

One Way You Can Help if Your Pastor Struggles With Depression

The suicide death of a young pastor is being felt throughout the world. Andrew Stoecklein, lead pastor of Inland Hills Church in California, left behind his wife, Kayla, and three young sons.

I am the father of three sons. I cannot look at a photo of the young family without getting tears in my eyes.

Please Hear Me Well

This post is not about suicide prevention. More able persons have written volumes on the topic. It is not about the Stoecklein family, though their story prompted this post.

I am writing this article because I want to have a frank conversation with congregational members around the world. I want you to hear me clearly. I want to offer one way you can help.

The Struggles of Pastors

Most pastors are not suicidal. But most pastors do struggle. They lead churches in a culture that is not friendly to their calling. Three-fourths of them lead churches that are struggling by almost any measure or metric. Many pastors are on the precipice of quitting, and most church members have no idea of their inner turmoil.

In the midst of these cultural and congregational challenges, these pastors see a decided shift among the members. Their commitment level is low, and their frequency of attendance is decreasing. Many of the members are in the congregation to get their personal preferences fulfilled. And if you mess with

their preferred worship style, order of worship, time of worship, color of carpet or any facet of the church facility, they will let you know. Their Trinitarian priority is me, myself and I.

These pastors have been stabbed in the front by church members and stabbed in the back by other staff. They love their church members; but they are deeply hurt when that love is returned with cynicism, criticism and apathy.

One Way to Help

Yet, these pastors tell us, the greatest pain is not the criticism and cynicism by some of the members. The greatest pain is when the “good members” remain silent, when they do nothing to come to the aid and defense of their pastors. The good members don’t want to rock the boat. They don’t want to incur the wrath of the pastor attackers. They think they are maintaining unity. Instead they are tearing down their pastor with their malignant silence. Their efforts to maintain peace sow the greatest seeds of destruction.

The one thing you can do as a church member is to stand up for your pastor in the midst of the ongoing and vociferous criticism. Speak up; don’t shut up. Let the ill-intending critics and cynics know you support your pastor, you love your pastor and you are there for your pastor.

I know. Pastors aren’t perfect. There is no need to comment to me about that obvious reality. But in the labor pool of church members, we have an overflow of critics and an acute shortage of courageous encouragers.

Your pastor can withstand the barbs and insults and tepid commitment of most church members. That is the world pastors have sadly come to expect. But your pastors can only withstand them if they know they have some vocal and visible advocates and encouragers.

Please stand up. Please speak up.

It may be the single greatest difference-maker in your pastor's ministry. {eo}

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This article originally appeared at .