

Vineyard churches get new leader

The man who guided the Vineyard movement through the transition period that followed the 1997 death of its longtime leader, John Wimber, has stepped down. Todd Hunter announced his resignation May 3 as national director and board president of the 500-member Association of Vineyard Churches, a post he assumed in January 1998.

Hunter, who said he never intended to carry Wimber's mantle, plans to return to the pastorate, likely in California. Before taking on wider responsibilities, he had planted the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Wheeling, .

"If someone is to be an authentic follower of Jesus and pursue the 'pearl of great price,' they may be called upon to risk it all," Hunter, 44, said upon his announcement, which went out to Vineyard pastors via e-mail. "My dream is to be a church-planting missionary to postmodern generations."

The Anaheim, AVC National Board "regretfully" accepted Hunter's departure, naming Berten Waggoner as acting national director. Waggoner, pastor of the Vineyard Church

of Sugar Land, Texas, immediately called upon church members to fast and pray.

The AVC grew during Hunter's tenure. The group planted new churches and focused on ministry to younger people, unraveling its reputation as an exclusively baby boomer fellowship. "Todd

did a great job of taking us to the next step," said Kevin Springer, pastor of Desert Springs Vineyard in Palm Desert, Calif. "He is a great pastor and has a great burden to reach this next generation."

Though Hunter is relinquishing his leadership duties, he is not leaving the Vineyard movement. "He [Hunter] is impeccable in terms of his character," Waggoner said. "He really just came to the conviction that he needed to be in the field."

Waggoner, 57, has been a Vineyard pastor since 1989. Before that he was affiliated with the Assemblies of God.

To be deliberated under Waggoner's watch is whether or not AVC should have an active pastor as leader or a full-time administrative top gun. Either way, Waggoner said he is not interested in the permanent post. Wimber had been a pastor and association leader. Hunter took on a full-time administrative helmsmanship.

Hunter was the second person to head AVC—the other being Wimber, who became its leader in 1979.

"We will go on and continue to grow, but the leadership will be different," Hunter said. "It's like a powerful rocket that gets the shuttle off the ground. Once it takes off, it shifts to different guidance systems."