

On observing the pain of ministry

By [Martha-Lynn Corner](#)

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I have come across, in my discernment journey thus far, many serious and devout warriors of the faith. These are men and women with battle scars, earned from fighting on the front lines of ministry, often at great cost to their own health and well-being and those of their family members.

It's a lot for an aspirant to consider, especially one making this journey with her own family's needs at the fore. I am not called if my husband and children are not called, which means the fibers of listening and seeking have been stretched to include them, too. It's a mantle that covers each of us in ways that are very much the same and very different. It is a journey of individuals, each with his or her own calling from God, and the journey of a family bound together by love and sacrament.

This is serious stuff, in other words.

So I have been wondering lately, while watching and observing how these warriors of the faith have been wounded in the service of others, about the very real pain that awaits should I walk through this door. And I have listened to the bitterness that can accompany such pain, accounts abounding online as much as in real life. The blogosphere is absolutely awash in stories of sadness and regret.

Some of these stories end in stoic acceptance. Some end in anger and confusion. Some lead, with great reluctance, to the rejection of ordained life all together, or an ongoing sense of alienation from the Divine.

But it stands to reason that some of these painful stories end in renewal. Some must end in understanding, in forgiveness, and in relationships primed for rebirth. I would hope that some, like a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap, lead to a purification of purpose that both re-energizes and redirects.

Those stories I also seek. Somewhat unsurprisingly, they are much more difficult to find, pointing to that oft-quoted maxim from Henry de Motherland that "happiness writes white." Frankly speaking, those stories don't make for the popular, potentially

viral fodder that sustains the secular press and also spikes readership in the religious press. Is that why they're so hard to find?

It is a strange journey, the discernment process. My own has been beautiful and surprising and challenging and painful in its own way, and I have kept most of that separate from my "internet life," including this blog and social media. Largely that has been out of a sense of wanting to guard something precious that was also initially quite private. Much like those anxious days of early pregnancy, I would sit and pray, alternately immersing myself in white-hot hope and backing away in self-preservation. It became a sort of dance-- step towards the window, then back away, as nothing can be promised.

But as the circle continues to widen, and more people are invited to sit and ponder with me what these stirrings are all about, I long to hear stories of satisfaction. Of unexpected grace. Of excitement and vigor and fulfilled, happy exhaustion.

I know these stories are out there. I am lucky enough to recognize the signs in some of the clergy I know, though I am often unaware of the particulars. As I continue to walk down this path, I pray to be blessed with a glimpse now and then of the brighter side of ministry. I am reminded, however, of the beauty of imperfection, and of scars. The warriors of the faith I have been privileged enough to know exemplify Christ's transformative power over suffering, and that is nothing if not hope for the journey.

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