

This is the hardest thing I have ever had to do. I am publicly admitting that I took funds from the Presbyterian Church over an extended period. Because of this, on September 11, 2025, my birthday, I tried to end my life. I was so filled with guilt, shame, and grief that I experienced a mental health crisis that made suicide seem to be the best solution. It was only by the grace of God that I failed. Since then, for my safety, I have spent 18 days in a mental health facility and am now taking medicine as well as being in intense, all-day, every-day group and individual counseling sessions.

My husband, children, extended family members, and close friends were in shock and extreme anguish as they found out I had almost succeeded in taking my life. No one had any idea what I had done to the church.

I had not been found out; in effect, I turned myself in. I had prepared a list of account numbers and passwords that I provided to the Church, while still in the hospital, so that my actions could be more easily discovered.

There are, I am finding out through my counseling sessions, reasons why I would do something so horrible, but they are in no way an excuse for my actions.

My guilt came from my taking funds from a church that, individually and as a group, embraced me, showed me love, and trusted me as their church administrator. In my mind, I may have found justification by using most of those funds to help others, such as my deceased son's three children. The weight of what I had done was so unbearably great that my mind deceived me into the belief that my suicide attempt would protect my husband, whom I had recently celebrated our 25th anniversary with, and my adult children, who have all devoted their lives to the children of this community. I could not fathom that my husband would forgive me and stand by me. But he has. I also know that my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, paid the price for my sins and asks for us all to admit our sins, truly repent, and ask for the forgiveness for which he has already given. But that does not free us from the earthly consequences of our actions. I must repay every cent and accept whatever punishment comes to me.

My shame came from memories that had flooded back of abuse by more than one person, that, from four years old to almost sixteen, which was when I was able to go and live with my dad. I will not be graphic, but the abuse included being drugged. At 10 years old, I told my alcoholic mother. She did nothing and said it was my fault. My shame included thinking that I should have done more to stop the abuse of other younger girls in my family. I am trying to follow the example of Christ's forgiveness that Christians are supposed to, by working through the process of forgiving my mother and those who so terribly abused me and altered my life in unimaginable ways. I can also see why it would be hard to grant forgiveness to me.

The grief I have is from caring for my father in our home as he wasted away and died in front of me. Then the unbearable grief of losing our son Christopher to fentanyl poisoning. My oldest son is a cancer survivor who lost his leg and has been extremely sick for the past year.

The reason I chose September 11 was, in my mentally confused mind, the worst day in my life, despite it being my birthday. That was the date when I was nine years old, when my parents separated and then divorced. It was also the day when my husband, Duane and I were on the fourth floor of the US Congressional offices when the planes started crashing into buildings in New York and Washington, DC. Our lives were saved that day by those who fought for control of Flight 93. We saw and felt the Pentagon explosion. We had been just next to the Pentagon the day before. Duane and I were also arm-robbed by a police officer with a machine gun in Russia. Our oldest son nearly lost his life to a rare bone cancer. He had nine surgeries and finally had to have his leg amputated and currently has been suffering from an unexplained illness for the past year. I was in bed for 10 years with migraines and high fevers from an autoimmune disorder. Our special needs adopted son has had behavior towards us that has caused some personal danger. As a city council member, I have had to endure countless death threats (mostly anonymous) and personal insults, even on the topic of my son's tragic death. Some of the threats have included my family. I have even been chased from my car into City Council meetings. My husband has come very close to passing away three times over the past five years. Still, these things may be reasons, but not an excuse for my behavior. There is no excuse.

What I have done in my life to cope has been to become adept at compartmentalizing. I got straight A's and have become the hard-working mother and wife who invested herself into helping others, serving the citizens, and trying my absolute best to provide things like police, fire safety, better road repairs, and housing. That is the person everyone knows. I have hidden away the abuse in a compartment until now. I have tried to block away the grief. I think, for some internal thinking reason, I used this theft as a soothing mechanism, much like the Foster children we have helped or have known who hoarded things or food.

I have been reaching out to the church through the Pastor. I have not heard back yet, other than hearing second-hand that the church may seek charges through the District Attorney. I have heard that someone told the Tribune that they now have a reporter trying to get a story. Here it is...rather than be like many public servants and individuals who try to lie, hide, and delay the consequences of something they have done, I am taking a different path. I am telling the truth and admitting what I have done. There is no reason I should have lived that day other than that I still have a purpose remaining on earth. I believe that it will be to pay the price for what I have done, including paying back every cent I have taken. Most important is that I will use this experience to hopefully stop others from committing the selfish, wrong-minded act of suicide. I will speak to and find ways to help those who have suffered abuse like I did. I will also tell others

of the love, forgiveness, freely given grace, and everlasting life given to those who believe in Jesus Christ and accept him into their hearts.

Lastly, I want to thank my husband, who has upheld his wedding vows and shown the depths of his love for me, which I do not feel like I deserve. Yet he does. And to my three living sons and daughter, who, although hurt, angry, and embarrassed, have shown me forgiveness and love. In writing this letter, I told Duane that I feel like a hard-boiled egg that gets peeled before it is fully cooked. I feel completely vulnerable. Sorry is not a strong enough word to explain the depths of my regret and shame. I do not think anyone can be as angry at me as I am at myself. Counter to holding the compartments of things in my life, I am now opening all the windows. I love our town and, regardless of the outcome, will dedicate my life to making it a better place to live. God bless you all.

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