

Margaret Rogers: Organized religion is one of the greatest tragedies to befall, especially Black people. It's a group. No. That's not exactly what I mean. The church, organized religion could be a great benefit, but we are so greedy. We are using the church for more damage than good. I'll give you a good example.

Margaret Rogers: Three years ago, there was a real big mess here in Wilmington. A minister caused a big ruckus. He wanted a raise, and he was determined to have this raise. Well, the old brother was making \$52,000 a year. Can you believe that? Can you believe it? \$52,000 a year to stand up in a pulpit while your members are starving to death. These people don't have any food. You want \$52,000 a year. Then every time they come to church on Sundays, gimme, lemme, can't you have? No. And then Saturday night I watch him. I watch him in the field right across the street from where I live. Come out of church, reach in the glove compartment and get the liquor flask to start drinking before you leave.

Margaret Rogers: And Mr. John's out with Miss Sally on Saturday night, and then he's in church Sunday morning shouting. Give me a break. No. I know that we have to believe in something and I do. I'm not stupid enough to that man is a superior being. There is something greater than me. I understand that. I believe that. But I believe in loving my neighbor as myself, doing everything I can to help somebody. That's Christianity. Not hating people.

Margaret Rogers: But being in church every Sunday as soon as the church door opens. You can say, "Yes, I attend Ebenezer. I'm a member of St. Luke's." Fine, but what are you doing? The biggest devils are in the church. They really are. They're not out here in the community. And I decided, after watching the minister I grew up with, be asked to leave town because the male members of the congregation said they were tired finding his pants hanging up in their closets. I know he fathered one child who was a member of junior choir along with me. His assistant was drunk, and we picked him up out of our hedges more than one Saturday night.

Margaret Rogers: And then I'm going to go to church on Sunday morning and sit there and listen, and you tell me "Thou shall not commit adultery." Give me a break. And that's when I finally told them. "No, I can read. I know what the Christian religion is about. I know what I should be doing. I will try to live my life that way, but I'll stay out of there." I had one minister here to call me and invite me to his church. And I told him I was sorry. I could not come. I didn't think I would be welcome. And he asked me why. I said, "I had a hysterectomy. And I understand right now, there's 17 young ladies in your church, pregnant and you're father of all of them. So I don't care."

Kara Miles: Wait, you said this?

Margaret Rogers: I said this to the man. Yes, I did.

Kara Miles: What did he say?

Margaret Rogers: "Um, um, um, um—beg your pardon?" Yes I did. Yes I did. I have just seen too much. And then when this man is raising all this sand, because he wants a raise from 52,000 to 57,000, and then stands up in the church and says, "You don't tell me who to ride in my car, even if you are paying for it. I ride who I want to and if I want to ride the young women around, that's what I'll do. And then when I decide to come to church, I'll come to church." No.

Kara Miles: So when did you make this decision?

Margaret Rogers: When I was 16.

Kara Miles: When you were 16. You stopped going to church when you were 16.

Margaret Rogers: I attended sporadically when I was in college because this was something at Fayetteville State at one particular time we had to do. Okay? But I found a way to get around that too.

Kara Miles: How did you get around that?

Margaret Rogers: I got up every Sunday morning and I rolled my pajamas up above my knees. I put on my coat, my hat, gloves. I put on stockings and heels and I went to church. And I came back and I got around having to go and stay a long time. I went to a Catholic church. I'm not Catholic. I went to Catholic church because that was one hour. But we had to have on those heels, hose, hat and gloves. So I put all that on over my pajamas and I went to Catholic church and came back and took it off. Yeah.

Margaret Rogers: But after I got out of college, I can't do it. I'm not a hypocrite. I'm really not. If I don't like something, I don't have anything to do with it. That includes people. If I don't like you, I just, "Hello, how are you?" and I keep going. I cannot see sitting. I have watched them, shouting up and down the aisles in the church and come outside. Before they leave church grounds, they're fighting, on the church grounds. And elderly Black women fighting on the church grounds on Sunday is one more comical site You hear? So I just stopped. I just simply stopped going. I just stopped going.

Kara Miles: Were your parents big churchgoers? Did they [indistinct 00:05:37]?

Margaret Rogers: Oh yes. Yeah, they did. And I was brought up in the church. I had my first Easter speech when I was three, which I still remember. And I went to Sunday school. I went to church. I went to BYPU. I went to every vacation Bible school at a Black church in this city in the summer. So I went to school all year round. We went from church to church to Bible school all the time. I did. I grew up in the church. I read the Bible from Genesis to Revelations and backward. I had to take correspondence courses, Bible correspondence courses. I was a member of the usher board. I was a member of the junior missionaries. I was in the junior choir. If it was connected with the church, I was in it. And if I didn't go to church on Sunday, I could not go outside. I had to stay in the house because I was too sick to go to church.

Kara Miles: So did you do all of this, I mean, when you were involved in the church, was it because you wanted to please your parents?

Margaret Rogers: No, this was what my parents wanted me to do. And during that time, you did what your parents wanted you to do? It was that particular time. But when I had children, as my children grew up, I did not force them. If a child of mine wanted to go to church, I got up, I helped them do everything they had to do to go to church. I did not tell them, "You're going to church on Sunday." No. I let them make their own decision about that.

Kara Miles: Did any of them start going?

Margaret Rogers: Yeah. Yes. And I have two who sang in church choirs. Yeah.

Kara Miles: So when you were 16 and you said you weren't going to church anymore, how did your parents react to that?

Margaret Rogers: My mom was very upset and she was much more upset because she found it out when I told the pastor, and I told the pastor in the church office when I gave him the Bible back that they had given me for graduation.

Kara Miles: And you said to the pastor?

Margaret Rogers: Yes, that I can't continue to do this. I know all about the adultery. I know about the child who was pregnant for you. Because she lived right around the corner. So he would bring us home after choir practice. It was always, "Don't worry about the children, daughter, I'll be glad to bring them home after. You know I'll see that they get home." And I knew. So I always had him to bring home first. "Take me home first." He says, "Well, I have to go." "No, take me first. I have something to do. I have to go home first."

Margaret Rogers: So I'd get him to take me home first. Then he took everybody else home. And then the next thing we knew, the young lady was pregnant and she admitted it was his. Then after several husbands became suspicious of the minister with their wives and found out that was true. In fact, he got caught running down the street one night in his underwear because he didn't have time to get the pants.

Margaret Rogers: No, I'm not doing this. I'm just not doing this because I couldn't sit there. I just couldn't sit there. And I knew I wasn't going to sit there in church. I had enough respect for the church not to sit there and be rude. So I just stopped going. And I was graduating from high school so that was the end of that anyway. I wasn't going to be there. So since I had moved back, they have asked me to come back and I said, "I don't think so." Especially when their present minister said that he was voting himself a raise and there wasn't anything they could do about it. He had their minds and if they tried to do anything to him, he would see that they were cursed. I said, "And you want me to—?" No.

Margaret Rogers: No. So I don't. I do not attend. But there was a record out in the seventies that was

boycotted and it said that Black people blame the other people for the system because we don't have a system of our own. The only thing we really have is what our grand forefathers left us. And that was a hallelujah church. And that's really basically what it is. And they don't use it correctly. They don't.

Margaret Rogers: And I just got tired of seeing the hypocrisy. I really did. And I don't think that religion is anything to play with and I can't see it, doing it the way they do it. So I stopped going. But I feel if that's your choice, that's fine. I feel it's a disservice to Black people. I really do. Because we don't think. The people who are really really into the church, if the minister tells them to jump off of a bridge, no other reason except Reverend Jones said do it, they'll do this. You are no longer thinking for yourself. You're letting somebody else do your thinking and that's wrong.

Kara Miles: Now, you were involved, though, in civil rights activism and churches were very heavily involved in that.

Margaret Rogers: They were.

Kara Miles: From Martin Luther King on.

Margaret Rogers: That's true.

Kara Miles: How did you?

Margaret Rogers: How did I relate to that? Yeah. I looked at the church as, quote-unquote, a plant, the building. You can always meet in a Black church. Black church is one place in the community where everybody can gather. I did not look at it as the Black church having an involvement, although Martin Luther King did start this more or less. Yeah. I'm not too pleased with Reverend Jesse Jackson though. And if he becomes president, I will immediately give up my citizenship. I'm moving to Switzerland. I think we—