

**A Voice
By
A Survivor**

It has been over 14 years since the story broke of “sexual impropriety” in my church. On a Sunday evening, the elders publicly announced the senior pastor had confessed to “one count” of sexual impropriety with a young lady, Wanessa, in the congregation. The elders mentioned her by name! I was horrified! They could have used *my* name! They knew *I* was one of the victims (there were at least 5). I was outraged! How dare they publicly name one of the victims, making her the scapegoat, and lie to the congregation about something so serious!

I was sitting near the back of the gymnasium-turned-sanctuary, flanked by my husband, brother, sister, and a couple of dear and courageous friends. My blood started to boil with the announcement of only one count—as if this were a courtroom hearing! Besides, I was aware of more than a *thousand* counts of sexual impropriety just against me! To which one of the thousand counts did he confess?

I turned to our friend, Bill, next to me. “He did not confess!” I retorted under my breath.

“What do you mean?” Bill said. “They just said he confessed!”

“They said he confessed to only *one* count,” I argued. “He’s guilty of more than one count!”

“You’re right, but you can’t say anything. They’ll crucify you!” he said.

“They just crucified Wanessa!” I responded. “They could have crucified *me!*”

I knew in that instant I had to say something! If Wanessa was going to be crucified, then I would be crucified with her!

Bill finally agreed with my argument, and gave approval to what I think we both knew was about to happen, but could never have anticipated. “You’re right,” he quietly said. “Go for it, babe.”

“He did not confess! He did not confess! He did not confess! He did not confess! HE DID NOT CONFESS!” With each repetition of the phrase, my voice grew louder and louder! I don’t recall how many times I said it. And then, as if being lifted out of my seat, I found myself standing and screaming at the elders and guest preacher who were on the podium so far away.

“THAT MAN RAPED MY SOUL!” Suddenly the audience of about 400-500 people grew terribly silent, and I realized the severity of my accusation. I thought I needed to clarify a little, so I added parenthetically, “. . . though not physically.”

Yes, it’s true the senior pastor never had intercourse with me, but if I hadn’t insisted on keeping my clothes on while he “counseled” me, then there would have been! In a very real sense, he *did* rape me over and over again. I know that now, but not then.

As the elders scrambled to have me thrown out of the church, my husband and brother (thank God for his “tank” physique) along with his wife, my sister, and friends surrounded me as we left on our own accord.

The elders never brought the now former senior pastor before the congregation, and I never went back to my church.

I have been on an incredible journey these last 14 years! My family has stood by me—through the ups and downs. We have been attacked, misunderstood, misjudged, maligned, and not accepted by Christians. We have continued to attend other churches, but have faced insurmountable prejudice when the church leadership or fellow parishioners found out I was a clergy sexual abuse survivor! We have also seen God work miracles through true servants who acted as angels in encouraging, restoring, and even protecting our very lives.

I believe God has much to say to CSA survivors. We have become modern-day lepers in religious organizations. God, however, wants to give us great comfort and let us know that He has not abandoned us. I believe He is working to begin to right our wrongs, and empower us to make change. Each of us has a voice! One voice may not be strong enough to pull the weight of our burden . . . but *together* we can bring hope and encouragement to each other, and invoke real change in our places of worship, as well as society on the whole!

