

Tullian Tchividjian to Launch New Church, Argues His Affairs Weren't Abuse of Power

Tullian Tchividjian has returned to the pulpit four years after stepping down due to adulterous affairs. Tchividjian, grandson of Billy Graham, was forced to resign from his pastoral role in June 2015, but he says all his romantic or sexual relationships with women—which included former congregants—were consensual and not an abuse of his pastoral power.

But now Tchividjian is getting ready to launch his new church, The Sanctuary, in the Jupiter/Palm Beach Gardens area of Florida this coming fall. They are currently meeting every Sunday morning, according to the church's website.

According to the *Palm Beach Post*, a woman who had an extramarital affair with Tchividjian says the relationship was “pastoral abuse and sexual misconduct” on Tchividjian's part.

But the popular pastor says this simply isn't true. While he admits that he participated in two adulterous affairs—one of which was with a congregant, Rachel Steele. Their affair lasted between May and June of 2015.

This affair eventually led to his resignation from Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and it ended his marriage with ex-wife Kim. The South Florida Presbytery also relinquished his pastoral credentials.

After Coral Ridge, he began working for Willow Creek Church in Winter Springs, Florida. But after confessing to another previous affair, he was fired from the church.

(Tchividjian says he went through a deep depression after he was fired from Willow Creek, saying he even wanted to commit suicide. But after coming through that dark emotional time, Tchividjian remarried in 2016 to Stacie Philipps.)

Steele says she did want to sleep with Tchividjian but that there was still an aspect of her giving in “to what he wanted,” reports the *Palm Beach Post*. She says the pastor used his position of power to groom her.

In December 2016, the Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE) board of directors issued a public statement calling Tchividjian’s affair a misuse of his power. The board included Tchividjian’s uncle, Emmanuel Tchividjian, and his brother, Boz.

“The GRACE Board is deeply disturbed about the revelations of sexual misconduct by Tullian Tchividjian,” the board wrote. “As an organization that deals with the abuse of God’s lambs and the damage silence causes, we feel compelled to speak. We believe that no material institution is more sacred to God than His lambs—be it church or mission or family. Institutions ordained by God were destroyed at His hand when they became corrupt.”

A spokesperson for Tchividjian says the “infidelity in 2015 was completely wrong, morally and ethically” but that the pastor in no way abused his role in either of his affairs.

“I don’t care what role a person has, a consensual relationship between two adults is not abuse,” Tchividjian says. “And some of these people will try to make the case that, ‘Well, because you’re in a position of authority, it is abuse.’ And I’ll go, ‘OK, I can see how that has been and can be used by people in these positions.’ ... That just was not true for me. I was not abusing my authoritative role to try and find women.”

In Tchividjian’s first sermon for The Sanctuary, he addressed

his past and argued that God can redeem anything. He later posted on Twitter with a link to the sermon:

Can anything good come out of failure? Can anything good come out of adultery or divorce? Can anything good come out of loneliness, discouragement, or loss? Can anything good come out of an emotionally dead marriage or singleness or shattered dreams?

– Tullian Tchividjian (@TullianT) August 8, 2019