

# THE CLERGY PROJECT

## SYNOPSIS

Entering the theatre, the audience is welcomed as part of the respective congregations, and the space buzzes with conversation, last-minute service planning – the excitement and anticipation of community, meeting once a week in a holy space. When the show begins, the three clergy storytellers enter in their respective vestments, highlighting the theatrical quality of religious ritual and tradition. And wait till you hear the three variations on the light bulb joke.

Then, something truly wonderful happens. They each remove their clerical garments, revealing black clothing underneath; personalized t-shirts have their first names on the front, and their respective roles and a simple, humorous description of their guiding principles on the back. Daniel: Priest – What would Jesus do? Elyse: Rabbi – What would Moses do? Shawn: Minister – What would Sartre do? Setting the tone for what's about to come, it's a reminder that these three members of the clergy are not only defined by their roles, they're *people*.

Daniel, Elyse and Shawn share their stories of how they were called to ministry and why they decided to go into the clergy, the challenges faced within their congregations, and life-changing moments of service in the midst of deep sorrow and pain. Told with candor, humour and compassion, they are frank about their personal joys and struggles in faith, some unusual circumstances where they just had to wing it – and even bend the rules – and the navigation of societal prejudice and inflexibility (Daniel came out to his congregation a week after he got married, and Elyse became a rabbi when there were no female rabbis in Canada). Living lives of service and community, they don't take themselves too seriously and are aware that even tradition has room for change.

While each comes to the storytelling process from different religious beliefs and traditions, they have much in common: faith, hope, charity and a drive to serve their community and build relationships. They are brave, engaging and warm storytellers, each with his/her own flavour: Daniel with his boyish charm and twinkle in his eye; Elyse's dry humour and chutzpah (and she does a mean Jackie Mason impersonation); and Shawn's philosophical and introspective vibe.

In the end, *The Soulo Clergy Project* isn't just about their roles as priest, minister and rabbi – it's about their humanity.

There is an audience TALK-BACK after each Fringe performance.