THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS

Megan Kenyon
kenyon.m@wustl.edu

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The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness

by
Megan Kenyon

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Chair, Master of Fine Arts in Visual Art Program
Lisa Bulawsky

Thesis Text Advisor
Heather Bennett

Thesis Text Advisor
Monika Weiss

Faculty Mentor
Monika Weiss

Thesis Committee
Lisa Bulawsky
Cheryl Wassenaar
Marie Griffith
## Contents

Introduction: *Out of the Darkness* ................................................................. 1  

Apocalypse: *Unveiling Patriarchy, Revealing Self* ......................................... 7  

Apologia: *Sharing Stories, Bearing Witness* .................................................. 25  

Apostle: *Seeing Women, Hearing Truth* ......................................................... 39  

Conclusion: *A Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness* .................................. 49  

Notes .................................................................................................................. 53  

Bibliography ....................................................................................................... 64  

Appendix: The Women’s Chapel Survey Data .................................................... 66
Introduction

Out of the Darkness
Recent political situations and cultural dramas prove that the pervasive messaging of white, American, evangelical Christianity no longer stays within pews or stained-glass windows. Evangelicalism’s militant and patriarchal aspects now leach out of church spaces and impact secular culture. Historically, shared theological beliefs define evangelicalism instead of shared cultural values. Currently, in evangelicalism what determines orthodoxy is adherence to strict social mores regarding sexuality, gender, race, etc., and not theological doctrines or church traditions. These cultural norms hide within Christianity blurring the lines between faithful spiritual practice and patriarchal hierarchy. As a Christian and feminist artist, I aim to challenge and to critique patriarchal forms of Christianity, specifically in the evangelical church. Using prophetic imagination and incarnational space, I seek to make plain the history and the present condition of the evangelical church by bearing witness for those who have been harmed by militant forms of masculine authority masquerading as the gospel of Christ.

Long before these violent and dehumanizing values manifested in American culture at large, they were wreaking havoc in the everyday lives of Christians, especially anyone who is not white, male, educated, and middle-to-upper class. Patriarchy in Christian spaces slithers and lingers in dark shadows where no one thinks to look. No one thinks to investigate these teachings that subordinate women, people of color, LGBTQIA people, immigrants, the poor, etc., and have been a part of American church culture for so long, making it feel like this is the way it is, that this is what orthodoxy and orthopraxy look like. Patriarchy hides under a variety of theological teachings on marriage, family, gender, sexuality, race, leadership, mission, and church governance working together in subtle and not so subtle ways to oppress participants.

If evangelical, patriarchal values wage wars, then the first casualties occur at home. Wives and mothers, daughters and sisters, and those with gender identity that is inconsistent with
their birth certificates, lose the ability to exercise agency in their own faith due to narrow readings of scripture and unexamined church traditions. These Christians desperately want to be faithful to Jesus and to the church, but often find that toxic theological teachings make it impossible and dangerous for them to pursue their faith within institutional church structures. This reality defines me and many others who have shared their stories with me. Documenting this reality as reality becomes vitally important, and so I put down my brush and pick up my camera to better capture what I see, both in my own life and in the lives of others.

I sent a survey to Christian women that expressed interest in my work and wanted to possibly participate in a project investigating the effects of patriarchy in evangelical spaces. I asked several questions to understand the stories of those enduring patriarchal and misogynistic Christianity. One question stands out based on the responses received: Have you ever been made to feel less than in Christian/church spaces because you are a woman? 82% of the respondents said yes, that matched their experiences.³ This is a disturbingly high percentage of women feeling marginalized in the same space they inhabit as church members.

My role as a Christian and as a feminist artist that challenges and critiques Christian patriarchy responds to this statistic with attempts to prevent further harm by utilizing prophetic imagination. This idea of the artist as prophet resurfaces as a result of research from several years ago. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann defines the prophet’s vocation as keeping “alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one.”⁴ He calls this the prophetic imagination and outlines three ways in which this operates, using the prophet Jeremiah as an example:

1. To offer symbols that are adequate to confront the horror and the massiveness of the experience that evokes numbness and requires denial. The prophet provides a
way in which the cover-up and the stonewalling can be ended…2. To bring to public expression those very fears and terrors that have been denied so long and suppressed so deeply that we do not know they are there…Thus the prophet must speak evocatively to bring to the community the fear and the pain that individual persons want so desperately to share and to own but are not permitted to do so…3. To speak metaphorically but concretely about the real deathliness that hovers over us and gnaws within us, and to speak neither in rage nor with cheap grace, but with the candor born of anguish and passion.⁵

Contemporary art and Old Testament prophets link arms revealing that there is power in presenting truths through artistic means, opening eyes, and unstopping ears.

Brueggemann describes how kings (his shorthand for those in power, usually using their power to exploit and to oppress) prefer not to see or to know. To see and to listen to people’s stories might, “suggest that we are not in charge, that things will not forever stay the manageable way they are, and that things will not finally all work out.”⁶ Powerful church leaders or denominational organizations continue to dictate terms even after hearing testimony from those victimized by them. Acknowledging these truths is dangerous and costly, in terms of power, in terms of money, in terms of reputation. The powerful close their eyes and stop their ears, and pretend that nothing is wrong, that they are not responsible, and that this system is not hurting anyone including themselves. In closing their eyes, they risk “alienation, loss of patrimony, and questing for new satiation that can never satisfy, and we are [then] driven to the ultimate consumerism of consuming each other.”⁷ People are not products, and something within the human spirit tries to resist being consumed.

Resistance seems impossible when the system or controlling power suppresses and objectifies while speaking as an authority for God. If individuals that speak for God promote patriarchal theology and culture, it starts to feel like there is nowhere safe to exist. The danger of this should be obvious; subordinating someone allows the person in power to deny access to
God, creating an environment for abuse to happen. Patriarchal hierarchy does violence to people, and too often church leaders are unwilling to see the harm it causes.

I could no longer ignore this reality. I began to ask what it would look like to create a safe space, a sanctuary, for women who have been harmed by evangelical or other types of religious spaces. During a studio visit with artist Meleko Mokgosi, we discussed the power that might come from inviting people to help design such a space. I took that idea and created a question on the survey. “If I were to build a space where women could lament/mourn the things they’ve endured in the church, I would want it to look/be like____” returned a variety of answers. “A place full of life, where you could just scream and people screamed with you” to “A confessional set-up, but the priest is God. When we finish laying down our burdens, the screen is opened and we can fully reconnect,” to “I don't think I could pick a place and make it everything it needs to be. Everyone's experience is different so everyone's healing must also be different. I do think that community plays an important role in healing.” These were just a few of the answers I received.

Indeed, everyone comes with different needs and different ways of relating to themselves, to each other, and to the Divine. Maybe the safe space, or even the brave space I want to create for people looks less like four walls with special lighting, comfortable seating, and soft music playing. Maybe it looks like shared life, like stories spoken and listened to. Maybe it looks like actions done together in community. Maybe it looks like people being allowed to be their whole selves and being an intimate and integral part of this community, this body. The idea of incarnational space enters in; maybe what is most important is not the architecture of the space or what is inside it. Maybe an incarnational space is just a group of women, sitting in a circle, sharing their truth, and rising up with photos to tell their stories.
And maybe incarnational space is what the church should have been all along. My story, and the stories of the women I work with, function as canaries in a coal mine, letting others know that danger lurks in the darkness, danger that seeks to rob, to kill, and to destroy. Seeing and sharing truth sets captives free.
Apocalypse

Unveiling Patriarchy, Revealing Self
Making *Though Your Sins be as Scarlet/There is Power in the Blood*, 2022, (Fig. 1) made no sense. I remember sitting in my parent’s dining room reading a book on feminist art. I went to the bathroom, and as often happens when on my period, my hand got covered in blood. Going to wash up, I reached my right hand towards the stream of water descending from the faucet, when the late January light caught my eye. It illuminated the red blood on my hand, making it startlingly scarlet. This stood out starkly from the white, porcelain sink.

Fig. 1. Megan Kenyon, *Though Your Sins be as Scarlet/There is Power in the Blood*, 2022, Digital photos on Glossy Paper, Typewriter and Colored Pencil on Newsprint, 6 x 2 feet. Image courtesy of the artist.

“This is beautiful…I have to take a photo of this,” I said to myself, and whipped out my iPhone. I snapped a photo, and then took another as I stuck my hand under the water; another as I
closed my hand over the blood to wipe it away; another in a tight fist in a moment of defiance; and one last one with my hand open again, cleansed.

I dried my hands, went back to the dining room, and sat down at the table to look at these strange photos. They terrified me. I am squeamish about blood at the best of times, and I do not like to linger over my own blood too long. Why did I take these strange photos? And why did I find them beautiful when I have previously found my period to be an annoyance at best, dirty and disgusting at worst?

I blame taking these photographs on Yoko Ono and Marina Abramović. About a week before I took these weird little self-portraits, I watched a video of Yoko Ono’s famous performance, *Cut Piece*, 1964 (Fig. 2). In it, she allowed members of the audience to come up and cut away parts of one of her nicest outfits with no resistance from her. It is a deeply disturbing clip at points, with one particular young man seeming to relish exposing her, as she squirms under his malevolent intent, clearly uncomfortable.

In contrast, I had been reading about Abramović just before I sauntered into the bathroom. In her famous performance piece, *Rhythm O*, 1974 (Fig. 3), she laid out seventy-two objects, ranging from things like a rose to a gun, and for six hours stood completely motionless, allowing the audience to use those objects however they wished. And, as one might expect, it got ugly, to the point that someone pointed the gun at her head.

![Fig. 3. Marina Abramović, *Rhythm O*, 1974. Image courtesy of the Tate Museum Archive, accessed April 12, 2023, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/abramovic-rhythm-0-t14875.](image)

Nancy Princenthal, in her book *Unspeakable Acts*, describes feminist artists like Ono and Abramović, saying,

> With embodiment as their fundamental premise, newly emboldened women stripped themselves naked, literally and emotionally. Taking their bodies as subjects meant exploring physical life in the positive, active sense—celebrating what women do, both routinely and exceptionally—and also the reverse: looking closely and honestly at the things that have been done to us, eternally and without recognition, much less accountability.

As I sat reading and absorbing tales of these two women and other courageous feminist artists like them, I felt intimidated. These women made themselves entirely vulnerable; physically and
emotionally naked and left themselves completely up to the will of their audience. And I wanted, so desperately, to be like them. Performance art is not my medium, but I realized that these strange, bloody photographs on my phone displayed a small expression of the vulnerability that I saw in those artists, so I decided to edit them. Then I thought to myself, maybe I should print them out, just to see what they might look like. And, before I could talk myself out of it, I had the photos printed and hung on a wall for others to see. Someone asked, “Why did you take pictures of yourself?” It is a variation on a question I often get asked, “What is the significance of using your own body in your work?”

I find myself evaluating everything I have ever been taught or experienced in culturally evangelical spaces as I deconstruct my faith and worldview. While many Christians use the term “deconstruction” to describe wrestling with what they have been taught or participate in, I prefer the term “apocalypse.” The Bible uses this word and in the original Greek it means “unveiling, revelation.” In this culture, it often conjures up images of disaster movies or end-time theories. I find these two meanings an apt description of the process of seeing your whole world unravel because of what one witnesses.

Doing this work, the way I see the world changes drastically; things that once felt dangerous and off limits suddenly seem less scary and even somewhat inviting. Other things that once felt familiar and safe suddenly feel fraught and unsure. It feels important to document this process, to document these moments as they catch my attention and to show people a version of what it looks like to change, to grow, and to wrestle with your faith. Here I use prophetic imagination, to “speak evocatively to bring to the community the fear and the pain that individual persons want so desperately to share and to own.” Using my own body in my work allows me to do this, relying on instinct or intuition as I create.
Nan Goldin is an artist whose work I see connecting with my own.\textsuperscript{19} Goldin’s work features photos of herself and her friends in their everyday lives in a community that is often overlooked (Fig. 4). Showing pictures, especially at that time, of herself, her life, and her friends is a radical act of remembrance and witness.\textsuperscript{20} I resonate with this sentiment and a statement by her in a recent documentary, \textit{All the Beauty and the Bloodshed}: “I mean, that’s the problem, you know? You grow up being told that didn’t happen, you didn’t see that, you didn’t hear that. And what do you do? How do you believe yourself, how do you continue to trust yourself? And then how do you show the world that you did experience that, that you did hear that? And so that’s the reason I take pictures.”\textsuperscript{21} Taking pictures, even of mundane things, makes them real; they speak truth, even if it is only the truth of the artist. Photography allows me to be an active witness of my own life, to speak with a prophetic voice; to comb through painful moments of shame and
disorientation, to unearth old fears and sorrows, and to capture this growing strength that comes from being set free from ancient chains of religious patriarchy.


Photographer Catherine Opie created three self-portraits over the course of ten years. In each one, she sits in front of a jewel-toned backdrop, lending a regality that is common in her portraiture work. In two of the images, *Self Portrait: Pervert*, 1994, and *Self Portrait: Cutting*, 1993, (Fig. 5), Opie carves words or images directly into her skin. These images push against stereotypes of lesbians, while also not denying the pain and the beauty of real lives lived.

Relating to another one of her works, *Being and Having*, 1991, (Fig. 6), she says, “We were so used to women in photos staring out vacantly. Even then, it was very unusual to encounter this kind of ‘masculine’ approach in which women stare back towards the camera and take ownership.” Being the one who looks contains power. Evangelical spaces set up power plays where women are obligated to hide themselves from men who look. From an early age, females learn how to dress so as not to be “stumbling blocks” or “eye traps” for men; men place women in spiritually submissive roles under the guise of protecting them. Books, sermons, podcasts, movies, and even music reinforce the idea that girls and women carry the responsibility for men who cannot be held responsible for their own lust. It is patriarchy at its finest.

I find myself deeply inspired by not just Ono, Abramović, Goldin, and Opie but also countless other feminist artists who take risks and open themselves up to fight against the
patriarchy and politics of their time. Judith Butler talks about the vulnerability of the body, saying, “The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where ‘doing’ and ‘being done to’ become equivocal.” I want to honor feminist artists who came before me and find a way to make good on the road they paved that I now walk tentatively on. I feel this deep need to not say “no” to something just because it scares me or because I worry about what people might say. Using self-portraiture in my practice fulfills the need to be vulnerable and to confront this misogynistic, patriarchal gaze.

I learn from these feminist artists that fear is not a tool you keep in your studio. Fear becomes fuel you burn, like anger, like grief, like joy, in order to get work done. Kyrie Eleison/By His Stripes, 2022 (Fig. 7) became the result. These five photographs document my body, naked except for underwear, both lying and sitting on my bed. The choice to be mostly naked signifies the vulnerability of my physical and spiritual self, but it also gives me power to tell the story. I control how much of me is seen or not seen. I choose to show the bodily effects of existing in Christian patriarchal spaces. The stress of disentangling my life from patriarchy gives me a stress-related skin condition. When my skin is scratched, it quickly swells up, red on the edges and white wherever the initial scratch occurred. I use this to my advantage by taking a Phillips screwdriver to write the word PATRIARCHY across my chest and my back revealing the extent to which patriarchal influence injures and inflames those harmed by it.
In the first image, my face stares into the eyes of the one who looks, directly eye-to-eye, holding their attention, and not letting them look away. In another image, my left hand reveals my purity ring and the WWJD bracelet I often wear while partially covering my breasts and leaving the word PATRIARCHY visible (Fig. 8). The purity ring and WWJD bracelet, like my hands, are part of a growing iconography within my work.\(^{25}\) To me, these images symbolize reclamation. The purity ring is not on my ring finger, but my pinky, a way of reinterpreting its meaning and use in my life. The WWJD bracelet works as a signifier of my journey through evangelical culture and the murky nuances that must be navigated, evaluated, and reclaimed to continue in Christian practice. The partial covering allows me to retain the power to rightfully decide how I am seen.
Fig. 8. Megan Kenyon, *Kyrie Eleison/By His Stripes*, 2022, (detail). Inkjet Print, Typewriter on Newsprint, 48 x 38 inches. Image courtesy of the artist

*Kyrie Eleison*, Latin for *Lord have Mercy*, quotes an ancient liturgical phrase and *By His Stripes* comes from scripture. Isaiah 53, commonly called the Prophecy of the Suffering Servant, generally refers to Jesus.\(^{26}\) Using this title points to the “sin” of patriarchy and the damage it wreaks on bodies, lives, and systems. Visualizing my own body and the enflamed words scrawled across it draws attention to solidarity with Jesus. Matthew 11, Luke 4, and John 11 reveal how Jesus cares deeply about being with and liberating those under oppression.\(^{27}\) Walter Brueggemann talks about the power of Jesus’ solidarity, specifically in John 11, saying:

Jesus wept...Jesus knew what we numb ones must always learn again: (a) that weeping must be real because endings are real; and (b) that weeping permits newness. His weeping permits the kingdom to come. Such weeping is a radical criticism, a fearful dismantling because it means the end of all machismo; weeping is something kings rarely do without losing their thrones. Yet the loss of thrones is precisely what is called for in radical criticism.\(^{28}\)
For me, the fact that Jesus weeps with us is a core feature of Christian belief and daily practice, especially as I seek to emulate this same kind of care for others.

The majority of evangelical and evangelical-adjacent churches describe a Jesus that is very different from the one who weeps. The Jesus that evangelicalism subscribes to is described in gory detail by historian Kristin Kobes Du Mez:

Jesus had become a Warrior Leader, an Ultimate Fighter, a knight in shining armor, a William Wallace, a General Patton, a never-say-die kind of guy, a rural laborer with calluses on his hands and muscles on his frame, the sort you’d find hanging out at the NRA convention. Jesus was a badass. This Jesus was over a half a century in the making. Inspired by images of heroic white manhood, evangelicals had fashioned a savior who would lead them into the battles of their own choosing…. weaving together intimate family matters, domestic politics, and a foreign policy agenda, militant masculinity came to reside at the heart of a larger evangelical identity.  

This evangelical Jesus looks nothing like the Jesus seen in scripture. Certainly, “badass Jesus” is not the sort that would weep by a friend’s graveside when he knows he will soon raise that friend from the dead. He does however look an awful lot like Christian leaders (mostly male) that I once respected who have shown by their words and actions that they are unworthy to preach about Jesus. Fashioning an idol that prioritizes white male authority and demands obedience creates the dissonance that fuels deconstruction for many Christians and ex-Christians. Kyrie Eleison/By His Stripes reckons with the need to show how patriarchy inflicts violence on those it claims to be protecting and hints further at the violence done to those who start to question the whole system.

Judith Butler talks about this type of violence that attempts to maintain the status quo of patriarchal power:

The person who threatens violence proceeds from the anxious and rigid belief that a sense of world and a sense of self will be radically undermined if such a being, uncategorizable, is permitted to live within the social world. The negation, through violence, of that body is a vain and violent effort to restore order, to renew the social
world on the basis of intelligible gender, and to refuse the challenge to rethink that world as something other than natural or necessary. Using violence to manipulate, control, and otherwise cling to power must be challenged. It should be foreign to a people who claim to follow Christ; his example is one of divesting himself of power and identifying with the vulnerable.

A question I ask other artists and activists repeatedly is “how long can you live and work from rage?” I can barely think of a time when I did not burn with anger over injustice. My rage makes me a savior, an ally, while being white, upper middle class, and educated allows me to see others as vulnerable to patriarchy but never to identify that way for myself. As I began to embrace prophetic imagination, I also began to more deeply engage in apocalypse for myself, questioning everything I ever heard or believed. I wanted to be a prophet, speaking truth to power, but I found myself drowning in rage over the injustice of patriarchy, especially as it infects Christian theology.

I know rage like the back of my hand; I can trace every deep blue vein from memory, I know every freckle and scar. I know its edges and its center; its hot, deep, searing grasp. It is a power that makes me stand up straighter and feel like my voice could carry across a city. As long as rage ran in my blood, I did not need to admit to the wounds I carried from my own tangles with evangelical patriarchy, nor did I need to admit I am not strong enough to carry so many stories.

But then, my rage dissolved, disintegrated, disappeared.

This powerful rage turned itself into heavy, heavy grief. I went from feeling like I could lift the world over my head to feeling like I would be crushed by even just a feather added to the burden in my arms. In fact, I did find myself crushed under the weight of patriarchy; after months of carrying others' stories, doing research, and evaluating my own life and experiences, I
found myself without the power of my anger and instead burdened with a sorrow that sat like an anvil on my chest. I started having panic attacks at night, and they grew in number and intensity to the point that I sometimes got less than three hours of sleep. Judith Butler describes this kind of grief, saying,

> If we might then return to the problem of grief, to the moments in which one undergoes something outside of one’s control and finds that one is beside oneself, not at one with oneself, we can say grief contains within it the possibility of apprehending the fundamental sociality of embodied life, the ways in which we are from the start, and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own.34

Grief stems from being “implicated in lives that are not our own.” I found myself carrying not just personal grief, but grief that flooded in with every testimony I listened to and with every conversation I engaged in with women whose lives were turned inside out by their churches.35

In an attempt to relieve some emotional distress, I went to see my functional medicine doctor. On the way into her office, I tripped and fell. My hands failed to stop the fall, and my head hit the pavement hard enough that it bounced once and shoved the metal nose piece of my glasses deep into the bridge of my nose.

I collected myself enough to walk into the doctor’s office, where Dr. Alethea Eller and her staff swiftly helped me to clean up, get ice on my wounds, and lie down somewhere nice and quiet so I would not pass out. Alethea, one of my collaborators, gently adjusted and listened to my body and my words as I shared the raw truth of feeling burdened, sad, and unable to cope. Toward the end of our session, she looked me right in the eye and said, “You are going to look badass…you’ve got to document this for the show!”

Despite the pain, the sadness, and the panic I felt, I burst out laughing. A couple of days later, as the black eye started to set in, I took a series of photos in my bathroom showing the carnage of my face. In the photos, I looked like I had been in a fight; I still am. It is a fight with
patriarchy; but it is not a fight I wage with fists or weapons. I wage war using vulnerability, showing weakness, and truth telling, even when the truth is painful and chokes up in my throat.

My bathroom figures heavily in this fight. Most bathrooms exist in an innermost part of a house providing a place of safety. Natural light fills the bathroom at my house, beautifully creating a quiet space for me to be alone. This allows me to be naked and unashamed. I stand under warm water and work out my faith with fear and trembling. I can cry, or I can sing, or I can just float and think of nothing.

Fig. 9. Megan Kenyon, *Lowly/This is How I Fight My Battles*, 2023. Inkjet prints on Moab Entrada, 66 x 60 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

*Lowly/This is How I Fight My Battles*, 2023 (Fig. 9), uses this space to create a series of photos of both my face and portions of my shower. In some of the photographs I use a mirror, so my reflection again stares out at the viewer. In other images, my gaze turns away. In one, I look
directly into the camera, again trying to use my gaze to pull the viewer into my truth.

Interspersed with the images of my face are images of soap on a wooden holder and the shower head with water coming from it, which portrays cleansing, caring for raw and wounded people and places.

Fig. 10. Megan Kenyon, *Lowly/This is How I Fight My Battles*, 2023, (detail). Inkjet prints on Moab Entrada, 66 x 60 inches. Image courtesy of artist.

In the case of *Lowly*, the bathroom becomes a place of healing (Fig. 10). Taking photographs, and then writing over a select few of them, I describe in words and images the reality of undoing Christian patriarchy from Christian practice. It is painful, hard, and raw work that leaves me and many others bloody, but this battle cannot and will not be won by trying to copy the bravado of toxic masculinity. I win this version of the battle lying on a chiropractor’s bench, being gently urged to say the things I can no longer deny while adjusting the icepack so my eyeball stops shivering. As Brueggemann notes, “We know from our own pain and hurt and loneliness that tears break barriers like no harshness or anger. Tears are a way of solidarity in pain when no other form of solidarity remains.”36 I can no longer carry my own story, or anyone else’s, with rage. In order to engage prophetic imagination, I need to embrace and to integrate the
pain and the grief, allowing perceived weakness to become the power that stands up and resists patriarchy.

Neither deconstruction nor apocalypse accurately describes this strange journey every time. In some instances, the word “disorientation” fits best. In looking for, examining, and excising patriarchy from my faith practice, I often find myself disoriented. Moving places of residence and switching churches recently increased this sense of disorientation. Where is home when nothing is quite familiar? What does safety look like? What does belonging look like?

Fig. 11. Megan Kenyon, *And I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For*, 2022, Inkjet Prints, Typewriter on Newsprint, Polaroids, and Ink on Bible page, 60 x 30 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

The works, *The Land of My Sojourn*, 2023 and *I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For*, 2022, explore this sense of disorientation and finding one’s place again. *I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For* (Fig. 11) utilizes a series of photographs, black-out Bible poetry, typewritten text, and Polaroids created over the summer of 2022. The series attempts to understand a sojourn, creating a spiritual and physical self-portrait. In several of the images, my
hand makes an appearance, reaching out, dancing as a shadow, grasping toward the light. Other images feature domestic spaces, church spaces, and nature shots, all showing this restless pilgrimage seeking resolution. *The Land of My Sojourn* (Fig. 12) displays similar themes, but I think of it less as a self-portrait and more like a map. Images of the same ochre yellow mailbox and dingy picture window match images taken from the gardens around my new church and images I took as a child of the home I grew up in. My home and my church exist as important touchstones and the center of my community, giving me a sense of belonging and a sense of identity. Finding myself in new spaces means wrestling with my identity all over again.

Wrestling resolves best in community; but what kind of community? Finding myself repulsed by the intrinsic and violent patriarchy found in most evangelical religious models, I quickly lost the community I trusted for most of my life. For the first time, I started to notice, others seemed to be in the same boat.
Apologia

Sharing Stories, Bearing Witness
In October 2022, I invited the women in my collaborative group, The Women’s Chapel, to participate by sharing images from twenty-five days of prompts. Those who participated came together to talk about the images that were printed and hung. My goal had been to encourage them (especially the “less artistic”) into making images related to our discussions about patriarchy and truth-telling as well as to model for them how art critique happens. Sitting in an empty studio in Weil Hall, Jess Poettker, between sobs, explained the photos she took during this photo challenge.

“They are trying to fire me,” she said as she dragged the corner of her sleeve under her glasses to catch the tears falling down her cheeks. I found myself surprisingly unprepared for tears. Some ladies in our group are always prepared, and they produced tissues seemingly out
of thin air for her. Sitting before her images, the group talks to Jess about her courage, her love, and her tenacity. “I just can’t let them do this to my youth kids…they did this to me when I was in high school, and I can’t let it happen to my kids.” Jess recently found herself the target of new leadership plans at Hope Christian Church in Waterloo, Illinois, where she is currently on staff. It appears that the church finds her difficult to handle and wants her gone. In a series of three images, (Fig. 13) the group sees Jess seated on the carpeted floor of the youth room at her church. In all three, her eyes are closed or downcast, and her posture is one of alternating prayer, despair, and resignation.

As I listen to the women of this group, I am in awe. They alternate from talking about the images as art to talking about Jess’s real-life situation, offering her more than just tissues to help her express her grief and fear. Reflecting on it later, I started to realize something.

We were “doing Church”!

My mom, also a collaborator on this project, uses this phrase anytime she and her lady friends get together and share deeply and intimately, crying with each other over the sorrows, laughing over the joys, and sharing scripture and other forms of encouragement. For my mom and her friends, church bears no resemblance to just one white dude standing in a pulpit after three songs have played. Communion builds through relationships between people and Jesus as they open up their lives to do life together. Judith Butler describes this sort of idea when she says, “If saying is a form of doing, and part of what is getting done is the self, then conversation is a mode of doing something together and becoming otherwise; something will be accomplished in the course of this exchange, but no one will know what or who is being made until it is done.” I call this incarnational space.

The idea of creating a space about women’s experiences first came to me in April of 2021. While folding laundry, I decided to do something “rebellious,” so I watched a documentary on feminism. Netflix released the documentary, *Feminists: What Were They Thinking*, which caught my attention both because of how scandalous it felt at that time to watch something about second wave feminists, but also because it featured Jane Fonda.41 As I folded and watched, I found myself introduced to an amazing array of artists, writers, political activists, and even religious figures. One artist, Judy Chicago, caught my attention with her collaborative *Womanhouse* exhibit (Fig. 14). Utilizing testimony shared in consciousness raising groups, collaborative practice, and a wide variety of media, Chicago and other feminist artists created an immersive space for viewers to see and to experience what women’s lives were really like in 1970s America.
I started to imagine what it might look like to do an art exhibition that would feature works about evangelical women’s lives. But, if I only told my story, it would not be enough. While my story had validity and I gained strength and clarity in telling it to others, my experiences were not even close to the sum total of experiences other women had in evangelical spaces. I had never been married; I did not have children; I had never worked in a ministry, nor did I come from a marginalized identity. These were things that I could not speak to that limited my understanding.

By fall 2021, through a series of conversations with mentors and other artists, I knew I needed other voices in order to do a project showcasing women’s stories. I needed to “do Church” in order to communicate to the church, and everyone else, about what was happening to Christian women caught up in the effects of evangelical patriarchy. Through collaborating with women that I personally knew, I began to envision a space where works could be seen and experienced. I called it *The Women’s Chapel*.

I desired to create an incarnational space where the beautiful, the broken, and even the absurd experiences of women from Christian churches (evangelical and otherwise) bring light into the darkness. As an incarnational space, *The Women’s Chapel* grew through sharing; the sharing of testimonies, sharing by listening to each other, sharing through time and space to create works that encapsulated what was being said. Sitting with Jess and the other women of our group, I realized that *The Women’s Chapel* was not a physical space I would create. Like my mom and her friends “doing Church,” the group created *The Women’s Chapel*, which became the church we longed for.

Now, two years into this project, what is being created surprises me at every turn. The collaborative group meets in in-person consciousness raising groups or virtually over Zoom.
Using cameras instead of paint brushes allows me to dismantle the hierarchy of artist to non-artist because not everyone paints, but almost anyone with a smart phone can take a photo. Even the most rudimentary photographers take moving and powerful images of their own experiences. Through sharing in group discussions, we take what we share and translate it into art objects, sometimes through poetry and collage, sometimes through iPhone photography, and sometimes through longer, daily photo challenges (Fig. 15).

![Image of group critique](image.jpg)

Fig. 15. Image from *The Women’s Chapel*, October 2022, Group Critique. Image courtesy of the artist.

In some ways, I just facilitate these experiences. I listen to the group and produce discussion topics and art making activities that speak to group concerns or to things that flow out of my research. But I also actively participate with them. I do the daily photo challenges, I chime in during discussions, and I share my experiences and ideas with them like they do with me and with each other. I do not always know what form or shape this work will take. All I know is that this beautiful, fragile, incarnational space is unmaking and remaking me into the kind of person I always hoped to be. If nothing else, this work helped me to embrace the label feminist with confidence. I no longer feel subversive watching documentaries on feminism while folding socks.
“Ok, tell us how to pose!” says Ari, her precocious face earnest and smiling as she strikes a dramatic pose that definitely will not work for this shot.43

I gathered Ari, Clara, and Macie together on a cloudy Saturday afternoon in October to take a series of portraits with them. *The Bereans* (Fig. 16) became a work that explored the strength of three young women I met during my time as a study hall monitor for Berea Academy’s homeschool co-op. It also pointed to a Biblical reference. In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul and his companions go to a town called Berea to preach.44 This passage describes the people of Berea as those with “noble character” because they do not take Paul’s word at face
value. Instead, they search the scriptures to compare and to contrast the truth of scripture with what they are hearing.

I find these three young women to be of very noble character. I am constantly in awe of their ability to question, to search for truth, and to spot signs of patriarchy encroaching upon their persons. While working together that Saturday, I asked them questions like, “What would you say to people at church that subscribe to patriarchal theology?” One of them answered by raising two middle fingers high, and the others squealed with glee.

Rock on.

Fig. 17. Megan Kenyon, *The Bereans*, 2022, (detail). Inkjet Prints, Typewriter on sumi paper, 4 x 3 feet. Image courtesy of the artist.

I manage to navigate some poses for them, and the final images are stunning. In one, Clara faces the audience, dressed in her “slutty dress,” as she calls it, since it is the sort of thing
her church would judge her for wearing (Fig. 17). Black with cut outs, it fits her beautifully, highlighting a young woman who is coming into power as a fully-fledged human being, physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and sexually. Flanking her are Ari and Macie with their backs turned to the camera, denying the viewer a complete look at them. Clara, the one face we see, is enigmatic and confrontational. Getting something past these three will be no easy feat as they are very aware and prepared to assert themselves. In another image, Ari looks directly into the camera while sitting on a church pew; in the background, we see Macie and Clara seated as well, displaying gestures of both defiance and annoyance. Ari’s face confronts the viewer and seems to ask a million questions, all of which (to me) start with, “So, why are you so threatened by women?”

In addition to the photos, The Bereans features texts of actual quotes from Ari, Macie, and Clara. Clara penned the quote that always seems to elicit an uneasy chuckle from viewers, “Purity Culture: Nasty, manipulative, woman-controlling, patriarchy. And creepy dads.” These texts are typed onto fragile sumi paper in small type. The viewer must come close to read the words, creating an intimacy between themselves and these young people who have something to say about the effects of patriarchy on their faith.

Sadly, all six of my collaborators under the age of twenty-five can attest to the devastating effects of evangelicalism and patriarchy on their lives. As Judith Butler says, “The bodies produced through such a regulatory enforcement of gender are bodies in pain, bearing the marks of violence and suffering.” These six beautiful people know deep in their bones this pain. Part of the reason they see what patriarchy is and where it shows up in the church comes from the deep scars within.
“They made me wear a tablecloth over my dress,” says Dymond with a quiet chuckle at the absurdity of it all. She and her mom, Tracey, are sitting at my mother’s kitchen table with myself and my mom. It gets late, but no one wants to leave.

Dymond describes the dress she wore to the homeschool prom. If the phrase “homeschool prom” conjures up a picture of awkward teens dancing to music their moms picked out, then you are on the right track. Dymond’s dress looked like most of the other girls' dresses, but with one major difference; Dymond is Black. I could not help but hear the racial undertones as she described how, in the middle of the dance, she found herself being pulled aside by some of the adults in charge. They told her that her dress was inappropriate and immodest. Their solution: drape a tablecloth around her. Yet, no one else at the dance, specifically the other (white) girls who were similarly dressed, was made to wear a tablecloth.

Dymond is true to her name: a rare gem. Her life has already been tested against tough odds. She continues to battle the effects of hearing loss from childhood as well as systemic racism. She often participates as the only Black girl in homeschool and church spaces. Despite her good-natured smile, she has grit to her. Gentle and generous by nature, she knows her worth and is not afraid to tell people exactly what is what.

Patriarchy controls modesty. Du Mez describes how:

Since the 1960s and 1970s, evangelicals had championed discipline and authority. To obey God was to obey patriarchal authorities within a rigid chain of command, and God had equipped men to exercise this authority in the home and in society at large. Testosterone made men dangerous, but it also made them heroes. Within their own churches and organizations, evangelicals had elevated and revered men who exhibited…rugged and even ruthless leadership…Too often, they had also turned a blind eye to abuses of power in the interest of propping up patriarchal authority. This focus on “rugged and even ruthless” masculinity poses problems for women. Women must submit to male authority, while simultaneously conforming and contorting themselves to fit a
narrow space as subordination directs “femininity.” Additionally, women are held responsible for their own sexuality and that of all the men around them. Modesty means women and girls must be circumspect in how they dress and comport themselves so as not to entice or to arouse. These testosterone-laden men could not be expected to quell their urges; that became the responsibility of the female sex.\(^5\)

Fig. 18. Megan Kenyon, *Modest is Hottest*, 2021, Digital photos on Matte Paper, 9 x 2 feet. Image courtesy of the artist.

While I was never told to wear a tablecloth, I have had my fair share of absurd entanglements with modesty rules that presented themselves in a variety of scenarios. As a younger adult, my parents made jokes about vetoing outfits they might deem scandalous, church camp notices explained requirements for one-piece swimsuits or else T-shirts would be needed to cover the frowned upon two-piece, and the absolute barrage of rules at Bible college that
changed every two years when the handbook got updated. While modesty rules were supposedly
designed to protect young women, the arbitrary nature of how much cleavage, leg, or bra strap
coverage was too much or not enough created shame and dehumanized young girls and women,
preventing them from really being safe.

*Modest is Hottest* (Fig. 18) describes this reality in a series of three sets of photographs.
The first set features my body from shoulders to hips. In four different photos, my hands attempt
different options for buttoning a black shirt, from buttoning all of the buttons for complete
coverage to buttoning only one, leaving a little cleavage visible. Two larger-than-life photos of
my legs in an ochre-colored skirt flirts with the idea of showing “too much” leg. The skirt falls
just above the knee, revealing a credit card taped to my leg, one vertically placed and the other
horizontally placed. In the final three images, my torso shows a mauve tank top. In one, my
fingers rest against the “strap” to show it is the appropriate thickness. In another, I raise my arms,
and my bra is visible.

These modesty rules were enforced at the time I attended Central Christian College of the
Bible. Similar rules were used to put Dymond in the tablecloth or make Clara joke about her
“slutty dress” in the homeschool and church spaces in which they participated. Macie described
how continuously living under modesty rules as a gender fluid person both made them hyper-
aware of others’ judgment and made them feel like they could never truly express their own
personality. Modesty rules became a way to victim-blame before people were even victimized.
The rhetoric was and is that any woman/girl who does not conform to these very arbitrary and
constantly adapting rules of presentation implicitly deserves whatever happens to them.

Modesty conversations and the broader discussions about sexual purity ethics in the
church cause an absolute firestorm of abuse. By making it the girl’s responsibility to keep male
sexuality in check and by fetishizing girls’ bodies through modesty enforcement, a system develops where men emotionally manipulate and sexually abuse anyone born female.

“He started doing things like walking in on me while I was in the shower or coming into my room while I was changing,” says K.H. Her fingers fidget with the blanket covering her lap. Her busy fingers steady her voice as she recounts the story of how she and her mother lived in a women’s shelter for months. Her father, a police officer and security team member at their former church, had been sexually harassing her ever since she hit puberty.

Being raised in a purity and modesty-based culture told her that her body would cause men to sin; she had internalized the abuse as her fault and just part of everyday life. But then, a teacher noticed her difficulty in school. As a bright student, it did not seem normal that K.H. sat and stared at the same page for an hour and got nothing done. As this teacher probed, K.H. opened up to her about what was going on in her life, and for the first time someone helped her admit the truth; she was being abused.

Her mom, A.H., acted quickly by enrolling in therapy, inviting K.H.’s dad. It became obvious to the therapist that K.H.’s dad had no intentions of changing his behavior, and instead, he began to escalate them. The therapist advised A.H. to leave their house at once and to take K.H. to a women’s shelter with her.

Initially church staff believed K.H. and her mom and took steps to remove K.H.’s dad from leadership positions in the church. Over time, the church’s loyalty to patriarchy led the church to limit their support in favor of the male perspective. The church opted not to seek advice on how to handle or even just to understand abuse. K.H. found herself ostracized from friends she had known for most of her life, and K.H. was even blamed by the pastor at her church for breaking up her parents’ marriage.
Between the time that K.H. first disclosed her abuse and now, she has identified the complexities that come from trauma working its way through the body. She battles several autoimmune illnesses that severely limit her ability to get around, much less leave her house. That has not stopped her from sharing her story. As I listened to her on that cold December day, my heart was strangely warmed by the fire in her voice and eyes. Beaten, but not crushed, struck down, but not destroyed, K.H. continues to use her voice to tell her story, calling the church to repent.  

Using prophetic voice and imagination through the incarnational space of The Women’s Chapel comes to rest in word and image. These ideas, based on my research, require the words of the witnesses to be shared not only through their text but in their images. I consider this when I think of K.H. Her current health struggles mean that I have not yet been able to photograph her, but her testimony and her strength of character diffuse through every part of How I Got Over/To the Church in America.
Apostle

Seeing Women, Hearing Truth
Fig. 19. Megan Kenyon, *How I Got Over/To the Church in America*, 2023. Inkjet prints, type on newsprint and sumi paper, wooden pulpit, folio, evangelical women’s testimonies, 8 x 12 x 4 feet.
A spiritual hymn and letters written in the book of Revelation inspire the title of *How I Got Over/To the Church in America* (Fig. 19). In the book of Revelation, Jesus sends seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. Some of the letters contain warnings to churches, others contain encouragement, and still others a mix of both. This opening salvo of an apocalyptic book written to encourage first-century believers inspires and challenges present-day believers to persevere in the face of intense persecution. I play with this idea by showing seven photographs of participating collaborators from *The Women’s Chapel* to inspire and to challenge the viewer.

The seven letters in Revelation all start with the same phrase, “To the angel of the church in…” The word “angel” in Greek translates more accurately as messenger. Meditating on this concept brings to mind the word “apostle,” which also means, “sent one or messenger.” Christian churches often fight over this word with regard to women; the prevailing sentiment says women cannot be apostles. Attempts to erase these apostolic women from scripture continues to occur.

Therefore, in choosing the portraits for *How I Got Over/To the Church in America*, I use the word “apostle” deliberately. The people participating in *The Women’s Chapel* proclaim a message for the church that identifies Jesus as Savior and Lord as they have encountered him. My collaborators and I deliver these messages to actual churches in St. Louis. *How I Got Over/To the Church in America* refers to how these women work to overcome patriarchal oppression in their religious communities in order to come to a more nuanced and liberated expression of their faith. Their messages defy and confront. They boldly drag out into the light what is and what was done in darkness.
In *How I Got Over/To the Church in America*, scale is a vital component. The images and texts rise up the wall, just over twelve feet in total height in a salon-style arrangement. The seven portraits of women in the group are each nearly two square feet, and the images of pulpits bearing messages to churches are eighteen inches by twenty-four inches. The large scale shows importance, each image taking up physical and spiritual space while speaking a valuable
individual message, but not drowning each other out. Though the images take up space a sense of stillness hovers from each portrait; each woman having said something and left it to linger in the air (Fig. 20).

I met with each woman individually in the place of her choosing. I asked each person to choose a place that made them feel safe, empowered, or inspired. Most places afforded us the opportunity to talk together for a while first to reconnect. This proved to be key in helping people feel relaxed and comfortable with me and with what we were about to do. I used a Minolta Autocord twin lens reflex camera from the 1950s to take the images. Because I looked down into the camera to take the photo, it seemed less intrusive and more conversational. I felt that I could connect better with my subject because I made eye contact without letting the camera get in the way. As I looked in the viewfinder and carefully adjusted for light and focus, I asked each person to give me a message to their church in just one or two sentences. After they spoke, I asked them to hold that phrase and that feeling and look directly into the camera.

Click.

Because I shoot primarily on film, I am selective in taking photographs. Each one becomes much more important to the work since I do not have many to choose from. These images capture the heart and the soul of these women who are not done with Jesus but are very much done being diminished by patriarchy in their churches. Amongst these six portraits sits a seventh: my own. It nods to my more personal work, showing how it is in constant dialogue with my work as a facilitator and as a maker working with others. My image shows me inside of my current church; in that space, I feel safe and empowered. It is important to me that viewers understand that I am active, inside participant critiquing my own contexts.
Three newsprint poems, taken from Bible verses appear in this series (Fig. 22). The original Bible they come from I received as a high schooler; its newsprint pages are yellowed and brittle after fifteen years of use. I create from selected verses, erasing words to create poems.
Printing these found poems on newsprint shows the simplicity and the fragility of this work.

Even if the medium fades or crumbles to dust, the message and words spoken will endure and continue to challenge or encourage.

Fig. 23. Megan Kenyon, *How I Got Over/To the Church in America*, 2023 (detail). Image courtesy of the artist.

These poems pair with three quotes taken from interviews with some of the women in *The Women’s Chapel* (Fig. 23). Using a 1960s manual typewriter I bought as a girl, I type the quotes because the typewriter creates a collective voice, perhaps even an official one, while still being unique. These quotes sit over scanned prints of my own hand, drawing from *Though Your Sins Be as Scarlet/There is Power in the Blood*. I painted my hand with thickly pigmented watercolor in roughly the same shapes that were created by the blood on my hands. To me, it underlines the fact that every part of a woman’s experience is valid and having a body that is not male should not prevent someone from speaking with authority.
The five images of the podium with messages on it indicate each woman’s relationship to the church she confronts (Fig. 24). If the image shows the podium inside the church, it means the space welcomed that woman’s voice and continues to be a space where she feels able to fully express her humanity and agency. If the podium shows a parking lot, it means she tried to speak to leaders or to laity at her church about the concerns she had, but no one listened, or worse, they shamed and excluded her to the point of forcing her to leave the space to protect her mental and spiritual health.

In one image, the parking lot shows the podium with its message closer to the building. The image reveals my mother’s message; one she has spoken over and over to church leaders while consistently being sidelined and told she should learn how to be silent. While she decides if she remains silent or not, her presence as an active member of that church speaks louder than her voice. She wrestles with her role as a woman in a Missouri-Synod Lutheran church when she
is so consistently forced to the sidelines. Other images feature the podium far away from the building. In one image, the paper flies up, revealing the message, “I was screaming out for help, and you pretended not to hear me.” This message is K.H.’s. Though her illness prevents her from being photographed, her words to her church stand as a powerful testament against spaces that ignore abuse and side with abusers over victims.

The podium allows the women to speak to their churches with a level of anonymity and collective voice that protects them from further spiritual trauma. The same podium used in the photographs with the messages to the churches now stands in proximity to the wall art and presents the messages in place of the members of *The Women’s Chapel*. As part of the installation, the podium acts as a symbol of both defiance and welcome.

Fig. 25. Megan Kenyon, *How I Got Over/To the Church in America*, 2023 (detail). Image courtesy of the artist.
A pulpit is a vehicle for communication of the word, and now it speaks our words. A photograph folio sits on the podium and mimics folders that Protestant pastors carry their sermon notes in. The contents are split into three sections: Apologia, Apocalypse, and Apostle, with each section highlighting the voices and experiences of the women (Fig. 25). This silent but loud sermon speaks as a testament to the strength, beauty, and tenacity of those I work with. It honors all that they have shared with me.
Conclusion:

A Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness
One thing is super obvious when looking at *How I Got Over/To the Church in America*; everyone photographed is white. Some of this occurred because of the initial parameters of the project: using only personal friends. While I have a number of friends who are Black and POC, not all of them were able to participate or they did not want to share their experiences. And in the end, this fact might be more telling about Christian patriarchy than anything, because it also is predominately white. If white women in evangelical spaces chose to be the canaries in the coal mine, screaming out about things like sexual abuse and cover-up in the Southern Baptist church, the Dobbs decision to strike down Roe v. Wade, or the January 6th, 2021 insurrection, it should be with the recognition that they were not the first. Black women, indigenous women, women of color, immigrant women, in fact, many women, have been speaking to the destructive power of patriarchy for generations because patriarchy is racist as much as it is misogynistic and sexist.

In my own life, it took the voices of Black women speaking about their experiences of racism, microaggressions, and trauma to open my eyes to what patriarchy is and that it affects me as well. And it took further listening to try to understand that though I may be a victim of patriarchal oppression in the church, I still retain a great deal of power and agency simply because of my class and my race. Dymond’s mother, Tracey, spoke this to me to help me understand.

A beautiful woman, inside and out, she bears a heart full of joy despite many personal losses in recent years. She came to see *How I Got Over/To the Church in America*. I watched her as she turned the pages in the folio, murmuring over the things she read. Looking at her standing behind the podium, I found myself struck by the fact that if it seems impossible for me to have agency to be allowed to speak in white evangelical spaces, it is actually impossible for her.

As an intelligent, educated, Black, Christian woman, this should not be.
C.O. unfortunately could not come to the show. Currently in her early 70s, she lives in Indiana and cares for her husband who is in his 80s and has a complicated heart condition. I got to see her briefly in February of 2023 as she shared some of the dark and deep traumas of her childhood. C.O. never felt she had a voice to speak up because that’s not what “good little girls” in church did. She deeply loves Jesus and is a faithful and active church goer even though scars of abuse remain. She gripped my arm and looked right into my eyes and spoke words of prophecy and prayer over me as I told her about *How I Got Over/To the Church in America*. I felt chills run through me in a way I seldom do; she spoke with Jesus’ authority, one born out of weakness, in lowliness and love, and I wept later thinking about how such a powerful and patient person often gets pushed to the sidelines by people who think serving God is about maintaining power and gaining position.

I recently talked to a college friend, S.C., over the phone. As a theologian, she often filters her theology through being a pastor’s wife and a mother with two small children living in rural Indiana. Every day she cares for her home and her children primarily alone while attending many doctor’s appointments. We talk a great deal about *The Women’s Chapel*, virtually through video sharing apps, to accommodate both our crazy schedules. One day, I got a message from her. I had sent her a video, describing my ideas for this text and for the piece, *How I Got Over/To the Church in America* and how I wanted to create an incarnational space fashioned through the sharing of life and testimony with each other. As I watched her walking with her boys, she said in response, “What you are describing is church, Megan. It is what the church is supposed to be.”

A lot of work needs to be done to help women like Tracey to not experience both racism and misogyny in the church, like C.O. to not have to hide in the past using giftings under shame.
or silence, like S.C. to not feel alone in their work as a theologians, wives, or mothers. Work needs to be done to dismantle patriarchy in evangelical theology, to disrupt the ways in which those ideologies get marketed out to other spaces. Women’s voices need to be heard in pulpits and behind podiums, in elder’s meetings and board meetings, as well as in the pews on Sunday mornings. Work needs to be done to make reparations for those who have been crushed under the weight of spiritual abuse and neglect, especially for those who are already at risk of marginalization due to gender identity, sexuality, class, or race.

There is a lot of work to do, and so I will keep working. I will continue to grow in my use of prophetic imagination, to use grief to call bad actors out into the light, and to hold them accountable for what they see, hear, and turn away from. I will continue to meet with and create incarnational space with my group, The Women’s Chapel, and hopefully the space will become a sanctuary of community and witness that blesses more than just the people participating. I will keep working, keep speaking, keep making, and keep photographing until it is finished, knowing that it may not happen in my lifetime. My hope is built on the promise that Jesus is not patriarchy, and so what is now does not always have to be.
With the repeal of Roe, the attacks on transgender health, and the unending debates over “wokeness” or CRT, evangelical causes are increasingly impacting secular life and politics.
American evangelical Christianity is not held together by shared theological beliefs but by shared cultural ones; writer and cultural critic Skye Jethani dubbed this “crotch Christianity,” where Christian theology and faithfulness is determined by adherence to conservative beliefs about gender, sexuality, race, etc., and not traditional theological doctrines. Because of this, so-called fringe groups or leaders can now partner with mainstream Christian celebrities because they share a common cause in relation to LGBTQ issues or are both pro-life, even though their theological commitments are basically incompatible.


3 I designed a qualitative survey for the purposes of intake for The Women’s Chapel, my collaborative project that utilizes evangelical women’s testimonies. I used this survey to both assess people’s understandings of key terms in my research and to facilitate the creation of interview questions for each participant as I met with them one-on-one. Twenty-two women in total have taken the survey, and eighteen responded “yes” to the question mentioned here.


5 Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, 45.

6 Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, 42.

7 Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, 46.

8 Diane Langberg, Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press), 92-94.

9 Meleko Mokgosi, studio visit at Washington University as part of the Freund Fellow program, October 2021.

10 The Women’s Chapel Participation Form, November 14, 2021.

11 The Women’s Chapel Participation Form, November 14, 2021.

12 Many thanks to Heather Bennett and her class “Art and Feminism”! Her passion for feminist art history and her passion for empowering her students made this class one of the best I have ever taken at any university and helped me feel comfortable calling myself a feminist artist.


14 Princenthal, Unspeakable Acts, 11.
Very grateful to Cheryl Wassenaar for asking this question in critique and for all her questions in studio visits that have helped me to challenge myself and my work! Cheryl asks some of the best questions, questions that make you pause and reflect and give you a lot to consider even after you answer. She is a very generous professor, and I’m grateful to have had the opportunity to work with her!

Christian uses of the term “deconstruction” differ some from philosophical uses. It generally refers to the process of taking apart received teachings and lived experiences to see if one can salvage anything of one’s faith. It is not a term I like using, as I will detail further on in the text.


Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, 45.

Eternally grateful to Monika Weiss for introducing me to Nan Goldin’s work and activism! Monika has given me the names of many artists and thinkers over the course of my two years at Washington University, and without her challenging and encouraging me I would not have accomplished the amount of growth I did during my time in grad school!

Goldin’s work often features drag queens, sex workers, gay and lesbian friends, and even herself in sexual or violent situations. She also is becoming recognized now for her work as an activist with the group she started, P.A.I.N, to try to get justice for victims of the opioid crisis, all of which is beautifully and heartbreakingly displayed in the documentary about her life and work, All the Beauty and the Bloodshed.

All the Beauty and the Bloodshed, directed by Laura Poitras (2022; Neon).


Purity rings became popular in the late 90s and early 00s as a way to visualize one’s commitment to sexual abstinence. I received mine as a gift in 2001 on my 12th birthday when I made a promise to “save myself for my future husband.” The ring now symbolizes to me my commitment to love myself enough to not settle out of fear of loneliness or the desire to conform to the popular doctrine that makes marriage/babies the end goal of womanhood. WWJD stands for “What Would Jesus Do…” This phrase became popular in evangelical culture when I was a child, and the bracelet I wear is one I’ve had since before 2000.
I often find the work of the Bible Project to be invaluable, as they provide tools for understanding scripture in a less toxic or evangelical way. Tim Mackie, “Isaiah and the Suffering Servant King,” Bible Project, accessed April 26, 2023, https://bibleproject.com/blog/isaiah-and-the-suffering-servant-king/.

Matthew 11: 28-30: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (New International Version, 2011)

Luke 4:4-21: “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” (New International Version, 2011)

John 11:20-44: “When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ‘Lord,’ Martha said to Jesus, ‘if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha answered, ‘I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she replied, ‘I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.’ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. ‘The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.’ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.
When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’
When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?’ he asked.
‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied.
Jesus wept.
Then the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’ But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’
Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ‘Take away the stone,’ he said.
‘But, Lord,’ said Martha, the sister of the dead man, ‘by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.’
Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’
So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.’
When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go.’” (New International Version, 2011)


29 Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 295.

30 John 11: 35-44.

31 People like Mark Driscoll, Ravi Zacharias, C.J. Mahaney, Doug Phillips, Doug Wilson, and Jon Piper, just to name a few.


33 A perfect example of this is the apostle Paul’s description of Jesus in Philippians 2.

34 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 22.

35 I am deeply indebted to Marie Griffith for her class on abuse in the church and for the many in-class discussions to help work through so many of the nuances and heavy topics that come up when discussing spiritual and sexual abuse in Catholic and Protestant spaces. Marie is so skilled at generating discussion and really listening to and letting students lead in those spaces. My time in her classes fueled so much of the work and research for this paper and a variety of pieces I completed while in grad school, and I can never say thank you enough for that!

On that day, I expected we would all look at everyone’s images, have some conversation about them, and I’d do some very straightforward conversing on art and how to talk about it. What I didn’t think to prepare for was emotions; quite a few times, the women started to cry or to get angry as they shared their images and talked about the meanings behind them for them. I underestimated the deep impact sharing stories through images had on the ladies of my group, and that makes me excited thinking about ways I can continue this work in the future.

J. P., from a conversation during Women’s Chapel group critique, October 15, 2022.

During the writing of this paper, my mother and her friends perfectly described what church ought to be: walking with a friend dying of cancer as she laid in hospice. My mother told me about the many moments in which her friend Elaine would start to cry because she was scared and how she encouraged her with words and touch and even scripture and singing. To me, that is the most beautiful picture of what doing church ought to look like; there for celebration and for walking through the valley of the shadow of death.


Growing up in conservative Christian circles, people taught me to view feminism with a great deal of suspicion and superiority. Church leaders, homeschool speakers, and even friends and family members were grooming me to not trust any woman who sought her worth outside of marriage and raising children. For quite a long time in my life I thought I would grow up, get married, have seventeen children, and live as a missionary in Africa, and that would make me the best kind of woman and Christian. I knew some feminist names, but Jane Fonda is probably the only one I really could identify, as I’d seen some of her films and knew about her career as an activist. I used to joke that I had a tiny feminist in my soul named Jane Fonda, who would raise up an objection when I saw something that seemed unfair to women. Strangely, I do not think I would call myself a feminist today if it weren’t for Fonda and her sharing in documentaries, as they lead me to other feminist artists who eventually helped me to redefine my life, my work as a theologian, and my art practice. By engaging with feminist artists, I learned to not be afraid of feminism and to see how necessary many of the frameworks of feminism are to my community. I no longer see a hierarchy in terms of what women choose to do with their lives; to be out in the world working is just as valuable as to be a stay-at-home mom. I also see a great need to show people how feminism and Christian doctrine are not incompatible teachings as a way to combat patriarchal power in church spaces.

So many voices spoke into my life and my practice during my time at Wash U, but Lisa Bulawsky holds a special distinction as she knew me and my work before I even applied, and she saw potential in who I was and what I was doing then. I met Lisa over Zoom during a portfolio review event, and she was generous with her time and her comments on my work. It was the same when we later had an interview during the acceptance process, and she was one of the first to hear my ideas about using socially engaged practice and about doing work in relation to women and the church. She also has been key in challenging me to get specific, to not be afraid to use my voice and speak up for myself, even outside of my thesis work. I’m so glad to have been chosen to be a part of this program, and to have made good on what she saw in me back in October 2020.
Acts 17:10-15: “As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible” (New International Version, 2011).

Sheila Gregoire and Rebecca Lindenbach recently completed an extensive research study on the effects of modesty messaging for teen girls and the outcomes over time, and the results are chilling. They detail things like how girls who receive modesty messages are 25-50% more likely to experience vaginismus during intercourse and are 1.68 times more likely to be in a sexually abusive marriage. Their book, She Deserves Better, details this research but was not available at the time of the writing of this text. I am grateful they choose to share some of this work through their blog. Sheila Gregoire and Rebecca Lindenbach, “Here’s the Data on Why We Need to Stop Calling Girls Stumbling Blocks.” Bare Marriage, March 29, 2023, https://baremarriage.com/2023/03/heres-the-data-on-why-we-need-to-stop-calling-girls-stumbling-blocks/.

At the time I attended Central Christian College of the Bible, the student handbook stated that with girls’ skirts, there had to be a credit card’s length between your knee and the hem of the skirt. It did not state if the hypothetical credit card is vertical or horizontal. I asked the then Resident Director which was the correct orientation, and she scoffed at me, clearly offended that I would assume it to be vertical when they “clearly” meant horizontal. I muttered something about that not being clear at all, since the handbook (which I had to sign off on as part of my student covenant) never stated which orientation was preferred.

It’s worth noting that I attended from 2013-2016, at which time the rule was that with skirts, there had to be a credit card length between the end of the skirt and the knee. As of 2021, the rule is now that skirts must fall just below the knee.
For some of these stories I have redacted names down to initials to preserve a level of anonymity. I received written and oral permission to share stories from all the members of my group, but some of the stories they told are quite sensitive, and in an effort to protect and honor them, I have at times shielded their names.

K.H., interview follow-up to participation form, December 1, 2021.

2 Corinthians 4:5-9: “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (New International Version, 2011).

The Book of Revelation is a letter that was sent to seven ancient churches in Asia Minor (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea). The number seven is an important one, as it signals completeness in most Biblical literature. Jewish apocalyptic tradition uses symbols and numbers to convey its message and meaning, so the Book of Revelation should not be thought of as a predictive text for the end of the world. Readers are meant to look up the various other biblical texts to understand what the symbols mean. The individual letters addressed to the churches deal with issues like apathy, moral compromise, flaunting of wealth and status, as well as encouragement for churches struggling under violent persecution. All of the letters serve as a warning that things are about to get worse, and each of the churches must choose between compromise and faithfulness. Theologian and Hebrew Bible Scholar Tim Mackie created an excellent video unpacking all this and more. Tim Mackie, “Revelation 1-11,” BibleProject, accessed April 12, 2023, web video, https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/revelation-1-11/.

Revelation 2-3 contains all seven letters. Here is an example from Revelation 3:1-6:

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for...
they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (New International Version, 2011).

60 While this is pretty common knowledge in Biblical and Theological studies, I found this article to be helpful in mapping the use of the word and demystifying spiritual beings in general: Cheree Hayes, “What Does the Bible Say about Angels and Cherubim?” BibleProject, 2023, https://bibleproject.com/blog/what-does-the-bible-say-about-angels-and-cherubim/.


62 I live in St. Louis, as do about ⅔ of the ladies participating in The Women’s Chapel. All of us have attended a variety of physical churches in St. Louis and its surrounding counties.

63 One of the participants sent me this message after we met up, and I think it speaks to the power of incarnational space and what that can do for individuals beyond just creating awareness through art:

“Church is something I’ve been thinking about a lot lately and how church doesn’t really feel like church anymore. It doesn’t feel welcoming. It feels lonelier than ever. Some of that is my stuff, some of that is the side effect of being the wife of a worship leader (everyone knows me but no one really knows me beyond who I’m connected to), some of it is the church I’m at. I find myself going less and less and it being that much more painful when I force myself to go and shake hands with strangers. The closest I’ve felt to church and fellowship lately was meeting for coffee on a rainy day in the greenhouse. I have been wanting to thank you for that. I didn’t expect to talk for almost three hours and I was so thankful for it. Thank you for sharing about your art and your life. It’s been a lonely season of life and our meeting was a pleasant surprise. That felt like church. I’m praying I find more of that in the season ahead. Whether that’s at The Way or elsewhere. Blessings” (Katelynn Armstrong, email communication, March 31, 2023).

64 One thing I struggle with in switching from painting to photography is the rather violent language attached to photography. We shoot people; we capture people’s images; we take their photo.

I did a group activity with The Women’s Chapel group in February 2023, where I had each lady pair up with a friend and practice talking about how they would like to be seen, and then workshop poses to help describe themselves and their stories. Then, I sent them out around Intersect Arts Center to take photos based on the character qualities and poses they workshoped together. When we came back together, I asked them what stood out to them most from the activity, and several of the ladies noted it felt awkward and invasive when they got the camera “too close.” They found themselves very aware of each other’s personal space, which is something I too have found to be awkward when working with others.

I aspire towards pacifism, and so the violent language associated with being a photographer troubles me. I still don’t have a perfect way around this. However, when I watched a
documentary on Vivian Maier, who mostly shot with a twin lens camera similar to mine, I found myself intrigued by the idea that she was less obtrusive and confrontational because the camera was not up in her face, but instead held down at her waist. I found I love the twin lens Minolta for portraits because it feels less aggressive and “in your face” than my 35mm Pentax K1000, or my digital Canon, or even my iPhone camera.

For most, this means a previous church, one they have left or no longer attend, though at least three people in the images currently still attend the church they are speaking to.

I’m asked occasionally why I use the typewriter, and not some other method, to display text in my work. The very simple reason is because it is fun; I bought this typewriter for $5 when I was eleven, and I have used it on and off for writing stories, making newspapers, writing letters to friends, and now for art projects. Each typewriter is unique like handwriting, and the older they are, the more quirky they tend to be.

Another reason is that the mark making feels decisive; you have to really press down on the keys to get them to strike and ink the page evenly enough to read. In moving from painting to photography, I often miss the tactility and gesture of paint, especially when I am using digital cameras and/or editing software. The typewriter allows me to reclaim some of that expressiveness.

The typewriter is also, strangely, a tool of liberation; it allowed more women in the twentieth century to get into office jobs as secretaries. While that did not totally solve issues like pay equity or access to jobs for women, it was a first step. It makes me think of a conversation I had with a pastor once who said the three most important jobs in church were the church secretary, the altar guild, and the banner team, all jobs traditionally done by women in churches. While I think that is still way too narrow of options for service, I do find it fun to use a traditional and nostalgic secretary’s tool in my work.

And last, but not least, is intimacy. The type produced by a typewriter is quite small. Most typewriters can’t accommodate a piece of paper over nine inches wide, so anything I actually type is generally no bigger than a sheet of letter-sized paper. This can be an advantage; small and intimate words draw the viewer in and can make them interact in a deeper way. But sometimes, it is a disadvantage, and so I use high quality scans and editing software to help “blow up” the text to be better legible at a distance or to make more sense in relation to other pieces in an artwork.

Cindy Kenyon, conversation at home, March 17, 2023.

I do not know how I could ever thank Tracey Calhoun enough for her love and patience with me. She has always been very open and honest with me, and even let me paint her in the past! I deeply treasure our friendship and the ways in which she challenges me to be a better woman, a better Christian, and a better artist.

Shaila Costandi is another person I can never thank enough. We’ve been friends since undergrad, and she was the first radical feminist I ever met who was also a Christian. Our conversations, especially over the past two years, have been crucial in developing The Women’s Chapel, and I am so glad she is in my life. One of her boys was born very premature and
struggles with some speech delay. While she had her second son, the doctors gave her medication that caused a blood clot that now, two years later, is still a problem. Even though her life is filled with running back and forth to doctor’s appointments and speech therapy, in-between regular house cleaning, food prep, playing of games, and church activities, Shaila still finds time to help me work out ideas and listen to me when I am overwhelmed. She is one of my greatest friends, and I’m proud to get to work with her.

Shaila Costandi, Marco Polo video conversation, November 2022.

There are so many more I need to thank, but four special groups stand out the most:

1. My family…my parents have been very gracious in supporting my choice to go to grad school, not just with money but also with love, listening, prayer, and always being there to cheer me on. They, along with my siblings, have made it possible for me to not just go to do an MFA but to really get as much out of the experience as I could. But two new additions to our family also get a special shout-out; my niece Betty and nephew Declan. Their births caused me to ask new questions of myself, the church, and the world, and I would not be able to call myself a feminist today if it weren’t for them.

2. The Carver Project Art Reading Group…John Hendrix, Sam and Betsy, Heidi Kolk, Penina Acayo Laker, Bernadette Lamb, and all the undergrads whose names I can never remember have been so wonderful in providing a space where I can dialogue with other Christians and artists about my ideas and get to hear from others about their struggles and dreams! Those conversations and studio visits from various members of the group have been such an encouragement and give me hope for the church in the future!

3. Holy Cross Lutheran Church…especially Pastor Bob and Sarah Bernhardt…I was lost and alone and honestly hopeless about finding a real Christian community to exist in when they invited me to come to church. That first Sunday I went was the first time I felt safe in church in years, and in the eighteen months since then, I have found a community that truly practices what they preach. They too give me hope that it is possible for the church to change and that there are spaces that will hold and empower those of us who are pushing for that change.

4. Last and never, ever least: the people of The Women’s Chapel: Katie, Amy, Jess, Ari, Clara, Macie, Christine, Christina, Gigi, Cynthia, Lauren, Jillian, Katelynn, Rachel, Cheryl, Tracey, Dymond, Brenda, Kylie, Anna, Shaila, Anne, Sarah, April, Alethea, Cassidy, Linda, and Verna. I would never, ever want to tell this story or do this work without them! Their stories, their passion, and their trust infuse every part of the work I am doing right now, and it is the privilege of my life to create work with them and for them.
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Appendix

The Women’s Chapel Survey Data
Below is a tabulation of some of the survey data I collected from participants in *The Women's Chapel*. Since collecting this data, four more people have taken the survey. There are also five women participating in the various activities or sharing things privately with me that I consider to be a part of this group but are not reflected in the data. This is a loose qualitative study, utilizing personal friends or relationships, and was created more for the purposes of intake and generating interview questions than hard data. Also, only a selection of questions are presented here; several of the questions asked on the survey were short- or long-form answer and were not intended for the purpose of collecting data points. This data should be seen as a reflection of the experiences and make-up of the group.

The Women’s Chapel Google Survey Stats as of June 5, 2022:

Demographics:

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Race:
White: 16    Black: 2

Gender Identity:
Female: 16    Non-Binary: 1    Gender Queer: 1

Sexual Orientation:
Straight: 12    Bisexual: 2    Asexual: 1    Demisexual: 2    Queer: 1

Marital Status:
Single: 9    Married: 6    Divorced: 2    Engaged: 1

Church Affiliation:
Lutheran: 3    Restoration Movt: 4    Baptist: 1    Non Denom: 7    Presbyterian: 1
No Longer Attending/In between churches: 2
Pick one that feels true for you:
18 responses

- 72.2%: I've been a Christian my entire life
- 27.8%: I became a Christian as a teenager/young adult
- 12.2%: I became a Christian as an adult
- 8.3%: I was a Christian, but no longer identify as one
- 1.1%: I am not now and have never been a Christian

Pick the one that matches closest your personal experience:
18 responses

- 77.8%: My church experience is all positive
- 22.2%: My church experience is mostly positive, but some negative
- 4.4%: My church experience is mostly negative, but some positive
- 1.1%: I have little to no experience in church
- 1.1%: I prefer not to say

Pick one that matches closest to your personal experience:
18 responses

- 61.1%: I was taught that it is wrong for women to lead anything in church
- 16.7%: I was taught that women can lead in some areas in church, but never preach from pulpits
- 16.7%: I was taught that women can lead in all the same areas as men in church
- 1.1%: I was not taught anything about women’s roles or place in church service
- 1.1%: I prefer not to say
Pick the one that feels most true:
18 responses

- I feel empowered to lead in any ministry at my church (27.8%)
- I feel discouraged in my attempts to lead at my church (38.9%)
- I have never wanted to lead in my church in any way (27.8%)
- I prefer not to say (1.1%)

Pick one that feels most true:
18 responses

- I feel supported by my church; they accept me for who I am and what I do (33.3%)
- I feel attacked by my church; they actively harass me for who I am and what I do (16.7%)
- I feel abandoned by my church; they shun me for who I am and what I do (44.4%)
- I feel my church is ambivalent; they don't seem to care or not care about who I...
- Not applicable or prefer not to say (1.1%)

Pick the one that feels most true:
18 responses

- I am very familiar with the Bible (100%)
- I am a little familiar with the Bible
- I am not very familiar with the Bible
- I have never read or heard the Bible
- Prefer not to say
Pick the one that feels true:
18 responses

- 55.6% I know a lot about church history
- 27.8% I know a little about church history
- 11.1% I only know a little church history about my denomination
- 11.1% I know very little church history
- 11.1% I don't know any church history
- 0% Prefer not to say

Pick the one that fits your experience:
18 responses

- 44.4% I have seen many women pastors preach
- 11.1% I've seen a few women pastors preach
- 11.1% I've seen one or two women pastors preach
- 11.1% I've never seen a woman preach
- 33.3% Prefer not to say/not applicable

Pick the one that fits your experience:
18 responses

- 16.7% I wanted to lead in my church and was encouraged and equipped to do so
- 11.1% I wanted to lead in my church, was encouraged, but not equipped or help...
- 11.1% I wanted to lead in my church and was equipped, but discouraged from certai...
- 27.8% I wanted to lead in my church, but was discouraged from and not equipped in...
- 11.1% I never wanted to lead in my church
- 27.8% Not applicable or prefer not to say
Pick the one that fits your experience:
18 responses

- My church/church-related school/para-church organization prioritized modesty (50%)
- My church/church-related school/para-church organization sometimes talked about modesty (50%)
- My church/church-related school/para-church organization rarely or never talked about modesty
- Not applicable or prefer not to say

As a child or teen, my church/church-related school/para-church organization:
18 responses

- Modesty conversations only focused on and were enforced on the girls (22.2%)
- Modesty conversations focused on boys and girls, but were only enforced for girls (11.1%)
- Modesty conversations focused on boys and girls and were equally enforced (11.1%)
- Modesty conversations never happened
- Not applicable/prefer not to say (50%)

As an college student/adult, my church/church related school/para-church organization:
18 responses

- Modesty conversations only focused on and were enforced on women (11.1%)
- Modesty conversations focused on men and women, but were only enforced for women (27.8%)
- Modesty conversations focused on men and women and were enforced equally (38.9%)
- Modesty conversations never happened
- Not applicable/prefer not to say (22.2%)
When I think about ALL my experiences in Christian spaces, I feel that:
18 responses

- 55.6%: Women and girls were highly valued and treated equal to men and boys
- 27.8%: Women and girls were highly valued, but not treated equal to men and boys
- 11.1%: Women and girls were not highly valued, but were treated equal to men and boys
- 11.1%: Women and girls were not highly valued, and were not treated equal to men and boys
- 11.1%: not applicable or prefer not to say

Three smaller sections are all 5.6 %

My church taught me:
18 responses

- 50%: The best thing a woman can be is a wife and mother
- 16.7%: Being educated/having a career is good, but being a wife and mother is still the...
- 16.7%: A woman can be anything, all roles are equally valid
- 16.7%: My church never taught on women's roles
- 11.1%: Having a career is best, being a wife o...
- 11.1%: Not applicable/prefer not to say

In Christian circles I feel:
18 responses

- 27.8%: Less-than because I am not married a...
- 16.7%: Less-than because I am married, but...
- 11.1%: Less-than because I am not single an...
- 11.1%: Less-than because I am divorced
- 11.1%: Less-than regardless of role
- 11.1%: Supported in being a wife, but not in b...
- 11.1%: Supported in being a wife and being a...
- 11.1%: Supported in being single

▲ 1/2 ▼
When in my church, I feel that sex is:
18 responses

- 27.8% Never talked about
- 66.7% Talked about TOO often

When sex is talked about in church, it is:
18 responses

- 50% Presented comprehensively: I feel confident on a range of topics regarding...
- 11.1% Presented one-sidedly: I can confidently relate my church’s positions, but woul...
- 22.2% Presented lazily: Sex is talked about, but I am not confident about what is presen...

When my church talks about sex:
18 responses

- 22.2% Sex is a loving act between mutually consenting adults
- 22.2% Sex is just a biological function done by mutually consenting adults
- 22.2% Sex is a duty married people owe to each other
- 33.3% Sex is dirty and seems degrading, esp...

When my church talks about sex, as a woman/girl, I feel:
18 responses

- Empowered, able to pursue a healthy relationship, and I know how to advocate...
- Burdened, it's up to me to not be a temptation and I feel exhausted by trying
- Burdened, it's up to me to be sexually...
- Confused; I don’t know how to find a...
- Ashamed; I feel like I’ve made mistake...
- Ashamed; someone else hurt me, and...
- Other
- Prefer not to say

If I went to my church’s leadership, I know they would:
18 responses

- Listen to me and take appropriate action/help in anyway they can
- Listen to me, but they may not do anything/may not actually be that helpful
- They wouldn’t listen to me because I’m a woman, I would have to take a male friend/family member to help advocate
- They wouldn’t listen to me regardless of what I do
- Prefer not to say or not applicable

If there was an incident of abuse (domestic, sexual, verbal, emotional), I know my church would:
18 responses

- Protect the victim and hold the abuser accountable, even if it was someone i...
- Protect the victim, but may not hold the abuser accountable if they are someo...
- Try to support the victim, but wouldn’t hold the abuser accountable
- Do nothing to support the victim, would do some things to hold the abuser acc...
- They wouldn’t do anything to support t...
- Prefer not to say, or not applicable
The things I have learned in Christian circles make me feel:

18 responses

- Empowered and confident in being a woman regardless of what I wear or w...
- Empowered and confident in being a woman, provided I dress/act a certain...
- Confused and unsure; I am not confident I like being a woman
- Ashamed of being a woman; I do not f...
- Ashamed of being a woman; I try to fit...
- Other
- Prefer not to say or not applicable

My church taught me:

18 responses

- There are only two genders, and they have specific feminine or masculine roles/characteristics
- There are only two genders, but their roles are fluid
- Gender and roles are a construct
- We never talked about gender or roles
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

I feel:

18 responses

- Confident in my gender identity
- Unsure or confused about my gender
- Prefer not to say
Question: Has your church/Christian school/Christian organization, etc., ever made you feel less than because you were a woman? How did you/how do you respond to that?:

Twelve out of eighteen respondents said “yes,” they’ve been made to feel less than because they are/were a woman.

Question: Have you ever thought about leaving your church or your faith? If you did, please describe why....if you haven’t left, please describe why:

seventeen out of eighteen people said “yes,” they’d considered leaving. Ten out of eighteen considered leaving the faith altogether; seven out of eighteen said they just considered leaving a particular church, not the faith.

Question: Have you ever experienced any sexual harassment or been sexually assaulted? How did you church help, or not help, you?

Thirteen out of eighteen responded that they had been sexually harassed, sexually assaulted, or molested as a child. Three of those responding were church related (abuser was affiliated with the church or abuse happened at church). Breakdown is five molested/abused as children, five sexually harassed, three sexually assaulted.
Question: Do you feel like your experiences in church or church-like settings prepared you well for sexual situations? Why or why not?

**Fifteen out of eighteen responded “no,” the church did not prepare them for sexual situations.**

Question: Do you feel like teachings on modesty gave you more confidence in your body? Or did they make you feel ashamed? Why or why not?

**Twelve out of eighteen people said teachings on modesty made them feel more ashamed about their bodies.**

Question: Have you ever been called out for wearing something or acting in a certain way that someone else considered “not Christian” enough or “not feminine”? Please describe if you would:

**Eleven out of eighteen respondents said they’d been called out for not acting feminine enough or being modest enough.**