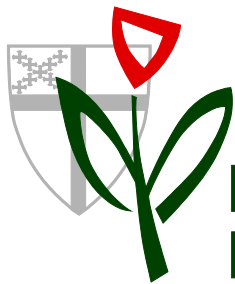


Clergy



Prepared in partnership

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National Episcopal
Health Ministries

Clergy

Table of Contents

Four issues for clergy	3
Clergy Boundaries	3
Literature Review	4
Moore, Allison, Clergy Moms: A Survival Guide to Balancing Family and Congregation, New York: Seabury, 2008.....	4
Friedman, Edwin H., Generation to Generation, New York: The Guilford Press, 1985..	4
Halass, Gwen Wagstrom, M.D, The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.....	6
Hochschild, Arlie Russell, The Managed Heart, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983	7
Kerr, Michael E., Murray Bowen, Family Evaluation, New York: W. W. Norton, 1988 ..	8
Steinke, Peter L., How Your Church Family Works, Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1993 ..	10
Walmsley, Roberta Chapin, Adair T. Lummis, Healthy clergy, wounded healers, New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1997	12
Vocation includes church and family and self	13
The First Invitation: Relationship with God	13
Clergy mothers' lives are revelatory.....	15
Saying "yes" to God	17
"God's call"	17
"God chooses me"	18
"God knows me."	19
"God loves me."	19
"One hope"	20
The counter-cultural nature of relationship with God	22
God in the world	22

Staying faithful	23
Love is our destiny	24
Strengthening Relationships.....	26
Honoring Families: A Native Perspective.....	26
An interview with Carol Gallagher by Martin Brokenleg.....	26

Four issues for clergy

These issues are for clergy who not only intend to honor their commitments to spouse or partner, children, community, and perhaps aging parents, but who are seeking resources to actually strengthen those bonds.

Time Management:

To be successful in both their vocation and family life, clergy must be proficient at managing their time. See Appendix for more information.

Setting boundaries:

“Boundaries” has become a buzzword in the church in the past two decades, in part through the work of practitioners uncovering sexual misconduct and working to prevent it, and in part through the psychological discipline of “systems theory,” developed by Murray Bowen and connected to congregational life by Edwin Friedman. See Appendix for more information.

Vocation includes church and family and self:

Decisions about partners, parenting, career, and community service are all invitations from God to live out our vocation. All these commitments can take their rightful place in a whole life, rather than competing against each other, as so often happens as soon as we open the calendar. See Appendix for more information.

Strengthening significant relationships:

This section includes an article about strengthening significant relationships. See Appendix for more information.

Clergy Boundaries

“Boundaries” has become a buzzword in the church in the past two decades, in part through the work of practitioners uncovering sexual misconduct and working to prevent it, and in part through the psychological discipline of “systems theory,” developed by Murray Bowen and connected to congregational life by Edwin Friedman. Friedman’s “Generation to Generation” has become a classic in the field. Susannah Smith is one of many interpreters of Friedman’s work: her website can be found at www.inspiredleaders.com.

Another insightful academic paper, “Boundary Work Tactics: Negotiating the Work-Home Interface,” was written by Elaine C. Hollensbe (College of Business, Department of Management, University of Cincinnati) and Mathew Sheep (Illinois State University, College of Business, Normal, Illinois).

Literature Review

Moore, Allison, Clergy Moms: A Survival Guide to Balancing Family and Congregation, New York: Seabury, 2008

This book uses scholarship and anecdotes to share the experiences of ordained mothers and illumine the vocation of all clergy.

Friedman, Edwin H., Generation to Generation, New York: The Guilford Press, 1985

Edwin Friedman was a rabbi, and a student of Murray Bowen from whom he learned his approach to family therapy. From there, Friedman carried his theories of systems into “religious congregations, schools, hospitals, professional partnerships, and business enterprises.” He did a great deal of training of his theories at an institution that he directed in Maryland.

As the title implies, the text concerns the generations in family process in church and synagogue. Friedman takes Bowen’s family system theory beyond the art of therapy into the halls of spiritual life, and demonstrates that trying to “fix” one part of a system does not work. The dis-ease that is exhibited in one area of a system can be the result of dis-ease in an entirely different area. Systems are organic and as such are emotionally affected by what goes on within. The within can be unresolved behaviors of previous generations. The leader who maintains a non-anxious presence and can define themselves has a better chance of effecting change within a system. Friedman contends that self-definition is more important than expertise. In other words, self-differentiation while in relationship is paramount for any family system.

Homeostasis is a system resisting change. It is so much easier to maintain the status quo rather than going through the process of change toward self-differentiation and relationship.

It is easier to identify and label the dis-ease of a person or part of a system than at the emotional whole. Friedman moves from the traditional view of seeing a person with a diagnosis, seeing content, and looking at cause and effect. He looks at the emotional process, the effects of the integral parts and observing the given position in a system. He keeps coming back to looking at the whole system, not isolating any one part. If one part is isolated, it will act differently than when it is in the system or relationship.

Triangles are another area Friedman illuminates. He writes “when any two parts of a system become uncomfortable with one another, they will ‘triangle in’ or focus upon a third person, or issue, as a way of stabilizing their own relationship with one another.” This causes the system to become anxious and unbalanced.

Family of origin is very important to understanding well functioning systems. If there has been dysfunction in someone's past, it is liable to play out in the system he or she now finds oneself. The health of any system can be improved by the ability of individuals to self-differentiate from their past.

This book is must for anyone interested in family systems theory and how it is applied to churches and other institutions. *Generation to Generation* builds on Bowen's work and goes on to be the basis for Steinke's publications. It is excellent background for students of any kind of relational study. Sparks of humor keeps the reader alert.

Halass, Gwen Wagstrom, M.D, The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004

From a review in the Nathan Network Newsletter, Spring 2005

All of us who work in this field are acutely aware of the consequences which ensue when clergy and others in positions of pastoral leadership do not exercise appropriate self care. Building on the research work done at Fuller Theological Seminary and Duke Divinity School which shows that a high percentage of clergy report that pastoral ministry is a danger to themselves, their partners and families, denominations have implemented a wide range of wellness and self-care programs. In addition, there have been a range of contributions to the literature in the last five years focusing on these concerns as they apply to clergy and other caregivers. The first of the most recent crop of books addressing these issues was *Rest in the Storm* by Kirk Byron Jones, released in 2001, and Gwen Halaas' *The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy*, published in 2004.

Dr. Halaas, who holds degrees in both medicine and business, has served as Director of Ministerial Health and Wellness for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and is currently Assistant Professor of Family Medicine at the University of Minnesota Medical School. As a family practice physician, she is well qualified to address the issues of wellness and self-care. This book is a compendium of her observations about wellness as they apply to clergy, and by extension, to clergy families. In reviewing the book, William Craddock, Managing Director of the CREDO Institute, wrote, "the special needs of clergy wellness are well-documented, and Dr. Halaas provides a comprehensive road map for initiating healthy change. *The Right Road* can help clergy to find the balance needed to strengthen their ministry and their lives."

Halaas uses the concept of the Wholeness Wheel as a practical and visual guide to balancing all aspects of health for clergy. She sets the stage by recounting some of the stresses reported by ELCA clergy in the work of pastoral ministry and offers a case study of a clergy person who is a "poster child" for many of the wellness traps into which clergy can fall and which put them at high risk for a variety of physical and emotional illnesses. Having painted a rather bleak picture of the health and self-care habits of many of the clergy, Dr. Halaas goes on to address each of the elements of the Wholeness Wheel offering practical suggestions about how one might make improvements in each of the areas.

The primary responsibility for effective self-care primarily rests, of course, with the clergy person but, Halaas argues, those around him/her must exercise some responsibility as well by challenging behaviors which are not good self-care or wellness practices. Clergy must lead by example and by demonstrating good wholeness behaviors, encourage others in positions of leadership to themselves engage in healthy activities. When those in leadership are healthy, then there is an increased probability that the whole community will move towards a greater state of health and wholeness.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell, *The Managed Heart, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983*

Arlie Hochschild has been the Professor of Sociology at the University of California at Berkeley for the past two decades, and is co-director of the Center for Working Families. *The Managed Heart* received several awards upon publication. According to Gail Sheehy, "*The Managed Heart* is written so accessibly that it appeals to both the academic and the general reader."

There is a gap between the emotion that is displayed publicly and the emotion that is felt. This gap is called emotional labor, which is stressful and can be an occupational hazard. The true self can be lost.

Although almost everyone experiences emotional labor it is seen more often in service jobs and therefore in women who are in the majority holding this type of employment. Feeling rules that set emotional labor in motion must be obeyed in private life and well as public life. Flight attendants and tax collectors' outward emotion is used to elicit different results in their respective jobs. The flight attendant uses her emotion to enhance the status of the customer while the tax collector uses his to deflate the status.

Emotional labor is a term that can apply to rules that unconsciously and consciously create the "perfect clergy spouse". The airplane where the flight attendant does emotional labor to create a comfortable setting for the customer could easily be substituted for the home and church of the family of clergy. Flight attendants themselves could easily be the clergy families, smiling, saying soothing things creating an aura of wellbeing while *feeling* something else entirely inside. The deep feeling is buried; it is not appropriate to exhibit true feeling of self. The emotional labor is hiding true feelings to the point that they are sometimes lost altogether and putting on the "face" required of the feeling rules of the situation.

Kerr, Michael E., Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1988

Michael Kerr worked for many years with Murray Bowen, the creator of Bowen's Theory, which is one of the basis for family therapy and the family systems theory. Kerr and Bowen were faculty at Georgetown University Medical Center in Washington, D.C., and directors of the Georgetown University Family Center.

According to Kerr, people cannot be looked at as isolated individuals, but as part of their emotional and intergenerational relational context. Kerr describes Bowen's approach to seeing the family as emotionally affecting one another. This emotional system within the family creates the behavior and development of individuals. The emphasis is on the family system and how a person is part of that system, effecting and being affected by that relationship. The tension of how to remain an individual and be in relationship is key to Bowen's findings. Therapy should be done with the whole family not with an isolated member of that group.

Bowen found that there was "a distinction between the family *relationship* system and the family *emotional* system. The relationship system was a description of what happened, and the emotional system was an explanation for what happened." Bowen believes that family systems are always on a continuum. By nature, relationships can not stay the same, they are always changing. It is how they change and evolve that is important. It is a natural system as is all life.

The theory of the Triangle in relationships can cause undo anxiety that affects the family system. When triangles are formed within the family system or from external contact change in behavior can be seen. The book includes helpful diagrams which are well explained in the text.

Multigenerational affects on family systems are another strong proponent of Bowen's thinking. All mankind are children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews ad infinitum. The behaviors that effected the generations before us still are with us. Everyone has a "black sheep" and/or an "angel" in their past. This is true of the nuclear family as well. Kerr explores "symptom development" and how the family can be evaluated to aid in the wellbeing of the entire family system.

This text was extremely important as it gave an overall view on which Friedman and Steinke based their work. *Family Evaluation* helps to put in perspective the need to look at the system of "the local church" in a different way. The local church needs to see that it is a family system which is made up other systems, such as the clergy, family of clergy and congregation, all of which are in relation to one another and involved emotionally. Each part of the church family system is in context of the whole emotional unit, and each can affect the other parts.

The triangle is center to the church family system and one that displays its ugly head more than it should. Family of clergy is used by congregations and clergy to influence one or the other causing anxiety and stress.

People come to the church system with their backgrounds as well as the institutional history which is seen in the “congregation”. All behavior is influenced by these factors to bring about various dynamics within the systems’ relationships.

Steinke, Peter L., *How Your Church Family Works, Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1993*

Peter Steinke is a Lutheran pastor and a contributor to The Alban Institute, an organization with a stated mission to advocate for congregations. He has studied with Edwin Friedman, and is presently Director of the Interfaith Pastoral counseling Center in Barrington, Illinois.

Steinke believes that congregations can be better understood if viewed through family systems theory based on the work of Friedman and Bowen. If those that work with and in congregational settings are aware of the emotions that cause unrest, they can be better equipped to enable wellness and healing.

Where there are emotional systems, anxiety is present. This is true of churches. It is also true that in a system, the individual wants individuality and to be in relationship with others. There has to be separateness to allow healthy togetherness. This can be anxiety resulting in tension.

System thinking is that everything is connected, parts and whole. There are circles of connection – everything influences everything else and the patterns created can be repeated again and again.

The human brain is made of three areas that handle different responses. The reptilian brain handles the survival, instinctual actions and the mammalian brain handles emotional responses. These two work together, while the neo-cortex, the largest area of the brain, handles analyzing, imagination, and creativity by itself. There is tension between the lower areas of the brain and that of the larger bigger part.

Relationships are most sound when they are based on “allowing” other, rather than “reaction” to other. If reactivity pervades a system not allowing analyzing and flexibility there occurs “a shrinking of perspective tightening of the circle, and a shifting of the burden.”

Triangulation is one danger of a dysfunctional system. Leaders must be good at self-differentiation and encourage others to do the same to allow creativeness to come together in wholeness. The author offers seven responses for systems [churches] to work toward:

1. self, not others
2. strength, not weakness
3. process, not content
4. challenge, not comfort
5. integrity, not unity
6. system, not symptom

7. direction, not condition (p. 109)

This book is a very readable text providing insight into the world of Systems thinking. It is a straightforward, succinct but academic work based on the theories of Bowen and Friedman.

The book has a table of contents that is not terribly revealing and uses clever titles rather than informative ones. After reading the book the table of contents becomes clear. The Foreword and Introduction are excellent in stating the basic premises of the book. There is no index.

This book is the 101 course for studying wellness of families of clergy in relation to system thinking. The families of clergy are part of the system of congregation, clergy and families of clergy. This important concept, which seems so simple, is something that is often overlooked by the powers that be in the hierarchical Episcopal Church.

Walmsley, Roberta Chapin, Adair T. Lummis, Healthy clergy, wounded healers, New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1997

Roberta Walmsley is the wife of the retired Bishop of Connecticut, who holds a Masters of Social Work degree. She was the coordinator for the Episcopal Clergy Family Project. Dr. Adair Lummis is a sociologist, as well as faculty at the Center for Social and Religious Research at Hartford Seminary.

The text sheds new light on what is health and how to achieve it in clergy and clergy families using statistical evidence. Walmsley discusses of the differences and similarities between clergy and other professions, and the many indicators which are used to delineate what is health in clergy and what is not. There is brief mention of the new phenomenon of male spouses and how the dynamics of being family of clergy affects them. There are concrete suggests of what can be done to help achieve wellness in clergy and their families.

The text is well-written and well-researched, and is clear and informative. It is the newest comprehensive published work on clergy and family of clergy wellness. Sadly, the statistics quoted are quite old. The notes on the various chapters give helpful insights to the text. There is no index. The “Questions for Discussion” section at the end of the book is useful for individual thought or for group discussion.

Vocation includes church and family and self

Moore, Allison M., *Clergy Moms: A Survival Guide to Balancing Family and Congregation*, New York: Seabury Books, 2008

Vocation: To work? To partner? To child? To all of the above!?

In *Clergy Moms: a survival guide to balancing family and congregation*, Allison Moore argues that vocation is centered in our baptismal covenant and our relationship with God. Decisions about partners, parenting, career, and community service are all invitations from God to live out our vocation.

All these commitments can take their rightful place in a whole life, rather than competing against each other, as so often happens as soon as we open the calendar. The book offers a multi-dimensional definition of vocation, describes some of the social and economic structures that pit parts of our life against others, elicits some of the internal voices that can often make us feel guilty about whichever commitment—children work, partner, self-care, aging parents—we tell ourselves we are breaking, and suggests ways to find God and joy in the midst of daily struggles to do what needs to be done.

The excerpts that follow are used with permission.

The First Invitation: Relationship with God

Multiple commitments: life-giving or crazy-making?

I care passionately about God—God as the source of life, whose love shapes all of creation, and God as Lover/Beloved inviting me to more and more abundant life. The more of myself—presence, skills, failures, persistence—I am willing to offer, the more I grow in love. I care passionately about being a good mom, offering presence, skills, failures, commitment to keep going anyway to my children so they can become who God is inviting them to be. I care passionately about my husband, offering presence, skills, failures, commitment to keep going anyway so we can grow together, nurturing and supporting each other. I care passionately about being a good priest, offering presence, skills, failures, persistence, to help people know God and follow God. I care passionately about making real parts of the world safer, and more just, and healthier for all people—so I work against racism and sexism and war and poverty and homophobia and violence in the home.

Those are statements made out of a prayerful place, when I have time and grace to remember what's really important. Naming the relationships and the process of attending to God in and through the relationships helps me find my center again. They

are core commitments, rooted in baptism and my relationship with God. Here's another experience of those same commitments from a different place.

It's Thursday night and I'm on the phone planning the weekend with my husband, who is living in another city for a year and only coming home on weekends. I'm planning to lead a workshop Friday and Saturday (I've said "no" to most Saturday workshops because Mike is away); Saturday night we'll be home as a family (but my sermon isn't quite finished); Sunday morning I'll lead church while Mike will take teenaged Avery to a reunion with summer friends and I'll find someone for six-year-old Marin to sit with in church after Sunday School; Sunday afternoon Mike will drop off Avery and leave; both girls want to go to a band festival to see their sitter perform; and I have to get the stewardship letter out by Monday morning.

The inner tapes start playing. "If I were a good priest . . . I would have had the stewardship letter already done, and a sermon written by Thursday night, and my daughter would never miss church" and "If I were a good wife...I'd take Mike to Starbucks for a quick cup of coffee Saturday night so we can catch up (but then I'm a bad mom because we'd leave the children alone)" and "If I were a good mom . . . I wouldn't have agreed to lead the workshop (but then I'd be a bad priest)." If anyone else had said any of the above things about themselves, I would have immediately challenged the self-criticism, but old patterns are hard to break. My own psychology, plus a good dose of female socialization, plus some internalization of parishioners' expectations, magnify the conflicting responsibilities of my life. And "what would Jesus do?" He was either single, or the kind of man who never let anyone know he had a family, or someone with "issues" about family. Not helpful!

The reality is, in Barbara Brown Zikmund's words, clergy women lead complex lives.¹ So do clergy parents with children living at home, and the spouses, partners, and children of clergy. Even mature couples of one or two clergy, who've lived with church on weekends and evenings for decades, find conflicts between home and church unsettling at times. The "work-life" blend² is a lively issue for all working people with family responsibilities, increasingly studied from many angles. In many ways clergy families are not unique, and their struggles can be a useful point of connection with parishioners. Yet the dimension of perceived holiness, and the especially blurry boundaries between work and family life when the family is usually expected to actively participate in the workplace and the work is about loving a parish family, sets parish clergy and clergy families apart. The gender expectations about clergy and mothers set female clergy apart from their male colleagues.

Another reality, however, beneath the complexity, is God. Faithful life is moving in and out of consciousness of our fundamental relationship with God, and trying to bring all of our life—relationships, careers, family responsibilities—into alignment with God so that we can know and share God's gift of abundant life and love. God is in the underlying commitments of committed relationships, ordination, and parenting, lifelong

commitments that often include an extended period of intentional discernment. God is also in the day-to-day mess that sometimes results from multiple commitments.

I want to weave experiences of faithfulness to God and analysis of the social structures that shape commitments into one understanding of vocation. The way vocation is usually described misses many aspects of holiness that are central to faithful living. Vocation usually prioritizes prayer life or church service as holier than other aspects of life, requiring the subjugation of other commitments in God's name. It prioritizes paid work in the public sphere over family commitments. Clergy women demonstrate in their lives and choices that other paths of faithfulness are also holy. Sometimes they find these paths intuitively, sometimes they are dictated by circumstance, sometimes they are proudly claimed. They are rarely explicitly discussed. They need their day in the sun so that all people, lay and ordained, men and women, can recognize how God is present in their daily lives and how they are faithful.

Clergy mothers' lives are revelatory

This book includes stories of women and men, lay and ordained, and sometimes their children. It focuses, however, on clergy mothers in parish settings, because social expectations that mothering and parish ministry each require 100% attention and 24 hours a day/7 days a week availability illustrate by exaggeration the tensions that face most working parents. The lives of clergy mothers also reveal the sexism in church and world and the systemic difficulties of parenting, childcare, and paid work in the United States.

A clergy mother married to a priest lamented the fact that Holy Week fell during her child's spring vacation. Both she and her husband would need to be in their different parishes for services Wednesday through Saturday evenings and were especially busy during the week, and their regular sitter could not cover so many hours (nor could a four-year-old tolerate so much church!). She said that while she had no doubt that her husband loved her child as much as she did, she would be the one organizing all the child-care logistics. "He just doesn't get it. By the time I go through the list of what needs to be done (which I know automatically by now) he shrugs and says 'Thank you for taking care of it' or 'Gee, I hadn't thought about that.'"

In another conversation, several clergy mothers discussed the relative advantages of either trying to train their husbands to do child-care logistics or just doing the organizing themselves, because it had become second nature to them. How had it become second nature for the women and not for their husbands? Barbara Brown Zikmund et al found that among ordained parents who had at least one child at home while they were working full-time in ministry, "clergy men are more than twice as likely as clergy women to report that it was 'relatively easy' to carry on their full-time ministry with a young child at home . . . three times as many clergy women as clergy men recall that it was 'very difficult'." ³

Clergy mothers' lives are revelatory not because they're still doing the lion's share of the housework and child care, but because they have, by necessity, integrated responsibilities to church, family, and self into one vocation. They have experienced the problems of expecting clergy and mothers both to be available 24/7, and have refused to give up on either set of responsibilities, even as that may well have meant sacrificing some aspect of either.

From the conversations I've had, it seems that clergy women's identities as mothers are as central to their sense of self as their identities as clergy, whereas for clergy men, professional identity is more central to their sense of self than identity as a father. Men don't face the same pressures to identify as fathers, and women are often still eyed with suspicion because of social expectations, socialization, and different social and economic supports (such as higher salaries for male clergy than female clergy in equal positions, and institutional biases favoring male clergy).

Expectations of clergy, and of mothers and fathers, make the reality of male and female clergy lives very different. Clergy mothers challenge both the norms of male clergy and the social messages about mothers. Their stories reveal important contradictions in social and economic structures shaping life in the United States, uncover implicit assumptions about holiness and vocation, and offer new models of vocation. Clergy women have often challenged structures and expectations intuitively, following their sense of God's call and their responsibilities to family and community. Many women talked about how the ordination process made them more overtly feminist. They found themselves having to defend their sense of vocation, their choice of internships and professional positions, their commitment to the church, or their leadership style, because someone thought it odd that a woman would want or be able to do what they were doing. Conversely, some women have talked about how trying to be a good enough mother and priest deepened their prayer life—sometimes intentionally and sometimes out of desperation. Clergy mothers may pray more than their male colleagues about priorities because they feel the competing pulls more keenly, as in “how much therapy will my child need to recover from her disappointment that a funeral ‘trumps’ my presence at her Halloween party?” because we feel guiltier, appropriately or not.

In a thoroughly unscientific survey of eight clergy, male and female, who had babies in the past few years, I found that none of the men took paternity leave, although the diocesan policy made it available to them and even though some of the men were assistants, not senior pastors. The men said that having a child made them more firm about boundaries and evening meetings, that they found themselves more efficient at work, and that they honored their days off more faithfully. All but one of the women took at least the minimum leave, some cobbling together vacation or unpaid leave to extend the six-week minimum, to care for their new children. The one exception was a lay woman on staff of her husband's parish—the adoption agency they had been working with for over a year called to say a baby was available on December 18 in the

midst of full social events and church services. Her parents arrived the next day and stayed for a month to care for their new son. Her husband preached Christmas Eve about saying “yes” to God, that there was “no room in the inn”, and no time in the schedule for a long-expected child to arrive.

Saying “yes” to God

I begin with some theological assumptions about God heard in discussions of how to live faithfully.

“God’s call”

The shape and direction of each of our lives is initiated by God. God says to Jeremiah, “Before you were born I knew you, and I appointed you.” The psalmist also describes feeling known and loved, needed and desired by God from before birth.⁴ Men and women describing their desire to be ordained often talk of the element of surprise and irrationality—they thought their lives were proceeding quite nicely in one direction when a number of experiences opened up an often more logistically difficult but more life-giving path. They too have the sense that God had a plan for them before they were conscious of it.

That sense of call is not restricted to ordination. I have heard lay people talk with a passion about this same sense of surprise, irrationality, and yet absolute rightness of the decisions that led them to the work they love. Stories of true love often have this same dimension, as do accounts of either deciding to try to become pregnant or discovering that one was pregnant, in convenient or inconvenient times. Vocation begins with a sense of someone or something outside of oneself, yet no stranger, offering an invitation to love more. Dag Hammarskjöld’s famous quote describes the experience well.

I don't know Who—or what—put the question, I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone - or Something - and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal.⁵

Look at some of the traditional Biblical “call stories;” e.g. Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Hannah, the prophets, Mary the mother of Jesus, the disciples, Paul, and so on. Usually God or a messenger of God appears and asks someone to perform a specific task; the person offers some objection, God meets the objection, and the person assents, though often not without questions and hesitations along the way (Moses, Elijah, Jonah). Four characteristics: God asks rather than commands; the task is usually life-changing; the task is part of God’s plans, needed by God to fulfill God’s purposes and goals; and usually the human becomes identified by the call (Moses the leader, “the prophets”, John the Baptist, Mary the mother of Jesus or the Blessed Virgin Mary, etc.). These stories have been the primary model for vocation to ordained ministry.

There's another, much more subtle kind of call story in Scripture, often found in stories of women. Leah's role as one of the matriarchs of the tribe of Israel is central, and includes all of the above characteristics. But there's no direct invitation or great fanfare recorded. God never asked Leah explicitly to overcome her jealousy of Rachel, the wife Jacob loved more, enough to help Rachel become pregnant, yet Leah interpreted events in her life as enough of a sign of God's blessing to let her help Rachel, and even raise Rachel's two sons after Rachel's death.⁶ Miriam, Moses' sister, also was a powerful leader. Her conversation with God, if there was one, was also not recorded. Her sense of call seemed to have emerged from careful attending to the needs of the people in their wandering through the wilderness and her interactions with Aaron. There's no record of Mary Magdalene's being invited by God or Jesus to follow Jesus, yet she is mentioned in several accounts across different gospels as serving Jesus, sharing the news of his resurrection, and serving as "apostle to the apostles."

In these accounts, vocation seems more to be about developing qualities of love and courage in and through the struggles and joys of life than about a direct conversation with God or a particular task. Whether direct or indirect, known ahead of time or after the fact, there is a tradition in human religious experience of knowing oneself to be invited by God into particular life-changing tasks that expand awareness of God and ability to love. Often the tradition has been "gendered," so women who don't hear their stories told and who do hear either of their sin or inferiority to men or whose roles are socially prescribed are reluctant to claim that vocation publicly. More subtle examples of God's invitation to abundant life despite external circumstances may be very useful. The reality of the experiences can't be denied and can provide meaning and value for the one asked and for those in her or his community of faith. They can usefully broaden understandings of how to honor multiple commitments.

"God chooses me"

On the face of it, this claim seems either obvious or absurd. Obvious, from the way God is portrayed in Scripture as first creating humans, then loving them, teaching them, sending prophets to remind them of their responsibilities and their privilege, continually seeking them out and inviting them to love. Absurd, given the way humans disregard God and God's ways, or because the idea that the Creator of the Universe is the kind of being who even notices each individual is absurd. "Of course God wants me, I'm wonderfully made," or the more subtle assumption that God is watching and available to each of us on demand, vies with "Why would God want me?" or "Lord, I am unworthy to enter your house" or "O God, who are mortals that you are mindful of them?" in everyday life.⁷ Christian faith begins with accepting the fact that we are very much wanted, loved, and known by God.

When I was first considering ordination, I said something to a priest about "if I choose to be ordained ..." He quickly corrected me. "If you are meant to be ordained, it is because God has chosen you. And not necessarily for your virtues, but for what you can learn."

Humans often connect being chosen with earning a position through grades or talent or appearance or even personal connection. Clericalism in the church elevates the vocation of ordained ministry to God choosing those who must be especially holy, or good, or worthy. The notion that God chooses each and every human being (maybe each and every part of creation) to fulfill some part of God's plan or be agents of God's love in particular ways, all of which are vital to salvation, cuts through elitism or arrogance in life-giving ways. The notion that clergy are ordained because God couldn't teach them to be faithful any other way is also appropriately humbling! "God chooses me" includes several assumptions that are central to my notion of vocation.

"God knows me."

Scripture is full of people called by God to do great things for God's sake who nonetheless at times turned against God, betraying God, others, and themselves. Yet I hear as a priest, and experience in my own life, the fear that God will only attend to perfect people, or will only be with us or love us when we are good. There are examples in Scripture of people killed for disobeying God, examples magnified perhaps by a history of human punishment for wrong and the voice of conscience (and/or superego) noticing the gap between what we have done and what we know we should have done.

Guilt makes it hard to hear many more examples of God offering repentance, forgiveness, and another chance to choose what is right in Scripture and in life.

The more we can live into the reality of the claim that God calls each of us, as we are, the more we can let go of questions of worthiness or having to get everything together before offering ourselves to God. Thinking of vocation narrowly as a set of things to do can betray us into trying to earn acceptance, when acceptance is given. Conscious and unconscious attempts to prove my own worthiness drive me, and many clergy, and many parents, to create impossible expectations for themselves. When I can remember that God doesn't share those expectations I can find the freedom, and also the discipline, to renounce some of them. God indeed wants us, as we are, at each and every point in our life.

"God loves me."

This simple truth can turn lives around. One male cleric talked about growing up in a Methodist church. He became increasingly fundamentalist in Christian belief as he began to suspect that he was gay. Worship and church activities reinforced the experience of God's love for him, and his faith grew and deepened around that conviction, even as he tried to ignore or suppress questions of sexuality. When he claimed his sexual orientation years later, he was clear that since God loved him for who he was, he would need to find a more inclusive church in order to be true to himself and God. His faith was strong enough to withstand and ultimately move away from damaging theology.

The internal conviction of God's love is a part of any relationship with God, but its power may be more obvious when people are more likely to be marginalized. It helps to know that God loves me and chose me to be a priest when others tell me that I've no right to be ordained because I'm female. People of color, ordained and lay, often have to rely on their internal sense of being loved by God when faced with racism in the church. For gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people who have been the subject of controversy in mainline denominations and the wider culture, the irrefutable conviction of God's love for them, as they are, becomes a lifeline, not just an abstract belief. It enables people to acknowledge the reality of institutional prejudice and power but not be defined by it.

God chooses us, knows us, loves us. These ideas are not new or complicated. Many books about priestly vocation, and many about faithful Christian living, emphasize these theological and experiential claims. I hear less about how these convictions shape parenting, and even less about how they shape committed relationships. God loves me—and you? And you, and you? When we have to eat dinner in 45 minutes between children's lessons and church meetings and no one is willing to even help set the table, let alone cook? God loves and knows and chooses each and every person, but God didn't design the structures within which we also live and move and have our being. Nor did any one human. Work and family structures have evolved over time in response to a host of social, economic, political forces beyond any one person's control. Yet it is in those structures, imperfect and often unjust, where we are called to remain faithful to God and to each other. Ideas of vocation have to take account of those structures, so that we can stay sane as we choose how to respond to life's joys and challenges

"One hope"

One of the most frequent comments I hear from working mothers, clergy or not, is how torn they feel between work and home. When they're with children they remember "one more phone call" that needed to be made for work; when they're at work they want to be taking kids for a walk, or meeting their teenager after school just in case he wants to talk. The culture divides life into home and work and asks people to choose allegiance to one or the other.

God doesn't. The baptismal liturgy in the Episcopal Church's Book of Common Prayer reminds believers that what may feel like scattered and even contradictory loyalties are grounded in "One God, One Hope, One Faith, One Baptism, One Lord."⁸ Most of the clergy and clergy family members I have talked to talk about how their unions or marriages are of God, how children have been a gift of God, how work in the church and the world has been a response to God. When I need some guidance addressing the inner tapes, I try to remember that if God invited me into these relationships with spouse and children and church and wider community, then God will help me find a way to honor them all.

This musing about vocation began with experiences of being torn by multiple commitments. It's easy to commit to one thing at a time—paths are clearer and more linear. If we remember that it took the Israelites forty years to make what could have been a thirty-day walk from the Red Sea banks to the land of Canaan, we may have some clue that God has something different in mind. Wholeness in the process is as important as the destination.

One second-career clergy woman was clear: "I am a priest and a wife and a grandmother, and those are all inseparable parts of my vocation." She and God have woven together experiences over her life into one whole. Another example: God is found in my earnest prayer on the way to the hospital that I can be fully present, listen well, pray faithfully, and get out of there in thirty minutes to go pick up kids. To systematically neglect or demean any one of these commitments for the sake of any other would deny the multi-faceted people God is inviting us to become (though sometimes I fear the invitation may be to schizophrenia!). When I feel most scattered I can return to the experience of *one* call, and look for the ways the disparate pieces fit together in a holistic response to God.

More than honoring separate commitments, God develops some other gifts in and through the intersection of these commitments. Anna, a priest with four children under the age of ten, felt that her experiences prioritizing children's needs and desires at home helps her prioritize parishioners' needs and desires at church. Parenthood helped her learn to respond proactively without reacting to parishioners' anxieties. A Lutheran pastor with two children under three years old, currently working half-time in the church's national office and part-time in a congregation, also talked about how parenting suddenly clarified priorities. She described the sleep deprivation that accompanies life with a new-born. She needed to go back to work after three months, but was still nursing on demand whenever possible until she wore herself out. Then her husband and older child got sick, and she realized that she had to take care of herself to be of use at home and in the office. "Mothering and working forces you to take enough care of yourself to be a good human in both arenas," she said. In her case, physical limits helped her set appropriate boundaries at work and routines at home. This contrasts with another kind of pastor, often male, who over-functions at work because home obligations are either non-existent or performed by someone else.

"One hope" also means sometimes giving up something known and satisfying for "hope unseen" of a new way of meeting needs of home and work. Darlene was, in her words, a "suburban housewife" who went to seminary in the mid 1970's because she enjoyed theology, without planning to become ordained. She commuted to classes, unlike most of her fellow students, so that she could manage responsibilities at home. Darlene was the seventh woman ever to matriculate from her seminary with a Master's of Divinity degree. Most of the women in her classes were more militantly feminist than she was. Darlene looked in vain for role models of suburban wife and mother and priest, and held on vigilantly to her role as "queen of the domestic sphere" at home while also

embarking on this new journey. She did well, especially in clinical pastoral education, and found herself driving 130 miles each day for a year for training to be a supervisor. C.P.E. supervisors were expected to be ordained, so she began the process in 1977, all the time wondering if she could be a “good enough” wife and mother. Eventually she found herself working fulltime, found that her daughter had benefited from the daycare setting Darlene had feared initially, and found herself proud to be an effective mother and priest. Her broader vocation unfolded gradually as step by step she moved into the new hope to which God had called her.

If God is inviting us to begin a new phase of relationship with God, then we can trust that we will find grace to do faithfully what is being asked. When it feels impossible, painful, or divisive, our task is to return to the source. “God, I thought this was from you and now it feels like a dead end—what happened?” Maybe we misunderstood. Maybe there has been a change in us or in a situation and God is inviting us to a different place. Maybe sin, our own or others’, has blocked God’s desires and we need to move in a different direction. In any case, God’s plans and desires are the foundation of our relationship and can be trusted.

The counter-cultural nature of relationship with God

God’s call. In a culture that emphasizes individual choice and earned success, the idea that each person is chosen and invited by God into relationship before that person may even be aware of it is a counter-cultural but life-saving perspective. The idea that the Source of Life and Love may ask something of us contradicts cultural notions of individual self-determination, even for those of us who have experienced enough of God’s love to know it for ourselves and trust its reality. The idea that the Source of Life gives abundant life to us freely, without having to earn it, is even more radical.

God in the world

“I wouldn’t call myself holy. In my day I already only have an hour that’s really mine, free of responsibilities to family or work or anyone else—I know I should pray but it’s also the only time I can work out or write or sometimes just veg out and watch TV—and sometimes I fall asleep.” This lay woman knows that time with God feeds her, and feels guilty about not devoting more time to prayer. Maybe she needs to reduce some of her responsibilities to others, but maybe she needs to accept that God knows her situation and will meet her in the midst of daily life as well as whenever she can devote her full attention to God. She, and many others, measure holiness by the amount of time devoted wholly to God in prayer, in church, or in explicitly religious activities. This measure of holiness is one of many factors that lead people to assume that ordained ministry is more holy than ministry in the world, despite a consistent thread within spiritual writings which celebrates awareness of the presence of God in all aspects of life.

Staying faithful

Holding on to awareness of a relationship with God has been a perennial human struggle, for people individually and together, in all aspects of life. Prayer gets squeezed into car rides and five minutes before or after sleep; months go by when partners only talk about logistics of work or family; relations with children or parishioners are reduced to seemingly endless demands and delays on both sides; and the church exhibits yet another particularly egregious example of racism or homophobia. All too often pressures in the culture and the church either obscure the presence of God or make life with God into one among many other activities, rather than the center or foundation of all of them.

And yet, God calls us back. I received an e-mail from a priest with a very young infant. “I love my child. He’s teething, beginning to crawl, and simply adorable. It’s a regular love fest,” she wrote. “Neither my husband nor I do too well without sleep, however!” She went on to describe some of the exciting things she’s learning about leadership in her parish. She’s finding God in mothering and work (and maybe she will in marriage again, once she and her husband can sleep). Moments of being overwhelmed with love when my younger daughter still wants to hold my hand, or even when my teenager takes hours to choose the right shampoo in the grocery store, make up for the fights for the bathroom in the morning. I know the sense of “midwifing God’s presence” that comes in some pastoral visits, planning parish discernment exercises, or celebrating Eucharist. A male priest can’t wait to go away, with his wife and without their children, to “rekindle holy passion” in their marriage. This same priest has also spoken gratefully about the opportunity to walk with terminally ill parishioners through dying to new life.

Humans get away from God, and God calls us back. We can develop disciplines in parish life and home life that help remind us of God’s presence. Psychotherapy and spiritual direction can keep clergy and parents honest about the quality of their relationships. Regular retreats and vacations restore perspective and delight in God’s creation. Sometimes all of those are not enough. I expect that even in a world with reasonable work expectations; adequate salaries, housing, education and health care for all people; and work and family structures that complement and enhance each other—humans could still lose the ability to see God and need to be called back into relationship.

Therefore, we need to be very careful about the images we use to describe our commitment to living as faithfully as possible. When vocation means only ordained ministry, and people seek to anchor their relationship with God primarily in activities that promote ordained ministry, their relationships with their families can suffer. When the vocation of parenting trumps the needs of the couple, relationships with partners suffer. Vocation needs to be understood as the living out of a relationship with God in and through all the commitments into which God has invited us. That will give us the freedom to attend to whichever relationship is most out of kilter, and trust that righting

one relationship will create enough space to help the others fall more neatly into their place.

Love is our destiny

Attending to the multiple dimensions of vocation is important not only because it will help us better serve the church, sustain a relationship, raise a child, or make a difference in the world. Vocation also has an intrinsic purpose of transforming believers and transforming the world so that God's desires for the world are more fully incarnated. This vocation is nurtured in the nitty-gritty details of ordinary life as much as in work explicitly labeled as holy (e.g. making pastoral calls or preaching or praying). When I really don't want to call a disgruntled parishioner or stay up to help a teenager rewrite an essay, but I do it anyway; when we take time to play joyfully with those we love, when we routinely empty the dishwasher or clean up messy dog-prints, we are blessing ourselves and our world by attuning ourselves more and more fully to God's grace.

Struggle, and duty, and sacrifice—all part of the language both of vocation and of love—take their rightful place in the service of love rather than as extra spiritual obligations. N.T. Wright expresses it well in an exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's paean to love. "Love is not our duty; it is our destiny. . . . constantly coming to us from God's future to shape us into the people through whom God can carry out [God's] work in the world."⁹ Attending faithfully to all aspects of vocation is essential for the well-being of the larger community, not only for particular individuals.

This book offers no prescriptions for a life of perfect balance between ordained ministry and parenting and committed relationships. I get tired just thinking of what I sometimes expect I should do to find God in each of these aspects of my life serially. Lisa Belkin says it well:

Not a one of us [the readers who respond to her articles on the "collisions that happen at the intersection of life and work"] seems to be able to give 100 percent to their job and 100 percent of themselves to their family and 100 percent of themselves to taking care of themselves. . . . No one can do it, because it cannot be done.¹⁰

One hundred percent in at least three different dimensions cannot be done. Yet every day clergy mothers get up, attend to self, to children, to partner (when there is one), to stray e-mails and phone messages and the church's agenda, to pets and repair people and the unexpected, not necessarily in that order. We do enough, enough of the time. Sometimes we don't and the world doesn't fall apart. (Rumor has it that Jesus already saved the world, so we don't have to!) We can apologize, make amends, and try again, trusting God's forgiveness until we can forgive ourselves. Our whole life, the multiple commitments through which we live into our relationship with God, is greater than the sum of its parts. Glimpses of God in just one or two places once or twice a day, can keep us sane when we can pay attention. When we live into our God-given destiny of love,

we help God transform this world into God's new creation of wholeness, justice, and peace, a bit more of God's commonwealth "on earth, as it is in heaven."

Strengthening Relationships

Honoring Families: A Native Perspective

Editor's note: In May, 2006 The Right Reverend Carol Joy Gallagher was an assisting bishop in the Diocese of Newark who has been very supportive of attention to clergy family wellness. This is an excerpt from an article in the April 2002 Witness magazine where she talks about the importance of honoring family commitments as a clergy person.

The entire article is available at
www.thewitness.org/archive/april2002/livingthroughpain.interv.html

Living through pain also is a promise... to live beyond and whole.

An interview with Carol Gallagher by Martin Brokenleg

Carol Gallagher is a former parish priest in the Diocese of Delaware and a former Bishop Suffragan of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia. A member of the Cherokee nation, Gallagher was the first native woman in the worldwide Anglican Communion to serve as a bishop. In this interview with *Witness* contributing editor, Martin Brokenleg, a Lakota priest and professor of Native American Studies at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, S.D., Gallagher reflects on her experience in the church as a native woman – and on the alternative vision she will bring to her new role. Her commitment to work that fosters the honoring of family and community relationships comes, in part, out of deep personal knowledge of family and racial violence.

Martin Brokenleg: Carol, I remember another native person, who is a bishop right now, who at one time asked me, "Should I leave my name in?" for nomination. And I said, "Well, God won't say, 'Yes' if you take your name out and God will say, 'No' if he doesn't want you there."

So, how were you nominated?

Carol Gallagher: A colleague of mine, with whom I had served as a deputy to General Convention and on other committees, sent my name in. Southern Virginia is his home diocese, and it's the home diocese of Delaware's bishop, Wayne Wright.

I was a little bit hesitant – just the basic, "What, are you, crazy?" But one of the things that Gary said was that they were looking for somebody to be the pastoral bishop for the clergy. Working with clergy issues is one of the things that I had been doing in Delaware – the health and well-being of the clergy is primary to me. The other thing Southern Virginia wanted was someone to encourage small congregations, many of which are poor and the more ethnically diverse parishes in the diocese. I also have a lot

of passion around that sort of work. So I said, "Well, okay." Pretty reluctantly. But I thought it was a really nice thing that my friend wanted to nominate me.

I made it through several of the hoops and hurdles and then went on what they were calling a walkabout – which all the rest of the church calls a dog and pony show. I came away saying, "Well, that was really nice that they included me, but it's never going to happen!"

M.B.: What did you tell people? What did they want to know?

C.G.: Well, most people were concerned about the kinds of programs we've developed here in Delaware. Many were concerned about my family, about how they would respond to this and all those kinds of things. Many of them were questions I find that are fairly commonly asked of women clergy. "How do you balance your home life and being a mother?" and all that kind of stuff.

M.B.: Women are expected to do that, but men aren't!

C.G.: It's still so new for the church in many senses – particularly around positions of what would be perceived as authority. I guess people were really concerned that I would leave the church for my family or some such thing. When they came here and interviewed me, one of my parishioners was really clear with them. She said, "You know, she DOES put her family first! I mean if one of her children is sick, she's going to stay with her children. But she would also encourage any of the rest of us to do that for our family, too. That's just the way she lives her life."

M.B.: Well, the only bishop I know who has resigned his episcopacy because of his family is Steven Charleston, a native person! Is that significant for us – for native people, that is? What's that gift to the church?

C.G.: Well, I think that as native people we have an integrated awareness of how much we're grounded in our family – and in our tribe and community – and that we really can't go forward if there is overwhelming pain and distress. The family or tribe has to find a way to heal together. So would I walk away from being a bishop if I had to? I wouldn't think twice about it! You know, my family will always be my priority. That's a gift that we as native people can bring to the church and to the rest of the world.

M.B.: Well, in Lakota culture women are more important than men and that's the reason that women are in charge of home and family and children. That stuns my mostly Norwegian Lutheran students! They're stunned to think that that's such an important thing, and that that's why we put the women in charge of it.

C.G.: Right! I was in Oklahoma – in Tahlequah – the weekend before Christmas.

M.B.: Cherokee center-of-the-universe!

C.G.: Really! Lois Neal, who just recently retired from the Methodist Church, and Chad Smith, the principal chief, were talking about matrilineal cultures and he said, "I may be principal chief, but we all know who's in charge!" So there's an importance to the role that the rest of the world would call "women's work." Those things have a different honor than in the mainstream culture. Lakotas and Cherokees would not say that the roles are the same, but there is that commonality of the importance of that role.

M.B.: Well, in our mythology, our revealer, our savior, our messiah is the White Buffalo Calf Woman! What do you imagine that kind of a psyche about women is going to bring into the church as a whole? To the House of Bishops, I mean. You're going to be a revelation to the House of Bishops!

C.G.: Well, maybe I'll have the opportunity to ask why things are done a certain way, or point out assumptions that are being made – about roles and who people are and those kinds of things – where other people might not even see that assumptions are being made.

I also hope I can bring into the House of Bishops the sense of really honoring families. I mean honoring whatever that means where people are, honoring how we're related so intimately. I'm hoping that that will be helpful to the process of real dialogue.