SHANNON HUNT VAN NYIUS
1994 RHEMA GRADUATE | PASTOR'S WIFE | IOWA

Source Statement Summary

Publication Notice: This document summarizes a named source-provided first-person account from Shannon Hunt Van Nyius, a 1994 RHEMA graduate, pastor's wife, and Iowa resident. It has not been independently verified by Oklahoma Child Wellbeing and is not presented as a finding of fact, accusation of wrongdoing, or legal conclusion. It is published with the source's permission for documentation and public-interest review purposes only.

Source status	Named reporting source: Shannon Hunt Van Nyius
Relationship to subject matter	1994 RHEMA graduate; longtime member of the same church community; pastor's wife in Iowa
Timeframe described	RHEMA graduation in 1994 through the present
Statement type	First-person account and personal observations
Handling note	Names and organizations referenced by the source are retained. The source has authorized publication of her name and identifying role information.

Background and RHEMA Connection

- The source reported graduating from RHEMA in 1994 and described believing from high school that she was called to attend.
- The source reported growing up in the church started by Gary Crowl, whom she continues to describe as “an amazing man of God.” She stated that he was Dean of RHEMA while she attended.
- According to the source, seeing many sincere and godly examples connected to RHEMA while she was young led her to assume that everyone associated with the organization shared the same heart and values.

Longstanding Church and Ministry Involvement

- The source reported that her husband served as an associate pastor for approximately 25 years at the same church she had attended since childhood.
- She stated that the current pastors have served for more than 30 years and are well known within RHEMA circles.
- The source reported that, through decades of ministry involvement, she and her husband gained a perspective on leadership dynamics that many congregants and outside observers may not see.

Community and Family Circumstances

- The source stated that about ten years ago, her husband wanted to leave ministry, but she encouraged him to remain because of fear and practical concerns.

- She reported that they live in a town of approximately 8,000 people and needed to remain close to help care for her aging parents.
- The source described the practical difficulty of leaving long-term ministry work in a small community where work, relationships, and ministry identity may be closely connected.

Leadership Influence and Organizational Concerns

- The source reported that the senior pastor has significant influence within RHEMA-associated circles and beyond the local church.
- She stated that the pastor also serves as pastor for The Family Leader, which she described as one of Iowa's most influential Christian public-policy organizations.
- The source stated that, in her view, parts of the ministry leadership operated similarly to a family business. This characterization reflects the source's personal observation and interpretation of internal leadership structure and culture.

Husband's Departure From Ministry

- The source reported that the mental and physical toll of ministry eventually became too great for her husband.
- She stated that he formally stepped down in April and has since moved into a new job serving hurting people in another setting. She described the transition as difficult but ultimately healthier for him.

Meeting With Leadership Before Leaving

- The source reported that she and her husband met with their pastor in January to provide advance notice of their plan to leave and to avoid placing the church in a difficult position.
- According to the source, much of the discussion focused on why her husband needed to stay because of the responsibilities he carried, rather than on his health, well-being, or reasons for needing to step away.
- The source summarized her experience as feeling that the loss of her husband's labor and help was given greater weight than understanding why he needed to leave.

Concerns Regarding Associate Pastors and Ministry Staff

- The source stated that she believes many associate pastors, staff members, and support personnel may experience similar pressures and may have little meaningful voice within ministry structures.
- According to the source, lead pastors may have access to peers, mentors, or trusted relationships when they are struggling, while associate pastors often do not have equivalent support.
- She stated that staff members may fear being labeled as gossiping, disloyal, or divisive if they disclose concerns, leaving them to carry burdens in silence.

Attempt to Obtain Outside Counsel

- The source reported that her husband contacted Tony Cooke's ministry, noting that Tony Cooke had previously served as an associate pastor at RHEMA, seeking guidance on how to leave ministry well.

- According to the source, her husband was told that their pastor's approval would be needed before anyone could speak with him.
- The source described the response as discouraging and as reinforcing the difficulty associate pastors may face when seeking confidential, independent guidance.

Need for Independent Ministry Support

- The source stated that she believes there should be an independent organization or ministry-support system for associate pastors, church staff, and ministry employees.
- She described the need for confidential biblical counsel, emotional support, ethical guidance, and practical assistance that does not require approval from the leadership structure a person may be struggling under.

Faith Reflection and Personal Conclusion

- The source reported that leaving the only church community she had known for more than 40 years was deeply painful, but she and her husband eventually reached the point where they believed they could no longer remain.
- She expressed gratitude for aspects of her RHEMA experience, particularly the emphasis on walking by faith, while reflecting that she learned many principles as though they were formulas for making life work.
- The source stated that her present desire is to follow Jesus not primarily as a means of obtaining outcomes, but as the model for how to live in the rhythm of His Kingdom.
- She credited her husband with helping her discover a deeper and more personal love for Christ.

Source Purpose Statement

- The source stated that her purpose is not to attack individuals or tear down ministry. She wants to bring attention to the need for independent support, healthy accountability, confidential counsel, and leadership cultures that value the well-being of associate pastors, staff members, and those serving quietly behind the scenes.
- The source emphasized that faithful people who carry burdens in silence deserve to be heard.

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A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO SHANNON HUNT VAN NYIUS

From Tracie Chapman

Handling note: Shannon Hunt Van Nyius authorized the use of her name and identifying role information in this publication. This response is included as supportive correspondence and reflects the author's personal encouragement, not a factual finding or legal conclusion.

Thank you for trusting me with something this personal.

What you shared carries the weight of decades - your faith, your home church, your husband's service, your parents, your community, and the painful realization that the people who depend on staff the most are often the people least protected when they are struggling.

I hear the grief in what you said. Leaving a church you have called home for more than 40 years is not simply leaving a building or a position. It is leaving history, relationships, memories, identity, and the place where you believed you would always belong. That kind of loss is real.

And I want you to know this: your husband stepping away because the mental and physical weight became too much is not failure. Sometimes the bravest and healthiest thing a person can do is admit that they cannot keep sacrificing themselves to preserve a system that is not caring for them in return.

What struck me most was what you said about associate pastors and staff having no real safe place to go. That is exactly the gap that needs to be addressed. Lead pastors may have peers and access to support, but the people carrying the daily weight of ministry often feel trapped between silence, loyalty, fear of being labeled a problem, and the risk of losing everything they know. That is not how the body of Christ should function.

You are not attacking the church by telling the truth about what ministry pressure can do to people. You are giving language to those who have been carrying similar burdens quietly, believing they are alone.

I am grateful that God opened another door for your husband and that he is now serving people in a healthier place. I also love what you said about coming back to Jesus Himself - not just principles, not formulas, not striving for outcomes, but a real relationship with Him and a life shaped by His heart.

That is the part no system should ever take from people.

Thank you for speaking. Thank you for refusing to let silence be the final word. Your story matters, and I believe it will help other ministry families recognize that they are not crazy, they are not disloyal for needing support, and they are not alone.

I am praying that the Lord restores what this season cost you both - and that He uses your voice to create safer places for the people who come after you.

With care,
Tracie Chapman

APPENDIX A

ORIGINAL COMMUNICATION FROM SHANNON HUNT VAN NYIUS

1994 RHEMA Graduate | Pastor's Wife | Iowa

Publication Notice: This appendix reproduces the original written communication provided by Shannon Hunt Van Nyius and published with her permission. It is a first-person account reflecting her own experience and perspective. The communication has not been independently verified by Oklahoma Child Wellbeing and is not presented as a finding of fact, accusation of wrongdoing, or legal conclusion.

Original Communication

I watched both of your interviews on Resistance Chicks, and I wanted to reach out and share part of my story.

I graduated from RHEMA in 1994. I knew I was supposed to attend from the time I was a freshman in high school. I believe God made that very clear to me. I grew up in the church started by Gary Crowl, whom I still believe is an amazing man of God. He was the Dean of RHEMA while I attended. Because I saw so many godly examples come out of RHEMA and I was only 19 years old, I assumed everyone connected to the organization shared that same heart.

Fast forward to today. My husband served as an associate pastor for 25 years at that same church where I had attended since childhood. The pastors there now have served for more than 30 years and are well known within RHEMA circles. Through those years, we were given a view behind the curtain that many people never see.

About ten years ago, my husband wanted to leave ministry, but I encouraged him to stay out of fear. We live in a town of approximately 8,000 people. What else was he going to do? We also needed to remain close to help care for my aging parents.

Our pastor has significant influence both within RHEMA and beyond. He also serves as the pastor for The Family Leader, one of Iowa's most influential Christian public policy organizations. From the outside, everything appears healthy and successful. But like many ministries, much of the leadership functions like a family business.

The mental and physical toll ministry took on my husband eventually became too great. In April, he officially stepped down, and God has graciously provided him with a wonderful new job where he now serves hurting people in a different setting. He absolutely loves it.

In January, we met with our pastor to let him know we planned to leave. We wanted to give several months' notice because we genuinely did not want to leave the church in a difficult position.

Unfortunately, much of the conversation centered on why my husband needed to stay because of everything he was doing rather than concern for his well-being.

It became clear that losing his help was a greater concern than understanding why he needed to step away.

One reason I am sharing this is because I suspect there are many associate pastors and support staff living this same reality. They often have no real voice.

My husband even contacted Tony Cooke's ministry, because Tony Cooke was previously an associate pastor at RHEMA, hoping to receive counsel on how to leave well. Instead, he was told they would need our pastor's approval before they could speak with him.

That was discouraging.

Lead pastors usually have trusted peers they can call when they are struggling. Associate pastors often do not. They cannot easily share concerns with other staff members because doing so can be viewed as gossip. They are left carrying burdens in silence.

I wish there were an independent ministry or organization where associate pastors and church staff could receive confidential biblical counsel and support without fearing repercussions.

Leaving the only church I had called home for more than 40 years has been incredibly difficult. But we reached a point where we knew we could no longer remain.

Today, our desire is no longer to follow Jesus primarily as a means of obtaining results. We want Him to be our paradigm - the One who shows us how to live in the rhythm of His Kingdom.

One thing I will always be grateful for is that RHEMA taught me to walk by faith. But looking back, I do not think I learned nearly as much about simply loving Jesus and growing in relationship with Him. I learned many principles that seemed like formulas for making life work.

Thankfully, over the years, my husband helped me discover something deeper: a genuine love for Christ Himself.

My purpose in sharing this is not to attack individuals or tear down ministry. It is to acknowledge that associate pastors, ministry staff, and those serving quietly behind the scenes often need independent support, safe avenues for counsel, and leadership cultures where their well-being matters as much as their labor.

There are faithful people carrying burdens in silence. Their voices deserve to be heard.

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