

Two for one? Spousal compensation: Spousal compensation

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [February 22, 2003](#) issue

That the spouse of a college or university president almost always acts as a co-professional with the partner (especially when the spouse is a woman) is a situation that has for decades inspired questions. Should there be an additional salary for the spouse, or should this be a two-for-the-price-of-one deal?

Diana Jean Schemo took up the question (*New York Times*, January 11) in an article about the appointment of Robert Birgeneau to head the University of Toronto two years ago. The university board talked to his wife, saying, as board committees always do, that they hoped she would work at his side.

Then they asked something unusual: Can we pay you a salary of \$40,000? The university's surprise offer made her happy, until she read the job in the campus newspaper, which titled its article "Marrying for Money." "I was really humiliated, to be honest. It was a real baptism by fire," she said.

Schemo's article went on to say that some have proposed "that not only the spouses of university presidents, but also those married to . . . clergy should collect salaries." Entertaining, propping up an ego, taking care of the family and being of great benefit to "the synagogue or church" need consideration in the compensation package.

Schemo reports that whether in colleges or congregations, a salary for the male spouse is less at issue. Convention does not call on him to give up his professional career to help a female president or pastor.

While I have been close to college and university presidents and presidencies, I am not expert enough to have an opinion or to offer counsel. No one has asked me, anyhow. But as a regular campus visitor I do see how crucial the effective presidential spouse is in many roles. And as a 50-year ordinand who hangs out with clergy, who is related to clergy and who was himself active in the parish years ago, I

am highly aware of the role clergy spouses play.

This situation has grown vastly more complicated in recent years, mostly because so many wives now have or have had a professional career of their own, especially when the ministerial spouse is a second-career pastor.

In prehistoric times, around 1947-52, I recall a book titled *The Shepherdess*. Male seminarians were urged to give it to their spouse or spouse-to-be. I didn't read it then and would be happy to learn that it is no longer to be found. I picture it being dismissed in our so-enlightened age as patriarchal, sexist, paternalistic, condescending and preoccupied with "submission." At the same time, it no doubt gave some valued advice to "shepherdesses" struggling to be both fulfilled and of service in the complex parish role they played at that time.

My informal scan of parish leaders today tells me that most are growing in sensitivity. They tell clergy spouses not to become slaves of the institutions their husbands or, increasingly, their wives serve. Do what you are trained to do, they tell clergy spouses. And after a similarly anecdotally based review, I also believe that congregations now more readily recognize that the role of the spouse is not that of a subservient side-person, and they want spouses to be adept at balancing commitments.

Meanwhile, I thank Schemo for noticing that this is an issue not only in the secular university but also religious life. It is safe to say one thing: unlike the nasty writers in the campus paper in Toronto, parish observers are not likely to accuse clergy spouses of marrying for money.