

Learning to Love the Church Again | Marian V. Liautaud

My trust was betrayed, but it's time to forgive.

One day nearly two decades ago, the senior pastor of my church stopped by my house unannounced. I had just had a baby, so I presumed his visit was pastorally motivated, although I was a little thrown off by his sudden appearance at my door. I invited him in, and we made small talk for a while. My baby began to fuss and it soon became apparent that he needed to nurse. My pastor didn't take his cue and offer to leave, so after several tense moments of trying to soothe my son without whipping out my breast to feed him, I told my pastor that we'd need to continue our conversation some other time. He finally left.

I didn't think too much of this incident—at least not until he showed up a second time uninvited. I didn't think too much of this incident—at least not until he showed up a second time uninvited. Thankfully, I was running out the door, and I told him I couldn't visit right then. As I drove away from my house, I had a sick feeling in my stomach, like something wasn't quite right. We weren't that closely connected at church. Why would my pastor stop by my house to pay a visit? Don't people usually call first?

Thankfully, nothing materialized beyond these two incidents. For me, that is. Years after I moved away from this church, I learned that there were several women, some of them my friends, who brought forth allegations of sexual misconduct against this same pastor. One of these women remains estranged from the church and from God, largely because of the devastating effects of being victimized by this man. And to this day, I no longer trust pastors like I used to.

Healing from the discovery that a man I trusted, my pastor, was actually a predator rocked me to my core, and it shook my faith. This incident left me feeling betrayed and afraid to trust church leaders. Since then, I've shied away from committing to any church. I attend for Sunday worship, but I stay on the sidelines. I've had to work through my fear that people in positions of power can—and sometimes do—abuse their power.

Pastors are human and fallible. Even though they're held to a higher standard of accountability because of the power of their office, they make mistakes for which they need to be forgiven. It's not productive or fair to project my fear of one man's transgressions onto every pastor I know thereafter. It may be time for me to forgive so that I can be free to build relationships in my current church.

People stop going to church for lots of reasons. In "5 Reasons to Quit Your Church," Kelli B. Trujillo covers five key reasons why people consider leaving the church. She makes a compelling case for why you should stay anyway.

Sharon Hodde Miller compares being committed to a local church to marriage. In "Married . . . to My Church?" she paints a powerful picture of our role as Christ's bride, one that's helping to stretch my own desire to be more committed to my church.

Speaking of being committed to one's church, Shauna Niequist shares her personal story of growing up in the church her pastor-dad, Bill Hybels, helped found. She writes about how the

church he started when she was a baby became more than just a megachurch to her; it became her sister.

But church is so much more than worshiping together.

People are busier than ever, and for some families, going to church is just one of many activities to choose from on a weekend. But church is so much more than worshiping on Sundays together. It's a place where, when we invest ourselves, we can experience deep community and fellowship; a place where we can know God and others and be known. Humans are wired for this kind of connection. May we all find a church we can call home.