

Popular Pastor Commits Suicide, Shocking His Congregation

Inland Hills Church of Chino, California, grieved over the weekend as news spread that beloved lead pastor Andrew Stoecklein committed suicide.

"It's not the outcome we hoped and prayed for, and today we grieve as a church family," the church posted to Facebook. "In his time leading Inland Hills, Andrew reached so many with his warm wit, passionate heart for God, and teaching that always, always pointed others to Jesus. The loving husband, father, son, and friend that he was will continue to inspire us in leading others into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. And in this tragedy, we encourage anyone who is hurting emotionally to ask for help. If you or anyone else is struggling, the Suicide Prevention Hotline at 800-273-TALK (8255) is a potentially life-saving resource. May we be a beacon of hope for the community, to rescue the hurting and honor the God that Andrew served so well. Andrew, we love you. And we always will. #godsgotthis #inlandhills."

Stoecklein leaves behind his wife, Kayla, and their three sons.

Saturday morning, Kayla issued an urgent prayer alert through social media saying Stoecklein was on life support after his attempt. As the hours passed, though, Stoecklein died.

In an emotional post to Instagram, Kayla pleaded with followers to pray for her and her children.

"It wasn't the miracle I was hoping for but he is now in heaven with his dad, free of pain, free of depression and anxiety," Kayla posted. He was an amazing husband, he truly

made me better, made me feel like the most beautiful girl in the world, and he loved me so deeply. We fit so well together, we were one. He was an amazing daddy, his three boys are going to miss him so much. He had such a unique and special relationship with each of them. He was an incredibly gifted teacher, communicator, and pastor. He was special, one of a kind and will be missed by thousands of people all around the world. Please pray for me and the boys. I don't know how I am going to face this, I am completely heartbroken, lost, and empty. Never in a million years would I have imagined this would be the end of his story."

Though Stoecklein's suicide is fresh, his story, sadly, is far from the only incident.

Pastors often wrestle with depression, though few admit it.

In an article for *Southern Equip*, Thom Rainer gives five main reasons pastors battle with the mental struggle.

1. **Spiritual warfare:** "I don't mean this in a profane way, but there was a point in my ministry when all hell broke loose. I can't explain the attacks any way other than spiritual warfare. The enemy was intent on destroying my ministry, and I began to spiral downward emotionally."
2. **The surprising reality of pastoral leadership:** "I wish someone had told me how tough it is to be a pastor. My single counsel was to preach the Word, and I understand the priority of preaching. But, after a year or so in my first pastorate at age 31, I saw the underbelly of local church life. I was just caught off-guard. And it took me some time before I realized I was truly depressed."
3. **Sense of inadequacy:** "My church is declining. While I don't get hung up on numbers, my members started talking about the decline. And when we had to delete a position because we could no longer pay the person, I really begin to hit rock bottom. I felt like it was all my fault."

4. **Critics and bullies.** "Pastoral leadership really can be a death by a thousand cuts. It's not any one person or criticism; it's the constant and steady stream of criticisms. It wears on you. My depression came on gradually, so by the time I was in deep depression, I did not see it coming."
5. **Loneliness.** "It's really hard to find a true friend when you are a pastor. And when you have no one to talk to about your struggles and questions, life can get lonely."