

ARE CHURCHES REPLACING ALTARS WITH STAGES?

Pamela Jackson's new novel, On This Side of Heaven, has churches everywhere pointing fingers and asking questions....not only about greed, power, and corruption, but about worship services that may be transforming altars into stages.

Atlanta, Georgia (PRWEB) December 13th, 2006 – On This Side of Heaven, a new novel by Pamela Jackson, explores issues churches historically wrestle such as greed, power, and corruption. But in a timely twist, the book addresses battles churches deal with today, such as urban sprawl, modern relationships, and contemporary music and worship styles.

With Reverend Bob Buck at the helm, the little church in Jackson's novel finds itself poised to ride a wave in a fast-growing and affluent suburban area. As Pastor of the tiny First Covenant Chapel, Buck is hungry to tap into the growing population, but mostly to enlist their monetary help in building a monumental mega church. Buck joins forces with an equally ambitious music leader, Ashley March, whose passionate music and flamboyant performances raise more than a few eyebrows.

Each Sunday the sanctuary in Reverend Buck's little church is transformed into a concert hall, complete with technology such as flat screen TV's, lights, microphones, and a big sound system. As Music and Worship Leader, Ashley sets traditional hymns and instruments aside for pre-recorded CD's or a rock band. While some characters in Jackson's novel are reluctant to embrace these changes, visitors are drawn to the enlivening new services. Reverend Buck welcomes these newcomers...and their money...with open arms. Church services at the First Covenant Chapel quickly evolve into organized entertainment designed to market the mega church project and swaying members to donate, even if Buck has to shed a tear or two.

[Author Pamela Jackson](#) sees and hears about characters like Reverend Buck on a regular basis. Raised in the church by her parents and grandparents, Jackson is concerned that churches are slowly losing a deep-rooted grace that money cannot buy. "In more than a few traditional places of worship, the altar has been completely transformed, or does not even exist. Staged musical productions have shifted the focus from God and the rituals of worship to a pulpit performance, complete with an applauding audience."

Performance-oriented services are not always well received with those who still cleave to God through a traditional style of worship. An Atlanta, Georgia resident, who asked to be named only as "Jill", describes her parents disdain with a shift to contemporary worship style at their Southern Baptist Church. "They got fed up with the dog and pony show that was put on every Sunday. My father was a Deacon in the Baptist Church, but the dramatic productions taking place every Sunday drove them away. They finally found peace and a new church home at a small Episcopal Church, where they appreciate it's preservation of tradition and formality."

Jackson clearly states that the problem is not with any particular style of worship or size of a church, but rather a common mindset of corporate structure of profit and loss -- with some churches in the dangerous arena of holding recruitment and cash flow above all. Once these motives are realized, congregants feel betrayed, ashamed, and wounded -- and may leave the church altogether.

To help heal and support those hurt or alienated by churches, Ms. Jackson has founded a group called RESTORE. This group meets regularly in Alpharetta, Georgia. Pamela says, "I founded the [RESTORE Group](#) to help restore brokenness resulting from wounds created in the church, and to strengthen the body of Christ as a whole."

At the end of On This Side of Heaven, Reverend Buck loses more than just his altar. Readers looking for more of Ms. Jackson's rich characters and page-turning plots will be glad to know that On This Side of Heaven is only the first in a series of novels. The second book in the series, For the Love of Heaven, will be released in 2007. Heavenly Novels are available in bookstores everywhere, or can be ordered online at <http://www.heavenlynovels.com>.

Pamela Jackson is an Atlanta-based writer and speaker. Her first novel, On This Side of Heaven, has received glowing reviews. Pamela lives on a farm outside Atlanta with her husband and their four children. She is a faithful member of Alpharetta First United Methodist Church. To schedule an appearance or engagement, please visit <http://www.pamelajackson.com>.