



BARTALK

A HIGHER CALLING

With the support of his firm, an Am Law 100 partner joins the clergy.

THE STORY OF HOW THE Reverend Luther Zeigler traded power ties for the priestly collar has become central to his ministry as the Episcopal chaplain at Harvard University. “I’m deeply passionate about vocational discernment,” says Zeigler, who walked away from a 21-year career as a litigator at Crowell & Moring seven years ago to pursue his calling. “I work with students to take the time to find out what they’re really passionate about, what they’re really good at, and find out how that meets the world’s needs,” he says.

Hyperachieving Harvard students can identify with Zeigler’s story. He took the LSAT on a whim while pursuing a Ph.D. in religious studies, and scored well enough to land a spot at Stanford Law School in 1982. Zeigler’s wife, Pat, whom he married right after college and who is now of counsel at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, says that Luther felt the economic pressure of being a young father—the first of their two daughters was born while he was in law school—as well as being the first member of his immediate family to attend college. “I got on the escalator that is the law school and big-firm way,” he adds.

Once Zeigler landed at Crowell & Moring in Washington, D.C., in 1985, he developed a practice advising clients, such as E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, on product liability litigation while also satisfying his academic leanings by handling appellate issues. By the time the Zeiglers’ daughters were finishing school and Luther started seriously contemplating a move to the ministry, he was a member of the firm’s management board.

Zeigler says before he told his fellow board members about his plans to pursue the call to ministry in 2003, he expected them to tell him, “That’s great, but see you later.” Instead, “they said, ‘That’s



Lawyer-turned-minister Luther Zeigler

great. How can we help you?’” he recalls. Current Crowell & Moring chairman Kent Gardiner, who was on the board with Zeigler, says that his former partner’s level of success “only made [his transition] more interesting because he was so much on top of his game here both as a practicing litigator and one of the firm’s leaders.”

Zeigler spent the next three years working on public service and diversity issues at the firm as he completed his theological training across the Potomac at Virginia Theological Seminary. Gardiner confesses that the board’s motives in allowing Zeigler to stay on in a modified role were not purely altruistic. “In all candor, [the arrangement] was born of a thought that maybe Luther would try this and decide [it’s] not for him,” Gardiner says. “We did nothing to impede his progress, but the door was open” for Zeigler to return.

But as Zeigler continued his studies, his sense of calling solidified, and in 2006 he resigned from the firm. His wife says, “A fair number of zeros fell off the end of his income,” so she moved from part-time to full-time practice at Orrick. In 2008 Luther Zeigler was ordained as an Episcopal priest, and he served as chaplain at Washington Episcopal School

in Bethesda, Maryland, and St. Andrew’s Episcopal School in Potomac, Maryland, before accepting the call to the Harvard Episcopal Chaplaincy in August 2011.

Zeigler says that though people are often struck by how different being a priest must be from life as a litigator, he believes that many of the skills he uses in his ministry—writing, public speaking, mediating disputes—are ones he honed while practicing law. “Preaching is an art form, and being able to persuade people that there’s a message to be listened to is not that different from trying to convince a panel that your client’s perspective should be listened to,” Zeigler says. His wife points out that his new job is no less demanding than his old one—he’s constantly working nights and weekends. But where the productivity of a lawyer can be measured in billable hours and briefs drafted, a successful ministry is very different. “Sometimes the greatest gift you can give another person is just being present for them,” Pat Zeigler says.

Crowell & Moring’s Gardiner says he learned something similar when he turned to Zeigler for guidance in dealing with the death of a beloved partner. Gardiner says Zeigler helped him to recognize “the limitations of what a leader can do and the value of just being there and being visible.” Reverend Zeigler still maintains a close relationship with Crowell & Moring, performing the weddings of many of his former partners’ children, and sitting on the board of the firm’s charitable foundation. Indeed, he says that presiding over the funeral of firm founder Eldon “Took” Crowell in June 2010 was one of “the most profoundly moving moments in my ministry.” Says Gardiner: “I think all lawyers are looking for a higher calling, but [Zeigler] found it, and that’s something that we applaud.”

—ROSS TODD