

## MONTH 7: JULY

### When There's No Oversight: Understanding Independent Churches

*[Content Warning: This article discusses clergy sexual abuse. Please take care of yourself. You can stop anytime.]*

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"I reported him to the church board. They said they'd handle it internally. That was two years ago. He's still the pastor. Nothing changed." This is the reality for survivors who report abuse in independent churches. No denomination. No oversight body. No accountability structure. Let me explain why independent churches are uniquely dangerous — and what you can do.

#### WHY INDEPENDENT CHURCHES PROTECT ABUSERS

In a denominational structure, there's oversight: • Regional authorities • Codes of conduct • External investigations • Removal mechanisms Independent churches have NONE of this. Instead: • The pastor IS the church • The board serves at his pleasure • No external authority • No requirement to report

#### THE PASTOR-AS-KING PROBLEM

In many independent churches, the pastor: • Founded the church • Controls finances • Appoints board members • Interprets doctrine unchecked Challenging the pastor = challenging the church itself.

#### WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE'S NO ACCOUNTABILITY

**\*\*1. DON'T Rely on Internal Processes\*\*** The board will protect the pastor. If you report internally, do it in writing (creates a record). But don't expect justice. **\*\*2. Report to External Authorities\*\*** Bypass the church: • File police reports • Consult an attorney about civil lawsuits • Contact state licensing boards • Reach out to advocacy organizations **\*\*3. Connect with Other Survivors\*\*** You're likely not the only one. Multiple reports carry more weight. **\*\*4. Accept the Church May Not Change\*\*** The congregation may choose the pastor. Your abuser may face no consequences within that church. But that doesn't mean you have no power. **\*\*5. Pursue Legal Accountability\*\*** Civil lawsuits can force financial accountability even if the church won't.

### THE SYSTEMIC PROBLEM

Independent churches are structurally designed to protect pastoral power. Your only recourse is external accountability: legal system, media, public advocacy.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

You don't have to wait for the church to do the right thing. You can pursue justice outside their walls.

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RESOURCES: RAINN: 1-800-656-4673 | You deserve support. Take care. 