

Catholic Lawyers Guild: The invitation to be a peacemaker

My brother Greg claims that he always knew I would become a lawyer -- but if not, then maybe a priest. Today, he routinely observes that I may have become both: I serve as an assistant district attorney in Suffolk County and my salary, as far as my brother can tell, resembles a vow of poverty. I don't take the bait because I am lucky to have one of the greatest jobs out there. Greg may have been confident in where I would eventually end up, but the path there was a mystery to us both. Thankfully, my Catholic education provided a sound training that I rely on each day to execute my duties as an attorney, and uniquely appropriate for a profession dedicated to justice.

Four of my most formative years were spent at Boston College High School where I was taught -- in true Jesuit fashion -- to do all things, "ad maiorem dei Gloriam," for the greater glory of God. For example, my quizzes often had "A.M.D.G." initialed at the top of the first page. This ritual, maybe rote at times, has undoubtedly helped countless young men discern their life's path, and certainly helped me. The phrase is designed to reflect the idea that our work takes on a holy character when we are mindful and present.

Before attending law school, I served in the Jesuit Volunteer Corp. as a community organizer for the Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice in conjunction with the Center for Policy Initiatives in San Diego, California. My work focused on policies that increased access to livable wages, healthcare benefits, and economic opportunities for the poor and marginalized.

Following my JVC year, I returned to Massachusetts as a member of Project Bread's staff on the Walk for Hunger. I traveled around the state delivering presentations about hunger alleviation and prevention to corporations, churches, schools, religious and community organizations.

These two experiences solidified my desire to be an advocate. They also illustrated how complex, nuanced and frustrating advocacy for justice can be. I hoped that entering one of the traditional learned professions would offer some clarity in this pursuit.

In most situations, a lawyer's primary responsibility is to zealously represent his or her client to the best of their ability. Simply put, to help others. This effort is essential to our adversarial system and our democracy.

A prosecutor's role is more complicated, however. Our Rules of Professional Conduct dictate that "a prosecutor has the responsibility of a minister of justice and not simply that of an advocate." In other words, a prosecutor must be carefully focused that the work is done with integrity and fairness. We have a responsibility to be mindful and present.

It is within this context that my work can be as tremendously fulfilling as it is challenging. Boston, like any major metropolitan area, has its share of violent crime. One of our most fundamental roles is to serve victims, and some crimes can exact a level of human suffering that can be incomprehensible. While these cases might provide fertile ground for cynicism, they can provide powerful insight into the fragility of life and resiliency of the human spirit. My faith and duty as an advocate seamlessly become one during these moments.

Pope Paul VI succinctly recommended: "If you want peace, work for justice." In this regard, I am blessed with a daily invitation to be a peacemaker.

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