

If you are experiencing issues by special concern to LGBTQ members of the Sig, please email [askthediva@sig.org](mailto:askthediva@sig.org) or call 800-955-6263.

Dear Diva:

I'll be graduating in May with a ThD and I am struggling to find a job in the academic world. I grew up as a Roman Catholic but I left the Roman Catholic Church recently because I'm a lesbian and I was tired of the hypocrisy of the Church, and also for fear of losing my job working in a Roman Catholic Church. I was worried if they found out I was gay they would fire me. I was later received as an Episcopalian and now work in an Episcopal Church that accepts me for who I am. On the academic side of things, I feel like I don't fit in anywhere. I inquired about applying for academic positions at Roman Catholic schools, but was told it probably wasn't worth my applying because I had "rejected the faith" by becoming an Episcopalian, but also because I was an out lesbian and I refused to be in the closet. This hasn't left me with many options. I would love to hear some advice on how to find a job. I'm in a tough position because I refuse to go back in the closet. I've made the choice to live my life honestly and with integrity, but I feel like I'll have great difficulty finding an academic position. I love to teach, but I'm very frustrated with the whole situation and wonder if I shouldn't look for work in another field, like nonprofit work.

Sincerely,  
Losing Hope

Dear Losing Hope:

Thank you for your letter — for the candor and anger in it. It has so many important questions rolled up in it — questions of faith, of vocation, of career — and they are all seared by experiences of rejection in your original religious community. Without denying the pain, or the importance of the other questions, let me see whether I can say a few things just about career.

First, it will be important to be as candid as you can about what personal price you are willing to pay for a faculty appointment at a college or university. Some religious schools will welcome (or at least tolerate) nonheterosexual faculty members so long as they are willing to be "discreet." The interpretation of discretion will vary. Any interpretation will be temporary, since a change of academic administration or denominational policy may result in an unpleasant change of your circumstances — even after tenure. But you do need to ask yourself once again how much you would be willing to censor yourself in order to get a job at a religious school for which your sexuality would be an issue.

It sounds to me as if you've already come down against this sort of life. So let me describe some other possibilities — after registering a strong caution. The present distress of academic structures in the humanities (broadly conceived) makes it almost impossible to offer generalized job advice. Hiring decisions are always local decisions — subject to all sorts of acknowledged and unacknowledged influences even at the best of times. There is no general method for getting a job, and any successful hire always involves elements of chance or luck. Still, I would suggest that you split your academic searching into different segments, presenting different combinations of your strengths. (This might be considered another sort of self-censorship. I prefer to think of it as an act of translation.) Apply to positions in worship or liturgy (perhaps especially at interdenominational or university-based divinity schools), but also learn to describe yourself as a teacher of Christian lived religion who would be perfect for the "Christian studies" position in a liberal arts department of religious studies.

At the same time, I would urge you to consider applying to secondary schools. A good secondary school will offer opportunities for teaching and (if I may say so) for intellectual collegiality that are more congenial than the opportunities at many colleges. In present circumstances, we simply have to override the distinctly American prejudice against pursuing lives of scholarship in secondary schools.

Finally, I would indeed encourage you to think about nonprofit work. There are, as you know, a

growing number of organizations working for progress in sexuality and religion. Since I believe that our scholarly work should speak to the world, I don't think you give up anything by carrying your scholarship forward into these new settings. On the contrary, I think that you fulfill your scholarship — and so one part of your vocation.

Sincerely,  
Diva