

## **Home for the Holidays**

My former life as a parish minister held many satisfactions and rewards, along with two notable downsides. One was that I almost always had to work weekends. The other was that I hardly ever got to spend Christmas with my family of origin, and on Christmas Eve I was unable to spend much time at home.. While many members of the congregation traveled, or welcomed home dispersed family members, I was presiding over the regular and special services of the season.

Only once in fifteen years as a parish minister in Bloomington did my wife and I, along with one of our two children, make it back to Rapid City for the Christmas holidays. Only once during that period did my aging parents find themselves able to come to Bloomington for Christmas.

There is some irony in the fact, then, that my wife and I spent a major portion of each of the last two Christmas holidays making the trip to Rapid City and back. Two years ago, on Christmas Eve day, my mother died at age 85. Last year, six days before Christmas, my father died at age 89. I became an orphan. It's strange that now, when I think of spending the Christmas holidays "at home," it can only mean staying put and hoping our two children will be able to join us for some part of the time. There's no other home for me to go to. [My wife's mother died before we ever came to Bloomington. We regularly visit her father over spring break and at other times.]

I'm expecting a less eventful Christmas this year, but one never knows. We're looking forward to having both sons and the older one's significant other with us. After a Christmas Eve trip to the Indianapolis airport, we may go out to dinner -- as we often have done in the past. We used to go out for Chinese (shades of Jean Shepherd's "A Christmas Story") between the early and late Christmas Eve services. I'll be quite content this year to have a quiet celebration at home and go to bed before midnight.

I hope any members of local congregations who read this will not assume that their clergy necessarily feel as I did and do. But I also hope they will consider that some years they should grant their clergy the opportunity to be elsewhere with family for the holidays.

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