

It's what I do.

By [Tim Graves](#)

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When one of our beloved flock are nearing death, we live in dread of the next phone call or text. That's the way it is for clergy.

When the call comes, our carefully planned day or day off drops to the bottom of the priority list. The dreaded communiqué and our response disrupts schedules and family time. Yet we don't complain. This is the job. We respond in love without resentment. That's how it is when you're called by the Divine. Though I don't exactly find *joy* in this aspect of my work, I have a sense of *satisfaction* and *peace* in being with families.

I also feel a private sense of grief. Always.

My grief can be simple and straightforward: I feel sad for others. If it is someone with whom I've had a deep or long-term relationship my sadness can take a while to process. Nonetheless, out of love I set my feelings aside to be God's presence for the deceased's family and friends. That's the job. That's the calling. It's what I do.

Sometimes, however, the death triggers a personal emotion. That's what happened recently. My wife and I are both clergy; we minister 165 miles apart. We manage the distance well. I feel as called to my rural congregation as she does to the suburban hospital where she is chaplain. Still, I don't like it.

Dealing with unwanted separation in my own marriage, I am sensitive to the grief of departures and time apart. The death of a parishioner's spouse is prone to trigger my own feelings. This can especially be true when an aspect of the couple reminds me of my own relationship.

When the text came recently, I was over a hundred miles away. When the text came recently, I didn't question where and with whom I must be. This is the job. This is the calling. It is where I needed to be.

This time the death followed a tragic one the week prior, and I found myself sobbing as I drove the freeway to be with the widow.

I thought about the grieving family. A family I love has been struggling for far too long. I sobbed and prayed for them. Without the drive, my emotions would have remained in check until the quiet of the evening or days later.

I didn't just sob for the family, however. I sobbed for myself. My personal feelings had been triggered. This is the job. This is the calling. It is what I do in my alone time surrounding a death.

I thought about the choices my wife and I make for our jobs, our God. I thought about quitting outright and becoming a househusband. I fantasized about living with my beloved all of the time. This is what I do when we must part.

And, so, I prayed for my own relationship. I did not pray for our circumstance to change. I know that, at least for now, this is the job. This is our calling.

I thought about our deaths with eyes open. One day, one of us will die and leave the other. The widow with whom I would soon sit was not an aberration. This is the nature of life; death will come.

This is marriage. This is a calling. This is love.

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