

# Editorial: Let's talk about your pew

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I am using your pew as a metaphor, a placeholder for something else. I need you to know that so you can be fully engaged with me from the beginning.

It's a longstanding tradition among churchgoers to sit in the same place in the sanctuary Sunday after Sunday. If attending church services in an old enough building (or in the new building of a church insisting on tradition), then that place is a specific spot on a specific pew. In newer buildings, that place is some form of chair.

Everything experienced during the worship service comes from the vantage point of that seat: the view of the platform and the preacher; the sound of the music; the surrounding people, who also sit in the same place Sunday after Sunday.

With enough time, worship itself becomes tied to that spot, so much so that if asked or forced to move, the inhabitant may undergo a crisis of faith right there in the middle of the sanctuary.

It's true. You've either seen it or done it. So, laugh with me.

On a recent Sunday, some of our extended family attended worship with us. We arrived a little early, before most of the other worshipers, and took up residence on one of the pews.

Two individuals arrived a few minutes later, one sitting next to me and the other sitting just in front. The person in front turned back to the other and said, "You filled your pew this morning." The other replied, "They were

here when I got here.”

As a pastor, I had my pew. It was the front pew, the one no one else occupied other than the pastor’s family, and not because no one dared take the pastor’s pew but because no one else was about to sit that close to the front. I didn’t have any sense of ownership of that pew. Anyone could sit there, but few rarely did.

As a pastor, I tried to challenge people’s possessiveness of their pews. I tried to help them move past tradition to something else. I didn’t succeed.

Now that I’m one of the rank and file church members, I experience pew possession differently—and I see the problem in a way I didn’t before. Rather than a pew being mine, rather than merely tolerating people who must sit in my pew, I can envision where I sit in a whole new way—and so can you.

## **So, let’s talk about your pew.**

What does it mean to call it your pew?

Is it *your* pew? Did you pay for that pew? Is your name on it somewhere? Do you hold title to it? If so, we need to talk about what a church building actually is.

If you don’t hold title to the pew, if it is not adorned with a plaque with your name on it, if you simply call it your pew, then why do you use the possessive pronoun to talk about a piece of furniture in the church?

Is your pew yours and yours alone? Do you stare or glare at anyone—friend or stranger—who sits in your pew? Do you give intruders the silent treatment? Do you take a position at the very end and block passage to anyone willing to sit in the middle of the pew?

Do you see your pew as your property or as your responsibility? How are you using your pew?

Are you using your pew for your own benefit and comfort?

Or are you using your pew to draw others to Christ?

Do you go out looking for people to sit with you? Do you stand at the end of your pew before church starts and invite people to sit beside you?

How can you make your pew the most inviting place in the entire sanctuary for people to join you in worship? What would that look like?

Remember, your pew is a metaphor, a placeholder for something else.

Your pew represents your power, personality and possessions. Your pew represents your time, talents and things. Your pew represents all God has given you—which is everything—to be used for God's glory.

Regardless of how you answer all the questions posed here, one thing remains true. In the end, it's not your pew.

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