

Case Study

A young woman in her 20's gets a job as an administrative assistant at a Christian Reformed Church in a small town. Though the pay isn't very good, she loves her job both because it is a place where she can use her gifts to serve God and because she loves the church community which has become home for her.

About a year after she started, the church called a new pastor. The new pastor is fairly well known to the community, having grown up in the area and even having relatives in the church. For the first couple of months, things were going really well. The young woman got along well with the new pastor. She appreciated his passion and excitement for ministry and for the church. And he seemed to appreciate her presence.

But it wasn't long before he started spending more and more time at her desk, bringing her gifts, and rubbing her shoulders. The young woman was really uncomfortable but not sure what to do. Increasingly, she found herself avoiding the pastor, which was difficult since she still had to come into work to do her job. One day, he cornered her, and pressed into her so she couldn't move, forcefully kissing her on the lips and groping her breasts. After some time, he moved away from her and told her that if she reported this to anyone, he would claim that she came on to him. It would be her word against his. She was ashamed, afraid, confused, hurt, and angry. She felt betrayed by the pastor, isolated from her community, and so very alone.

She knew that if she told anyone in the church, they would likely blame her for corrupting the pastor, dismissing her allegations as not a big deal, or accuse her of lying. With no power to change the situation and no clear way to have it addressed, the young woman left her job, her church family, and even moved out of the community.

While leaving put an end to the immediate threat, the young woman paid an enormous price for the pastor's indiscretions. She lost her job, her church home, her community. Furthermore, in the years to come, she would wrestle with depression, shame, and anger at this violation, spending countless hours in counseling to process the violation and her grief over what he did to her. Not surprisingly, the young woman never did return to church, having lost faith in pastors and the institutions they represent.

- 1. Do you think the woman's fears about coming forward with allegations against the pastor are legitimate? Why or why not?**
- 2. How could this scenario have gone differently? What would it take for it to go differently?**