

Tennessee Megachurch Pastor Apologizes, Denies Affair as Church Implodes

Between 2013, when Tavner Smith responded to God's call to plant a church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and 2015, when his church ranked No. 7 on *Outreach magazine's* list of fastest-growing U.S. churches, Venue Church experienced explosive growth with almost 2,000 members. But in a story repeated too often, that growth has now dwindled and the church, which once offered six weekly services in two locations, appears in danger of closing after revelations including Smith's divorce, an alleged affair with a former staff member and the subsequent resignations of multiple staff members.

In a December meeting with more than 100 church volunteers, Smith, 41, apologized but still denied the affair, the *Chattanooga Times Free Press* reports from recent audio obtained of the meeting. In a separate article, the *Free Press* reports that the church "now struggles to attract a few dozen people to a service on a given Sunday."

Smith met his former wife, Danielle, at North Greenville University in South Carolina and later attended Redemption World Outreach Center (now Redemption Church), also in Greenville, South Carolina, after a time of what Smith said was his "disobedience" to the Lord. He volunteered with the Redemption youth group and ultimately became executive youth pastor under the leadership of Pastor Ron Carpenter, whom Smith's website describes as his "mentor." Danielle Smith also served on the Redemption staff. Both left their Redemption positions under the call of God and moved to Chattanooga in 2013 to begin Venue Church, which launched with an astounding attendance of 450 on Oct. 13, 2013.

“The word venue means the place where something happens. We want our church to live up to that name, and be the place where whatever people need happens,” Tavner Smith told the *Free Press* at the time.

However, a December 2021 *Free Press* article tells a much different story. It includes the news of eight Venue Church employees quitting over rumors of Smith’s alleged affair with a longtime staff member, news of which surfaced this past November when church volunteers showed up at Tavner Smith’s house, only to discover the pastor and the venue employee wearing very little.

The next month, video of Tavner Smith kissing that same employee at a restaurant went viral, per [this](#), which adds that the church’s North Georgia campus closed Jan. 31. The Smiths’ divorce was finalized in December, per court records obtained by the *Free Press*.

Wide-ranging allegations of poor leadership and misuse of finances began circulating online from volunteers and members of Venue Church, and the situation appears to have escalated from there. Tavner Smith preached at the church’s Chattanooga campus on Jan. 3, but two days later posted on Instagram of a planned sabbatical, saying he would “see you in February”: