



INSIDE  
2023 Little  
500 Guide



Former members of Bloomington’s  
High Rock Church allege spiritual,  
emotional abuse

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Editor’s Note: This story includes mention of suicide, spiritual abuse and sexual assault.



Pastor Scott Joseph was worried his congregation was under attack. In response, he spoke to his congregation during a sermon in August 2022, informing them of a website called “Leaving the Network,” along with a Reddit thread of the same name. He claimed these sources were saying “nasty stuff” about the church and its vast network.

Joseph advised members to stay away.

“The reason is, I’m caring for sheep,” Joseph said in the sermon. “If I see them going over to drink from a toxic cesspool filled with leeches, I’m going to say, ‘Hey, there’s a better pool over here. This is a good place to drink from.’”

What Joseph described as a “toxic cesspool of leeches” is an online community of former members, staff and pastors of network churches, including from High Rock. Among them are Tim Reeves, a former pastor at High Rock Church in Bloomington who had been with the church since its inception in 2008; Clint Deck, a former small group leader who belonged to the church for six years; and a young couple, Kim and James, who no longer felt the church could be a safe place for the child they planned to adopt. Kim and James asked not to have their last names listed out of concern that it would affect their relationship with their clients, as they both work in the mental healthcare field.

The emotional pain they describe is long-lasting. For some, the damage is left permanently unresolved, which Clint believes is the case for former member Andy DeYoung, who committed suicide a year after leaving the church.

“I was hurting people,” Clint Deck said as he looked down at his hands. “People were truly looking to me for answers, and I was only supposed to give them the church’s answer. And the church’s answer was hurting them.”

Tim, Clint, Kim and James all claim what they experienced at High Rock was spiritual abuse. Communicating with former members through Reddit and reading testimonies from members of other churches on the website became a part of the healing process as they learned they were far from alone.

As of April 2023, 20 months after the website went live, 27 stories have been posted to the website. The Reddit thread currently has 813 members.

As both sites gained popularity, a consensus grew: the emotional harm former members allege appeared to be rampant throughout the network of churches, a system created and maintained by religious leader Steve Morgan.

SEE HIGH ROCK, PAGE 4

Bloomington's 7 Day Forecast

SOURCE: ETHAN STEWARD | ETHSTEWAY@IU.EDU  
GRAPHICS BY: THE WEATHER CHANNEL

Thursday April 20	Friday April 21	Saturday April 22	Sunday April 23	Monday April 24	Tuesday April 25	Wednesday April 26
82° 55° P: 10%	63° 44° P: 80%	54° 34° P: 60%	50° 34° P: 0%	60° 40° P: 10%	62° 44° P: 20%	65° 49° P: 40%