

When the green-eyed monster strikes clergy couples

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Some of us clergy couples struggle with jealousy. Some of us don't. And sometimes we're split on the matter. It took my partner seven and a half years before she felt the envy. Then (finally!) the other month the Rev. Jamie looked me in the eye and said (for the first time), "I am so jealous of you. If one more person says they're going to give you a stole, I'm going to scream."

It was right before my ordination—almost six years after I graduated from divinity school and almost five years since she got *her* "the Rev." I was less a latecomer and more on the scenic route, taking the long way through denominational barriers and transitions. Finally I was arriving at this one milestone, and my stoles were coming along too, as friends and family near and far texted her pictures of their personalized creations, hoping for her input and hoping to surprise me on ordination day.

There was the red one from my dear friend, its rich, vibrant color the highlight of a simple pattern; the green one from my mom, with appliqued leaves to symbolize nourishment and sustenance; the many-colored one from my church, with bright, brilliant colors splashed against black fabric; the white one from my colleague in ministry, its sun rising over hills, doves flying off the fabric—the dawn from on high breaking upon us, giving light, bringing peace, as in Luke's scripture for the day.

I would have been jealous, too. But that's nothing new.

It's been a pattern for seven and a half years. That time we facilitated a dialogue group together, I swear the people all liked her better. When she got more interest than I did in search-and-call, I rejoiced on the outside as my resentment built silently. These last three years as she's served a college as chaplain and director of spiritual life, I've been in comparative vocational exile as a community organizer. We both have good jobs, great co-workers. We both make meaning through our work. Only one of us (me) feels compelled to compulsive covetousness.

It's always something. The latest incarnation goes something like this:

Why are you the one who gets to live your calling? Why do you get a job where people call you Rev.? Why do I have to be the one to string together the threads of a pastoral life into messy, unpatterned patchwork?

There are reasonable, logical answers that make sense for why this is, for this time and place. I even believe them mostly. But my inner companion, the jealous devil that she is, does not abide by such propriety as logic. And sometimes she goes even deeper: what if there's not enough calling to go around? We are a clergy couple, and we're gay. In Missouri. Even with just one of us, ministry opportunities can seem marginal and scarce.

And that's what it comes down to after all: scarcity and abundance. What if I am never the one who is chosen? What if people love her so much that there's not enough love left for me? What if?

The subliminal emotion in this dynamic will take a lifetime of work. Through the years I've learned at least enough to know that the fears and insecurities that mark my friend jealousy will find some outlet through the cracks of my brokenness. Perfect contentment and security will elude me for years to come. On the other hand, even on the worst possible days, I have an abundance of stoles hanging around a clergy robe that remind that though there is scarcity, there is also enough.