

From Pastor Marissa Becklin

What Is A Clerical Collar For?

One of the most holy and wonderful things about being a pastor has been responding to questions and curiosities that the community has about my role, my experience, and about God and faith in general. One of the questions that I receive most often is this: “Why do you wear a clerical collar?” Here’s my answer!

I’m not required by anyone to wear a collar, but I have chosen to. My choice to do this occurred after a long process of discernment about what the role of being a pastor means for me. When I wake up in the morning and I prepare to do any number of tasks that I engage in as a pastor, I look in the mirror and I put on my collar. This symbol reminds me that I am part of something bigger than myself—that in ministry I am connected to the wider church (bigger even than the ELCA), and that I am serving as a representative of God and the church in this community. This helps me realize both that I am not alone, and that I have a responsibility to God and to this congregation.

When I am in public, people in this community who don’t even know me are able to approach me and ask to pray with me, or ask me a question about God, or share something painful that they have experienced with church. I believe that the church exists for the sake of the world, and that my role as a pastor extends into this community (just as our role as Christian community does). I have had countless beautiful conversations with people in Lancaster County and beyond due to the fact that I was wearing my collar.

I am poignantly aware of the fact that many people have had negative experiences of the church, and have experienced pain, trauma, and shame from someone wearing a clerical collar. It is important to me to wear this symbol with integrity, and in a manner that affords dignity to others. I hope that by doing so, and by listening intently to those painful stories and being able to apologize for some of the horrific things that this collar has represented to people, that a bit of healing might occur. In a way, my act of wearing a collar while rejecting harmful narratives is a way of reclaiming a symbol that has been defiled by others.

Finally, in a world that can be antagonistic toward women in ministry, I am a woman who is called by God to be in ministry. When I see myself in a collar I am reminded that God stands with me, and I hope to represent that reality to the world as well. God calls me to do this work because of who I am, not in spite of it, and God calls you to live your baptismal life because of who you are, too.

In Christ, Pastor Marissa