agent and over-agent, indicates a need for continuous ethical reflection in Pentecostal pastoral care.

The Purpose and Process of Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is understood as a practice that can help the counselee to see life in a brighter light, experience reconciliation, find direction for the future, restore relationships, and experience being raised up. One pastor expressed it as: "People say things like: 'Oh, now I see things in a brighter light' or 'Oh, it was incredibly good to be able to put some words to this'" [own translation] (Johan). The aim often involves expanding the perspective and inviting God into the processes so that life is marked by love, hope, and wholeness. Additionally, the flexibility of pastoral care is emphasized—there are few fixed frameworks, and Jesus' encounters with people are used as a model. One of the pastors explained this by saying: "But beyond that, I do not have any more ritual or fixed framework. I simply invite them to tell about life" [own translation] (Karianne). Pastoral care is thus clearly distinguished from the ministry of intercessory prayer, while simultaneously being an integrated part of the church's practice. The pastors emphasized the example of Jesus in the way He met people and prioritized flexibility and closeness.

The pastors described the counsees' processes as complex, often involving overlapping challenges and inner conflicts. Pastoral care is experienced as meeting people in the tension between spirit, soul, and body. The pastors wish to empower the counselee, challenge their understandings, and create room for growth and change. As one of the pastors stated: "I do not only stroke her with the hairs ... I challenge her" [own translation] (Lisa). Pastoral care may thus enhance empowerment and assist in breaking destructive patterns. However, pastoral care becomes unhealthy when responsibility is removed from the counselee; it remains healthy when the pastor meets the person with warmth while also maintaining that the counselee has personal responsibility for their own life and choices. One pastor expressed it as: "I think there is a lot of unhealthy pastoral care. ... if in pastoral care we completely remove personal responsibility, then it will not turn out well in the long run" [own translation] (Lucas).

Four Pastoral-Care Perspectives

Through the thematic analysis of the empirical material, four central pastoral-care perspectives emerged. These perspectives are not intended as a direct repetition of the four preceding findings categories but as an interpretive summary across the material. While the categories above demonstrate how the pastors describe relational presence, the presence of the Spirit, role understanding, and the process of pastoral care, the perspectives clarify the underlying pastoral-care logics that together shape Pentecostal pastoral care. The perspectives therefore represent different centers of gravity rather than separate positions.

1. *The relational perspective* emerges from the findings concerning relational presence and emphasizes pastoral care as a human encounter marked by listening, recognition, and process, where the good conversation is emphasized.
2. *The pastoral perspective* emerges from the findings concerning role understanding and responsibility; it reflects how the pastors understand their calling and man-

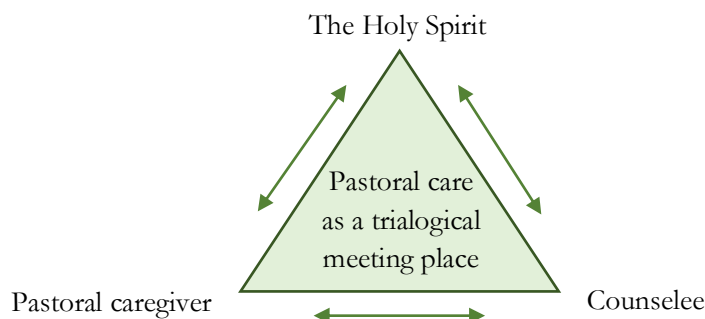
- date, balancing authority and servanthood but also vulnerability, boundaries, and sustainability.
3. *The biblical-theological perspective* spans several findings categories and explains how the Bible, Christian faith, and theological reflection are woven into pastoral care as resource, framework, and foundation.
 4. *The pneumatological perspective* emerges particularly from the findings concerning the presence and significance of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing how the Spirit is understood as an active third party in the conversations—as comforter, inspiration, and guide. Notably, the pastors also reflect on the risk of unhealthy practice when the gifts of the Spirit are handled unwisely.

DISCUSSION

The four pastoral-care perspectives that emerged through the analysis—the relational, the pastoral, the biblical-theological, and the pneumatological—form the framework for this discussion, where I elaborate on and problematize these perspectives in light of previous research and relevant theory while also reflecting on tensions. The analysis demonstrates that the relational perspective constitutes a clear center of gravity compared with the three other perspectives. This view is expressed both in the pastors’ language—by emphasizing presence and process—and in the descriptions of what is regarded as most central in pastoral-care practice. Moreover, this view nuances the image of Pentecostal pastoral care as one-sidedly “spiritual” or kerygmatically oriented, indicating a more complex practice in which relation, theology, and pneumatology are woven together—with tensions.

Figure 1 illustrates Pentecostal pastoral care as a trialogical practice in which the pastoral caregiver, the counselee, and the Holy Spirit may potentially interact (Waldemar, 2026). The horizontal arrow between the pastoral caregiver and the counselee marks the relational perspective, while the pastoral caregiver’s position includes both the pastoral and the biblical-theological perspectives. The diagonal arrows between the Spirit and the two conversation partners depicts the pneumatological perspective—the belief that the Spirit may work in, between, and through the participants in the pastoral-care conversation.

Figure 1: Pentecostal pastoral care as a trialogical practice



1. The Relational Perspective

The pastors emphasized that pastoral care consists primarily of the good conversation, marked by genuine contact and fellow-human presence, which in itself may have a healing effect. Pastoral care is understood as walking alongside the counselee in processes, accepting all emo-

tions, and encouraging ownership and empowerment. The role is described more as that of a companion than a problem-solver. This perspective demonstrates how Pentecostal practice integrates elements from psychology, faith, and theology, with trust and closeness forming foundational pillars. Pentecostal pastors share much with the counselee-centered tradition that characterizes Lutheran pastoral care (Okkenhaug, 2002; Grevbo, 2018; Stifoss-Hanssen et al., 2019). However, the relationship is interpreted within a Pentecostal interpretive framework, where the presence of the Holy Spirit is expected, experienced, and articulated as an active part of the pastoral-care setting. This perspective is not necessarily a claim that the Spirit is present in an ontologically different way than in other Christian traditions but rather that Pentecostal pastors describe the relationship in more explicit pneumatological language. The relational process is therefore understood both as an encounter between counselee and pastoral caregiver and as a space in which God may be actively present.

The Pentecostal pastors' relational emphasis can be recognized in Owe Wikström's (1999) understanding of pastoral care as an empathic and reflective encounter, marked by care and theological reflection. However, the empirical material differs in that the Pentecostal pastors understand pastoral care not only as a relational space of care and a place for theological interpretation but also as a space in which the Holy Spirit actively works through words, intercessory prayer, and insight. This emphasis on the Spirit's presence and action corresponds with the findings in Waldemar (2026), adding a pneumatological dimension that is articulated only limitedly in Wikström. Pentecostal pastoral care may therefore be said to unite central elements from the Lutheran tradition with a clear grounding in Pentecostal faith and practice concerning the active presence of the Spirit.

Several pastors also described an underlying tension between relational openness and theological conviction. While they are conscious of not steering the conversation too much and wish to meet people with acceptance and spaciousness, strong theological positions, for example in matters concerning relationships and gender, may challenge this openness and create a risk that the counselee's experiences are corrected too quickly. Therefore, a field of tension may potentially arise between the relational and the theological, where the ideal of empowerment collides with the unavoidable asymmetry in the relationship. Such a tension has also been noted in recent Norwegian pastoral-care theology (Engedal, 2018). The pastors themselves articulated this tension and emphasized the need for wisdom in encounters with sensitive issues.

Although this study highlights the relational perspective as central in Pentecostal pastoral care, several international contributions suggest a different emphasis. American studies such as Mathew (2020), Parker (2016), and Decker et al. (2021, 2022) substantially emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit, which may indicate a stronger pneumatological and more kerygmatically oriented approach than in this Scandinavian study. An example of such a kerygmatic approach can be found in Benner's (2003) *Strategic Pastoral Counseling*, which emphasizes the connection between the Bible and the counselee's life. This view raises the question of whether there is a distinctively American variant of Pentecostal pastoral care, while Scandinavian practice emphasizes relationship and conversation—while a stronger pneumatological orientation may be present without appearing clearly in this article.

2. The Pastoral Perspective

The role of the pastoral caregiver is understood as a calling and a mandate from God but is also marked by vulnerability, boundaries, and the need for sustainability. The pastors reflected on their own competence and the importance of referring onward, and they described both strengths and disappointments in ministry. The pastoral perspective thus illuminates the ten-

sion between authority and servanthood, and between representing God and being a fellow human being. Moreover, a potential tension may arise between the relational and pastoral perspectives.

Pentecostal pastors and other Free Church leaders are often understood as spiritual shepherds of the congregation. The role carries some influence, both because they are perceived as “shepherds of the flock” and because they are often chosen by congregational democracy to be the church’s spiritual leaders. Many pastors also described a personal calling to ministry. The tension between authority, understood as a calling from God, and humility, understood as servanthood, becomes clear in pastoral care. As a spiritual leader, one has a mandate to inspire and lead; however, this may also turn into control and abuse of power—especially in a Pentecostal context.

Resane’s (2020) analysis of *shepherd leadership* provides a theological basis for understanding the pastor’s role as spiritual leader. The shepherd has a threefold task—to nourish, protect, and guide—which forms a clear starting point for a Pentecostal understanding of leadership. However, Resane also indicates, with reference to South African church life, that pastoral integrity is often a neglected dimension in certain charismatic contexts. This view reinforces the need for humility and self-reflection, especially in pastoral-care situations where power and vulnerability meet. Although the analysis is contextually rooted in South Africa, it raises issues that may be recognizable in other Pentecostal contexts. Therefore, the tension between servanthood and authority becomes not merely a practical or psychological phenomenon but also a theological and structural question: the role of shepherd gives the pastor’s words an inherent weight, which may be either liberating or problematic depending on maturity, ethics, and reflection. As Lingell and Västberg (2020) note, spiritual equipping, visible results, or growth are not a guarantee that a leader’s life is in order. This reminder makes the tension between authority and humility particularly important to address in charismatic contexts. Åkerlund and Tangen (2018) further develop this tension, stating that Pentecostal pastors occupy a special position when they function both as a mouthpiece for God and as a culture-bearer in the congregation. In such a context, both structures and expectations may create what Åkerlund and Tangen call “charismatic cultures,” characterized by strong visions, idealization of leadership, and little tolerance for criticism or doubt. The authors also describe how leaders may become “trapped in their own role” and feel that they must maintain a spiritual image. For this reason, they indicate the need for reflective practice and ethical guidelines.

In relation, Askeland and Kleiven (2016, p. 71) address how a corresponding tension may arise in all diaconal work, where the relationship between helper and the seeker is marked by an unavoidable asymmetry. When a pastor meets a counselee in a vulnerable life situation, the relationship is not entirely equal—the pastoral caregiver receives a position of power that must be stewarded with humility and awareness. While power itself is not necessarily negative, it must be exercised relationally, in a serving manner, and with care for the other person’s freedom and autonomy. A related aspect of this asymmetry concerns the distinction between pastoral care and spiritual guidance. Bergem (2008, p. 293) notes that the difference chiefly concerns the center of attention. While spiritual guidance is primarily concerned with how a person should live their life in their journey toward God, pastoral care is more concerned with removing the obstacles that people experience. These two conversations often overlap, but an inattentive pastor may easily move in the direction of guidance, where the “shepherd” seeks to lead the “sheep” toward particular goals. Waldemar (2023) notes precisely this tension: being both the shepherd who sees the individual and the “large-scale farmer” who leads the flock. Moreover, the shepherd image may suggest a passive counselee if terms such as “sheep” and “flock” are not problematized. In the pastoral-care setting, the counselee must be understood as an acting and interpreting subject, with their own experience, conscience, and judgment.

The pastor's authority must therefore be exercised in a way that strengthens the counselee's ownership, freedom, and responsibility in their own process. In a Pentecostal context, power and asymmetry may be expressed in various forms. If the pastor at one moment leads intercessory prayer, uses spiritual gifts, or conveys an expectation that the Spirit speaks through them, this may cause the pastor's words to carry additional weight in the pastoral-care setting. Several Pentecostal pastors in this study therefore emphasized the need to meet the counselee in the pastoral-care setting with caution and humility, so that their own experiences or interpretations are not communicated as God's word. Moreover, as several pastors mentioned: to create space for the Holy Spirit—without taking His place.

Additionally, the counselee's vulnerability in the encounter with pastoral authority may make the relationship particularly exposed. Counselees often seek pastoral care during periods of uncertainty and crisis, and may therefore easily follow well-intentioned advice from a faith-filled pastor without question. However, unhealthy power dynamics may arise if the pastor misuses their influence—either consciously through strong advice, clear interpretations, or firm convictions, or unconsciously by lacking awareness of the asymmetry, their own role, and the vulnerability of the relationship. Avoiding such power dynamics requires a high degree of self-insight on the part of the pastor—a factor that Lingell and Västberg (2020) highlight as decisive for leaders who exercise power in vulnerable relationships in the book *Fräls oss från ondo – om makt och maktmissbruk* [Deliver Us from Evil: On Power and Abuse of Power].

Several pastors also described how vulnerability and sustainability are important themes in their own ministry. Pastoral care may be demanding over time, and many are aware of the risk of carrying too much. They indicated the importance of finding rest, seeking guidance from colleagues, and acknowledging their own limits. This reflection reveals an awareness that pastoral care is not only a ministry exercised with authority but also a practice that requires humility, human realism, and care for one's own sustainability.

3. The Biblical-Theological Perspective

Pentecostal pastors understand the Bible and theology as resources that shape language, attitudes, and guidance, and several pastors mentioned that the Bible must not be used in an authoritarian manner. Bible verses are rarely quoted directly but are instead woven into the conversation as a basic attitude and in reflections. Pastoral care is understood as a space for speaking truthfully about life in light of faith, while theology functions as a background tone rather than a textbook. This view reflects a Pentecostal understanding that all of life has a spiritual dimension. Pentecostals have always emphasized an experience-based Christianity rather than doctrinal confessions (Warrington, 2021, p. 15) while also emphasizing belief in the Bible as God's authoritative word (Andersen, 2022, p. 49). As Cartledge noted, Pentecostalism has *a high view of Scripture* as inspired by God while also considering it as a meeting place for the experience of God's Spirit (Cartledge, 2020, p. 167).

Prayer is regularly highlighted as a natural part of pastoral care. While Lutheran deacons are often cautious about opening the faith perspective and rarely use prayer or Bible reading in pastoral care (Jakobsen & Jakobsen, 2022), the Pentecostal pastors describe prayer as an integrated practice, either explicitly in the conversation or implicitly as an inner posture. This viewpoint indicates greater confidence among Pentecostal pastors in including the dimension of faith, even in encounters with people who may be vulnerable or skeptical; this is also confirmed in Waldemar (2026) regarding so-called *expressive ecclesial resources*.

Additionally, the findings reveal that Pentecostal pastors are aware of the tension between clarity and openness. Clarity may both attract and alienate people—a reality that becomes particularly evident in questions concerning relationships and ethics. A dilemma thus

arises: belief in the Bible as a resource may collide with the desire to preserve a relationship marked by respect and spaciousness.

Another challenge concerns theological competence. More than half of Norwegian Pentecostal pastors do not have higher theological education (Waldemar, 2023), which may contribute to fragmented theology, with elements of prosperity theology, over-spiritualization, or too-quick “spiritual solutions.” Prophetic statements, theological phrases, or intercessory prayer may in such cases function as shortcuts instead of engaging the counselee’s life situation in depth. Although many emphasize that “Thus says the Lord” language has been abandoned, the same logic of authority may appear in other forms.

Although Stifoss-Hanssen et al. (2019) claim that the tension between kerygmatic and counselee-centered pastoral care has largely been abandoned in Norwegian pastoral care—admittedly within the Lutheran tradition—this study demonstrates that it remains highly relevant in Pentecostal practice. The Pentecostal pastors’ biblical-theological perspective continually balances giving direction from the Bible with the risk of overriding the individual’s interpretation of life and experiences. A question that then arises is why this tension continues in the Pentecostal context. Possible explanations may include the charismatic culture with its strong emphasis on personal experience, the significance of the Bible and the gifts of the Spirit, traditional understandings of authority connected to the pastoral role, and varying degrees of theological education among pastors. These factors may contribute to the balance between clarity and humility remaining an ongoing practical challenge.

4. The Pneumatological Perspective

The Pentecostal pastors describe pastoral care as a space where the Holy Spirit is understood as a third party—an active co-agent in the conversations. Such a trialogical understanding has been highlighted by several theologians and scholars within the field of pastoral care (Adams, 1973; Decker et al., 2021; Kelleman, 2007; Sphar & Smith, 2003; Waldemar, 2026). The Spirit may offer words, questions, or insights that are experienced as existing beyond one’s own competence, and which are therefore interpreted as “traces of the Spirit.” Several pastors recounted that after a conversation, they have wondered about questions or formulations that they experienced as something they had not “come up with themselves.” Such experiences give pastoral care a distinctive character, where God’s presence is understood not merely as a framework but as a concrete and active factor in the conversation. This understanding indicates that pastoral care is not reduced to a psychological or relational encounter but is seen as an arena where God Himself may touch, guide, and release.

Moreover, the importance of balance and humility was emphasized. Several pastors noted the danger of spiritualizing too quickly or using one’s own promptings as if they had direct divine authority. As one pastor expressed: “All of us human beings, we hear four voices. We hear God’s voice, we hear the devil’s voice, we hear our own voice, we hear the voice of others” [own translation] (Frank). This awareness indicates that intercessory prayer and prophetic contributions are often offered with reservation, and that the counselee is encouraged to test what is said. The pastors’ practice must therefore balance expectation of the Spirit’s intervention with respect for the counselee’s freedom and integrity.

This perspective reflects a distinctive feature of Pentecostal faith and practice. Unlike Lutheran pastoral care, which has traditionally emphasized the Word and the sacraments as means of grace, Pentecostal pastors highlight spiritual experience, intercessory prayer, and the gifts of the Spirit as central resources. The empirical material thus confirms features also emphasized in international Pentecostal research (Cartledge, 2001; Mathew, 2020; Decker et al., 2021, 2022; Parker, 2016), particularly the expectation of the Spirit’s presence as an active co-

agent in the conversation. The same evidence is found in Waldemar (2026). However, the study exhibits greater caution than parts of the international literature, in that the pastors emphasize balance, responsibility, and humility to avoid over-spiritualization or harmful practice. This view raises a question that remains underexplored: How can the Spirit's promptings be given a healthy and constructive place in pastoral care without developing into projections or "quick solutions"? The pneumatological perspective therefore appears as both the greatest strength and the greatest challenge of Pentecostal practice. Its strength lies in creating a space of possibility marked by expectation, hope, and openness to God's intervention, while its weakness is its vulnerability to misuse, especially if the gifts of the Spirit are communicated without humility, theological reflection, and relational sensitivity. The empirical material thus indicates a need for continued reflection on how trust in the Spirit's work can be combined with pastoral wisdom. This requirement further suggests the need for research that more explicitly examines the role of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal pastoral care, particularly how Pentecostal pastors differentiate between their own promptings, relational sensitivity, and experiences of the Spirit's guidance in concrete conversations.

Regarding theoretical location, it is doubtful whether Grevbo's (2006) typology is fully adequate for describing Pentecostal pastoral care. Classifying the practice primarily as "charismatic" or "spiritual" does not capture the complexity of the empirical material. As Jakobsen and Jakobsen (2020) note, pastoral-care practice cannot be reduced to fixed categories, since it is often composite and situationally dependent. If, however, Grevbo's typology is understood as different resources or perspectives that may be introduced to pastoral care, it may function as a useful tool for reflection—but not as a comprehensive description of Pentecostal practice.

Pentecostal Pastoral Care as Enrichment and Challenge

The discussion demonstrates that Pentecostal pastoral care may both enrich and challenge Pentecostal practice and the broader field of pastoral care. It enriches the field by clarifying how pastoral care can be understood and practiced as a practice in which relational presence, pastoral role understanding, biblical-theological interpretation, and expectation of the work of the Holy Spirit are held together. Moreover, the findings challenge the field of pastoral care to reflect further on how prayer, spiritual experience, biblical use, and expectation of divine presence may be integrated into pastoral care in ways that also safeguard the counselee's freedom, vulnerability, and process. Therefore, questions of authority, asymmetry, theological quality, spiritual discernment, and ethical regulation are also highlighted. In this way, Pentecostal pastoral care may contribute to a broader practical-theological conversation about how Christian pastoral care can be open to God's presence and marked by expectation of God's intervention, while also being pastorally responsible.

CONCLUSION

This article examined how Pentecostal pastoral care is understood and practiced by Pentecostal pastors in Norway and Sweden. Based on the empirical material, the article argues that Pentecostal pastoral care may be understood as a relational-pneumatological practice that integrates human presence, theological grounding, and expectation of the active presence and participation of the Holy Spirit. The study reveals that pastoral care is understood through four pastoral-care perspectives: a relational perspective that constitutes the center of gravity, with the pastoral, biblical-theological, and pneumatological perspectives forming a complementary and underlying framework. Pentecostal pastoral care may therefore be regarded as a triological

meeting point, where the pastoral caregiver, the counselee, and the Spirit may potentially interact in ways that can create transformative change in the counselee's life. The Holy Spirit may affect both the counselee and the pastoral caregiver, thereby shaping the relationship, the process, and the dynamic. The strength of the pneumatological perspective lies in expectation, hope, and openness to God's intervention, while its weakness lies in its vulnerability to misuse when the gifts of the Spirit are communicated without humility, theological reflection, and relational sensitivity. The findings show a clear reflective awareness among the pastors, where the balance between pastoral authority and servanthood, between theological clarity and relational sensitivity, and between charismatic expectation and caution constitutes central fields of tension.

The article thus contributes both by describing Pentecostal pastoral care as a distinctive practice and by clarifying the need for further theological, ethical, and practical development within the field. For Pentecostal contexts, this finding entails a challenge to further develop language, practices, and structures that can safeguard both the expectation of the Spirit's work and the counselee's freedom, vulnerability, and responsibility. Moreover, the findings may contribute to a broader practical-theological conversation about how spiritual experience, prayer, biblical use, and relational care can be integrated into pastoral care in theologically clear and pastorally responsible ways. Pentecostal pastoral care shows its distinctive character in the encounter with these tensions: it combines trust in the guidance of the Spirit with a life-near understanding of human vulnerability and process.

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