

Welcome to the Priesthood, or “why did I become a caseworker in the first place?”

One night, about 3 weeks ago, I woke up at 4 am and could not go back to sleep. As a forty-something mother of a five-year old, and director of a counseling center, I have plenty to think about on those sleepless nights, but that night I had some strange thoughts about you, and what I might say to you on this special day, your graduation day and transition into CPS casework. As you can tell, I have stayed attached to these ideas, and I hope you will too.

My strange thoughts follow... Being a CPS caseworker is a lot like being a priest. Now, I'm not talking Catholicism here... I'm talking about priesthood from the perspective of its ancient and sacred definitions. You can easily substitute minister, preacher, rabbi, or other cleric for this term. I am talking about someone who represents, interprets, and attends to, matters of the spirit, matters that are divine.

*My Disclaimer*

I hope I don't offend anyone with this metaphor, from a religious perspective. I mean my comments sincerely, respectfully, and from the heart.

I am talking about someone who has a calling.

Yes, I think you, CPS workers, carry “the word”, a message with sacred and spiritual meaning. *Take care of the children.* What could have more divine importance than that? Like good priests, you have to minister to the needy, the wounded, and the “sinners” of our community. And like good priests, you have to accept the “sinners” and not hold them to judgement, as they will be judged by a higher power... in court! Good priests know that they are not above sinning, and not above their parishioners. “There by the grace of God, go I”.

And like priests, you must believe you know what is right and wrong. You do your best to carry out the will of the people, as told through the laws of the land. And like priests,

you do not have protection from mistakes. There are many risks in your work, to make mistakes. Some of these are very similar to those in the priesthood. The risk of abuse of power, the risk of crossing boundaries, the risk of putting your job and your clients before yourself-- not taking enough care of yourself/becoming burned out with hearing so much pain, the risk of isolation from personal relationships, the risk of misinterpreting “the word”—in this case the law, among others.

So how do you become a great priest? Learn from others, use your supervision, don't get isolated, take care of yourself, know and like your congregation, delegate responsibility (to therapists and other resources), keep learning about other “faiths” and beliefs, as well as your own, stay humble, *remember there are unknown forces that are at work*. Find ways to nurture, maintain, and grow your spirit. Ask for help when you need it. Have faith.