

Father Bernie Lindley

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Church

This is Father Bernie Lindley from St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, for Voices.

Two days ago, I celebrated my tenth anniversary of ordained ministry. In the Anglican tradition, similar to other Christian denominations, a clergy person gets ordained twice—once to what we call the transitional diaconate and then, at least six months later, to the priesthood. This transitional diaconate period is a type of internship. The newly ordained clergy person typically serves on a parish staff as an assistant. When I was newly ordained, I was an assistant to Fr. Bill Smith, the vicar of St. Timothy's here in Brookings at that time.

As I look back on ten years of ordained ministry, I have been trying to identify what has been the most difficult part of my job. I have had many parishioners die in the past ten years and I have officiated memorial services for many more people other than just parishioners. I have probably performed 150 to 200 memorial services, funerals, and committal services. These are sad occasions, but they are always celebrations of life where sadness and joy co-mingle. Maybe someone would think that having people die is the most difficult part of my job, but it isn't.

The most difficult part of my job is managing people and living into their expectations. In my fishing business, the expectation is that the boat, and therefore the crew, are all pulling in the same direction to make money. My job is to train and empower the crew and if they can't do their job, then we part ways and I find someone new that can. The agenda is clear—we are there to make money as best we can.

The church is different. The agenda is to love God and love God's people, but there are many ways to go about doing this and not everyone has the same ideas about how to implement the vision. Managing people in the church is like herding cats—they are all headed in a different direction. And that is difficult.