

Nashville Pastor Placed on Leave for 'Unhealthy' and 'Hurtful' Conduct

Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee has placed Senior Pastor Scott Sauls on an indefinite leave of absence.

The good news is that Sauls, who has pastored at Christ Presbyterian for 12 years, in a video message to his congregation made it clear he had not been involved in any sexual sin or substance abuse. And while it is refreshing to hear that considering many kingdom leaders in recent years have fallen into such traps, the bad news is that Sauls says he has committed other sins against staff members and congregation members that he must repent for.

Religion News Service reported in his video message to his congregation, Sauls apologized for an unhealthy leadership style that he says harmed the people who worked for him—and the church. He even used the public venue of social media to do so.

"I verbalized insensitive and verbal criticism of others' work," Sauls said. "I've used social media and the pulpit to quiet dissenting viewpoints. I've manipulated facts to support paths that I desire.

"I am grieved to say that I have hurt people. I want to say to all of you that I am sorry."

Sauls said in the message that he would "seek counseling and repentance" during his leave of absence and that he "hoped to some day reconcile with the people he had harmed."

Sauls' leave of absence follows an investigation by the Christ Presbyterian church board and by the Nashville Presbytery of

the Presbyterian Church in America. The investigation was prompted by a letter sent from a number of former Christ Presbyterian staff members who had issued concerns about Sauls' conduct as the leader of the church.

Sauls' standing as pastor will be reviewed at an upcoming meeting of the Nashville Presbytery. He is considered a "teaching elder" by the presbytery, and the presbytery will have the final say over the length and condition of Sauls' leave.

Neil Spence, a PCA Pastor and board member of the Nashville Presbytery, told Religion News Service in an email that Sauls is still a member of the group and in good standing, but that he could not predict what the presbytery will do in Sauls' case.

If the group suspends Sauls, he would not be able to carry out the duties of an ordained minister.

Other Christ Presbyterian Church pastors have encountered similar problems in the past. Religion News Service reported that Rev. Ray Ortlund left the church after "three difficult years as pastor."

Religion News Service reported that concerns about pastoral conduct and leadership styles have come under increased scrutiny in recent years in light of controversies involving megachurch pastors such as Bill Hybels and Mark Driscoll.

"Churches have also begun to rethink the top-down corporate leadership style popularized by pastors such as Hybels," Religion News Service reported. {eo}

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