

Clergy gathering rituals

By [Lillian Daniel](#)

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I was speaking at a Methodist clergy gathering when a pastor told me that at first the hotel had not been excited about hosting the group, since its members weren't going to run up any kind of bar bill. But then the hotel manager noted that they had more than made that up in how much was spent on dessert. The Methodists were welcome there anytime.

In my own denomination, the United Church of Christ, the clergy do their best not to leave those poor bartenders disappointed. It's not that we like to drink, of course. It's an economic justice issue. And we order dessert, too. Anything for the Lord.

Someone once said that when the Baptists come to town, the bars are empty but the liquor stores do very well. When the Episcopalians come to town, I suspect they're both happy. Though maybe not the dessert makers: Episcopal clergy seem to be skinnier than the rest of us, and much better dressed in their clergy shirts and clerical collars. Plus, black is slimming.

And what about clergy fashion? When the UCC held a national gathering with the Disciples of Christ, we were amazed at each other's dress code. The Disciples were dressed up as if for work—or, as they might see it, as if for church. They clearly hadn't gotten the UCC memo about what to wear as a delegate to our General Synod convention: Birkenstock sandals with socks, Guatemalan vests, rainbow pins on hats, tee shirts with impassioned slogans, all of which should be covered with whimsical badges that say things like, "Kiss me, I'm a Congregationalist." The only thing we could agree on was the denominational tote bag.

In the end, do any of these differences really matter? [In Colossians](#) we are advised, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

One year at a General Synod limited only to our own tribe, I was shocked to ride down the escalator with three elegantly dressed women. Their high-heeled shoes, stockinged legs and beautifully cut skirts seemed so out of place in the UCC sea of sneakers, sweatpants and Birkenstocks that I wondered if they were missionaries from some other religion that only accepts tall women with a sense of style.

The mystery was solved when they appeared on the stage for worship and were introduced as members of the first-ever General Synod Transgender Choir.

Finally, someone with the courage to challenge the dress code.