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Loving and Leaving a Church: A Pastor's Journey

Barbara Melosh
Westminster John Knox Press (Jul 24, 2018)
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Barbara Melosh's *Loving and Leaving a Church* is a deeply personal memoir that provides fresh insight into the struggles of small mainline congregations in America.

Both a clergyperson and a historian, Melosh writes with skillful attention to detail and forceful anecdotes, working to understand what happened during her first stint in parish ministry. Melosh brought her enthusiasm, excitement, and talents to a small struggling Baltimore congregation, only to find that the congregation wasn't interested.

This is not a new story, but what's fascinating is how thoroughly Melosh is willing to expose and examine that painful and challenging moment in her career and in the life of her Baltimore congregation. The congregation, Saints and Sinners, carries in its name a constant reminder that everybody falls short. Melosh's high hopes and aspirations clashed with the wishes of the congregation, which preferred to keep living in the church of the 1950s.

Melosh details the outreach that fell flat, the unfailing focus on the problematic church building at the expense of other concerns, and the congregation's earnest desire to simply remain in existence. It's all here.

The book's tone is engaging and personal, highlighting the very human aspects of being a pastor in a local parish. Melosh covers the fatigue of her first Easter season, the difficulties of opening her home up at Christmas, and the overriding sense of being "unequipped" to really do the work. There is more to be explored—it is clear that it wasn't lack of training that failed Melosh, but a lack of her congregation's willingness to change. Hidden in the tragedy of missed expectations is a hopeful message about the possibilities of finding faith.

Melosh's is a story that needs to be heard by today's church as it considers how it will become the church of tomorrow.

JEREMIAH ROOD (July/August 2018)

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