

My Turn

Thou Shalt Not Turn Me Into a False Idol

Because I'm a pastor's wife, everyone thinks my life is perfect and they have me figured out. Not so fast.

BY EILEEN BUTTON

MMARRIED A BANKER. I LIKE TO remind my banker-turned-pastor husband of this when we're having a particularly difficult time in the ministry. Although I wouldn't trade his occupation—some would say “calling”—my husband's career choice bestowed on me a title I never bargained for when we walked down the aisle. I am a pastor's wife.

Over the years I have been introduced to others without my first name. Just “the pastor's wife,” as though the label alone is sufficient in describing who I am. “I'm

Eileen,” I gently correct. I usually get the same response. “Oh ... nice to meet you.” As the conversation progresses, I feel their eyes examining me as though something about my stance, attire or aura might confirm that I am, in fact, married to a pastor.

What they seem to be looking for—and what they'll never find in me—is perfection. It is assumed that my children never fight, my husband and I never disagree, my home is always clean for drop-in visitors and my meals are always nutritionally balanced. It is believed that I can, on a moment's notice, whip up a casserole for a funeral dinner or fill in for the pastor. For

them, I am a symbol—a projected fantasy of what it means to live a life of faith—not an actual person. Many prefer to believe the plastic persona rather than get to know the authentic, warts-and-all woman behind the smile.

My new acquaintances will often keep themselves in check, being careful not to swear or make a bad impression. Some actually apologize for their lack of church attendance or relay horrifying experiences from the last church they attended. Aisle 8 of the grocery store always makes for an awkward confessional booth.

With a title like mine, it is easy to feel pushed into a box with the lid closing fast. In an age when Christianity seems to be defined more by a political party than with the life of Christ, I am immediately prejudged. Many assume I agree with the outlandish comments spewed by famous evangelicals, and are surprised (at times offended) to learn what I really think.

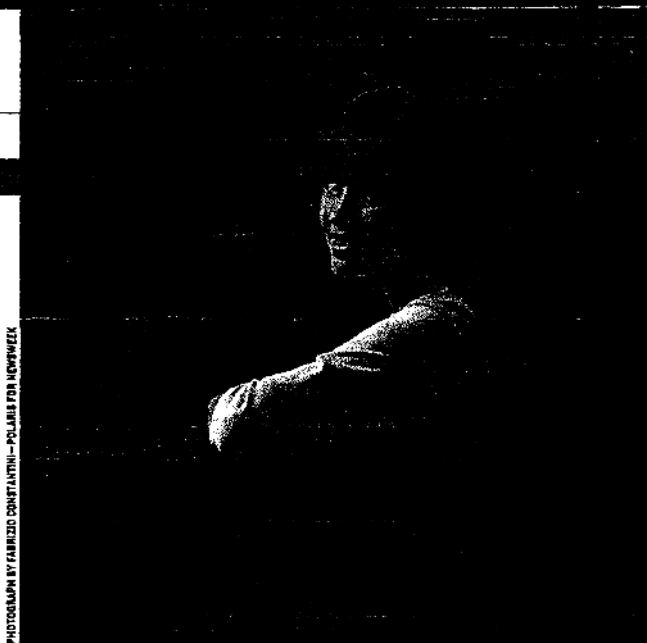
For those who suppose they have me pegged, I'd like to dispel a few stereotypes.

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I don't believe Jesus would be a Republican or a Democrat. I am suspicious of our presence in Iraq and mourn the loss of lives there. I applaud those who may not be churchgoers but whose actions and generosity reflect Christ more than the lifestyles of many professing Christians. I believe God wants for us to prosper, but not necessarily in the way our American culture dictates, and certainly not just for personal benefit.

By the way, I don't wear stockings, pumps or flowered dresses with lace collars. Nor do I don Tammy Faye-style false eyelashes, wigs or sequins. I prefer jeans, khakis and classic T shirts. I don't volunteer in the nursery or children's church (I've had three children of my own; that was more than enough). I don't perform with the music team. With a voice like mine, no one will let me on, and the only song I know how to play on the piano is “Chopsticks.”

However, I try to use the gifts I have been given in the church and commu-



WIFE OF A PREACHER MAN: Acquaintances keep themselves in check, being careful not to swear or make a bad impression

nity as a teacher, writer and friend.

Life in a pastoral family can be unpredictable and intense. Obviously we cannot plan for funerals or 3 a.m. phone calls. We hold our breath as we prepare to go on vacation, and I bite my tongue if our children complain about going to church. I've vowed to never respond to their complaints with “You have to! You're the pastor's kid!” I know all too well the claus-

trophobic feelings associated with the label.

There are those who jokingly suggest my husband has an easy life “since he only works a few hours on Sunday morning.” They have no idea what it takes to lead a church, write weekly sermons, counsel those battling addictions or inspire people to make eternal choices. They cannot imagine the burdens that keep him awake night after night.

It's a responsibility that I share with him now, but I'm still the same person I was before my husband became a man of God.

Some might find my ideas, opinions and loud way of laughing (and snorting) a little incongruous for a pastor's wife. But if you take the time to get to know me, you'll discover a person working through the same faith and life issues as everyone else.

Just don't forget to ask me my first name.

BUTTON lives in Davison, Mich.