

# Tough calls

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

July 22, 2010

This summer, my divinity-student wife is doing a unit of [clinical pastoral education](#). As someone without any pastoral care experience, I've been fascinated to hear about the scenarios (real and hypothetical) that come up in CPE-related conversations. For instance, a classic: Would you baptize a dead baby?

Not *should* you but *would* you, a fairly different question. The issue is the potential tension between decency and order and what may in the moment just seem like simply *decency*. Such moments can come up in worship contexts as well as in pastoral care, as in this somewhat lighter example: Would you serve communion to a dog?

[A Toronto priest did recently](#).

The story might be a real eye-roller if she had done so on principle and offered an earnest theological rationale as to why. Instead, I think it's pretty interesting: A church visitor brought his dog to the altar with him. Apparently the priest, faced with a surprising and somewhat delicate moment, made a quick decision and went with it.

It's

easy to name better ways she might have handled it. But is it as easy to say with confidence that we would have come up with one of them on the spot?