

Megachurch Pastor Matt Chandler Steps Aside After 'Inappropriate' Online Relationship

The Village Church Lead Pastor Matt Chandler announced Sunday during a church service that he was taking an indefinite leave of absence from preaching and teaching after he revealed that he had an inappropriate online relationship with a woman.

During his few minutes on stage, Chandler said that the relationship was not sexual or romantic, but that the church eldership was concerned about the frequency and familiarity of the messages between he and the woman on Instagram.

Chandler, 48, said he was in total agreement with the elders' decision to have him step aside for a while, but that he is "the lead pastor of this church, and I plan on being the lead pastor at this church for the next 20 years."

Chandler has been the lead pastor at The Village Church since 2002.

The Village Church is a large and influential Southern Baptist congregation in Flower Mound, Texas, in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area. Chandler has also been president of the church-planting network Acts 29 since 2012. The Southern Baptist Convention has been embroiled in scandal and controversy itself in recent months.

In his announcement to the church, Chandler explained his "relationship" with the woman in question:

"Several months ago, a woman approached me outside in the foyer. She had some concerns for how I was messaging on

Instagram with a friend of hers. I didn't think I had done anything wrong. My wife knew about it, her husband knew about it. But there were a couple of things that were disorienting in the things she said to me. I immediately came to the elder leader board and told them this is what this person just told me, and then I went home and I told Lauren this was what was said to me.

"They looked into the relationship with me and this other woman, and they had some concerns. They were not that our messaging was romantic or sexual. It was that our conversations were unguarded and unwise. I don't ever want there to be secrets between you and me.

"The concerns were about frequency and familiarity. We believe in brother-sister relationships. Yet there was a frequency that moved past that, and a familiarity that played itself out in coarse and foolish joking, something unbecoming in my position as a lead pastor and elder. I am held to a higher standard and I felt short of that higher standard.

So, the elders have decided, and I think they are right, that my inability to see was I was in probably reveals some unhealth in me. I agree with them. So, in their grace to me and my family, they have decided, and again, I think they are right, to put me on a leave of absence starting immediately from preaching and teaching at The Village Church.

"First of all, I'm really embarrassed. I feel stupid. I feel dumb. I feel like I'm embarrassing my wife and kids, putting a ton of pressure on the staff here. You might be hearing this, you might not even be a Christian, and you might be saying, 'What the H?' But the Word of God holds me to a certain standard. And I fell short. I'm apologizing to my family, to you, to everyone involved in this situation.

"I love the level that our elders engaged in this. Do you know how easy this would have been to make it nothing and let me

not address whatever this is. Super grateful that the elders have loved us and walked with us the way they have. I'm super grateful for you. I'm super hopeful for what's to come in the future. But I need to breathe and that's both discipline and development. Forgive me, I love you. I'm eager for what's ahead of us on the other side of this."

Acts 29 released this statement Sunday:

"Matt Chandler, who serves as President and Chairman of the Board of Acts 29, recently notified Acts 29 of some concerns raised at The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas. These concerns were about his use of private messaging on social media in the context of his role as lead pastor. The elders of TVC reviewed those concerns, including commissioning an independent investigation of his messaging history with a particular woman.

"TVC elders concluded that though Matt was not involved in a romantic relationship with this woman, in this messaging he failed to live up to the standard of conduct expected of a church elder. As a result, TVC announced this morning (August 28) that the elders are putting Matt on a leave of absence from preaching, during which he will focus on growing in the areas of his life and walk that contributed to this behavior.

"Acts 29 prioritizes personal integrity and holds our leaders to a high standard of conduct. Considering the findings of the TVC investigation and consistent with the leave of absence from preaching and teaching that the Village Church has placed Matt on, the Acts 29 board has asked Matt to step aside from Acts 29 speaking engagements during this time. We hope that Matt can use this time away from speaking to focus on the process that TVC elders have laid out for him."

Co-lead pastor at The Village Church, Josh Patterson told the congregation before Chandler spoke that "this has been a weighty thing." He also said the public discipline of a lead

pastor is an example of the mission of The Village Church.

“This has been and will remain a place where it is OK to not be OK,” Patterson said. “And the follow up to that is, we just don’t want to stay there. It is OK to not be OK. We just don’t want to stay there.” {eoa}

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