

# 'Saying Yes to the Spirit'? Vineyard Anaheim, Flagship of Vineyard Movement, Leaves Denomination

*Editor's Note: Charisma News reached out to both Vineyard Anaheim and Vineyard USA; this story has been updated with a statement from Vineyard USA National Director Jay Pathak.*

Anaheim (California) Vineyard began as a house church under the leadership of John Wimber and became the flagship of a denomination, the Association of Vineyard Churches, that has grown to include more than 2,500 churches on six continents with more than 500 in the U.S. Despite concerns raised by Vineyard USA, on Sunday, March 20, the church and its senior pastors, Alan and Kathryn Scott, announced in a "Family Update" from the church board and at its Sunday services that it is officially disassociating from the denomination.

Pointing out that Wimber's vision included the idea that each local church be self-financing and self-governing, Vineyard Anaheim's statement says its decision came in response to "the invitation and direction of the Spirit" (through scripture, counsel, prophecy, evidence of grace, and circumstance)" and that the church decided to "do what we have always done: take another step of faith and risk."

The board's statement goes on to note that, although the church is leaving the Vineyard movement, "We wish to clarify that this is not a rejection of Vineyard values, theology or praxis, but our best effort to respond to the distinct calling on our church at this time, and a desire to say yes to the Spirit." The board adds that "God has called Vineyard Anaheim to follow beyond denominational lines before and each time we

have done so, He has met us in ways that have contributed to the blessing of the wider body of Christ.”

In the changes following the COVID-19 pandemic, the board adds, “we invited a board of notable and respected national church leaders to help us. Not all of our board are ‘Vineyard’ but they are all kingdom leaders who are people of outstanding character and exemplify biblical leadership standards in every way.” The statement also makes mention of the pain associated with this decision:

*Even with godly people leading, we understand the decision to withdraw from the Association of Vineyard churches is painful. It has implications beyond the local church. There is no way to do significant transition without stirring strong emotions, and it can be tempting when emotion is high to bridge the gap with suspicion. Some have suggested this decision is rooted in some kind of grievance. This is not the case. Naturally, in every healthy family there are differences and distinctives. There are challenges and tensions. But we wish to clarify that neither Vineyard Anaheim nor any of its leaders have any grievance with the Vineyard or its leaders. We love the Vineyard movement and although our association has ended, our affection remains undiminished.*

*This decision is simply about guidance and obedience. It is about a local church and its leaders doing what they have always done: trying to discern what God is actively and presently doing among us and responding wholeheartedly even when our “yes” is costly.*

Vineyard USA did not hesitate to give its own perspective on the split, posting an update and video from National Director Jay Pathak as well as a linked FAQ section on its website, also dated March 20 (previous updates on the situation, dated Feb. 26 and March 9, can be found on the same page).

Pathak points to the deep ties between Vineyard Anaheim and the denomination and adding that the Scotts informed the denomination of the decision three weeks prior to its occurrence:

*Vineyard Anaheim is the mother church of the Vineyard movement. It was pastored by John Wimber, with whom many of us had personal relationships, and by whom all in the Vineyard have been profoundly influenced. Many of us have personal ties with the remaining members of the Wimber family, and have deep sympathy for their pain and outrage in regard to this decision. This church was built and paid for by the contributions of generations of Vineyard people, as well as by the donation to Vineyard Anaheim of the building that housed Vineyard Ministries International and Vineyard Music. It is a place of deep spiritual heritage for all of us who consider ourselves a part of the Vineyard movement.*

Pathak's statement also includes some history of the decision, saying that within 24 hours of the Scotts first informing VUSA, they also sent a letter to their congregation informing them of the decision to exit. In the accompanying video, he says, "This is not a conversation that we've tried to sidestep or move around. We've really taken it head-on." After a request from the denomination, the Scotts and the church paused the process—but ultimately moved ahead with the split.

VUSA presents a less amicable view of the church's departure than the church does, saying the church leadership would not agree to an "on-the-record, in-person meeting" as the denomination requested and pointing to the FAQs for those with more questions. Yet Pathak, who says in the video that the situation allows the denomination to consider what kind of family it wants to be, concludes his statement with words of grace:

*Finally, while we are beyond grieved to have been informed of*

*Vineyard Anaheim's decision to end this process, we recognize the Scotts, their Board, and this church as our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are praying that God will give them favor for the sake of their city and the Kingdom. We have loved the fruit that we have seen from Vineyard Anaheim and the way that God moves through the ministry of the Scotts. The encouraging stories coming from Anaheim are akin to the stories we hear from all around the Vineyard – stories of healing, of compassionate service of and with the poor, of salvations and baptisms, of passionate worship, and of transformed communities. May we celebrate the work of God among them as we celebrate those stories as well.*

*In the midst of this sorrowful moment, we remain incredibly excited about the future for the Vineyard in our nation and around the world. May you know Jesus even more deeply and experience the power and presence of His Kingdom today and in the days to come.*

“We exist as a movement so that people will come to know Jesus and experience the power and presence of His Kingdom,” Pathak adds in a statement to Charisma News. “In Vineyard churches all over the world, churches are training and equipping leaders in the theology and practices of the Kingdom while cultivating an expectancy for encounters with the Holy Spirit. This moment highlights our desire to ensure that all churches and pastors are connected.”

Please join the Charisma News staff in praying for the impact of this decision on the church, denomination, the larger body of Christ and those who have yet to hear the Good News of Jesus. {eoa}

*Follow breaking news like this on our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.*