

Ministers reveal odd and wondrous calling of pastoral work

Isabella R. Moyer | Apr. 19, 2012 NCR Today

Last Sunday, the PBS program "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly" aired a segment called "[Two Pastors.](#)" [1] The two pastors are the Rev. Lillian Daniel and the Rev. Martin Copenhaver, both ministers in the United Church of Christ. They are also co-authors of the book [This Odd and Wondrous Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers](#) [2].

The video introduces us to two warm, passionate and compassionate people obviously in love with their vocation. The book reflects on the joys and struggles inherent in leading a parish community.

Many of the experiences mirror our own Catholic experience: the hesitancy in answering the initial call; the hard work of seminary life; learning how to pray; the need for wise mentors; the struggles of shrinking parishes; the joys of breaking open the Word; and facing both criticism and praise from parishioners.

Other experiences allow us an imaginative peek into the world of "what if?" What if our church ordained women? What would it look like? Daniel describes some of the early challenges of being taken seriously as a woman minister. Being told she looked cute and tiny in her robes didn't help. But her competency and love for preaching solidified the acceptance of her community.

What if our church reconsidered mandatory celibacy within the priesthood? Both authors describe the delicate balancing act between ministerial life and family life. In the past, the minister's spouse was traditionally seen as an unpaid bonus worker for the church. Today, the minister's spouse usually has a career and profession of his or her own. Some ministers become workaholics, to the detriment of their families. This, of course, is no different from the reality faced by many couples today.

Daniel and Copenhaver have written a wonderfully honest reflection on their lives as ministers in the United Church of Christ. For me, as a Catholic, it is an opportunity to reflect on our own priesthood, odd and wondrous as it is.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/april-13-2012/two-pastors/10753/>

[2] <http://www.amazon.com/This-Odd-Wondrous-Calling-Ministers/dp/0802864759>