

After Driscoll Steps Down, Mars Hill to Officially Dissolve

“Historically, our mission has always been clear—to make disciples and plant churches.”

With that opening sentence, Mars Hill Church announced that it will dissolve as a Seattle-based megachurch and leave it up to the leadership of its 13 campuses whether to become independent churches.

The church’s official announcement contained these four key points:

- All of Mars Hill’s existing church properties either will be sold, or the loans on the individual properties will be assumed by the independent churches, subject to approval by the lender;
- All central staff will be compensated for their work and then released from their employment.
- If any funds remain after the winding down and satisfaction of Mars Hill business affairs, they will be gifted as seed money to the newly independent churches, then ...
- The existing Mars Hill Church organization will be dissolved.

Mars Hill has been roiled in controversy for several months. It culminated with Senior Pastor Mark Driscoll’s resignation last month. Critics said he had become overbearing and arrogant and that his leadership style was domineering and confrontational. He also had been accused of plagiarism, and one publisher cut ties with him at the end of June.

“Following much prayer and lengthy discussion with Mars Hill’s

leadership, the board of Mars Hill has concluded that rather than remaining a centralized multi-site church with video-led teaching distributed to multiple locations, the best future for each of our existing local churches is for them to become autonomous self-governed entities," read an open letter to the churches' past and present members and attendees from Pastor Dave Bruskas. "This means that each of our locations has an opportunity to become a new church, rooted in the best of what Mars Hill has been in the past, and independently led and run by its own local elder teams."

Bruskas said that despite the complexity of the reorganization, the church's board has set a goal to have it completed by Jan. 1.

The pastor asked for prayer for the various campuses' local elder teams as they contemplate the following options in the next few weeks: (1) becoming an independent, self-governed church; (2) merging with an existing church to create one independent, self-governed church; or (3) disbanding as a church and shepherding current members to find other local church homes. "This decision will be made by your local church's Lead Pastor and elder team.

"Ultimately, the success of this plan, and the future viability of each of these new local churches rest solely on all of us continuing to be faithful in supporting Jesus' mission through our attendance and continued giving."

Observers in the ministry said after the implosion of Mars Hill that several key lessons could be learned for other churches to apply. Chief among them is the need for accountability of the senior pastor to a board of elders internally and a mentor externally. In addition, wrote Bishop Joseph Mattera in an article for CharismaNews late last month, campus churches cannot raise up new leaders unless each campus has its own pastor. And, Mattera wrote, the "one man brand" of a church leaves that church vulnerable if all eyes are focused

on a single charismatic leader.

Mars Hill's leadership advised its members: As you consider next steps for you and your family, let me encourage you to join us in three critical pursuits:

1. Stay with your church family as we embark on a new expression of the same mission.
2. Pray for Jesus to be honored in everything we do as we begin this season of transition.
3. Give generously, as your gifts in November and December of this year will make a critically important difference in our desire for 13 churches being healthy and sustainable from launch-day and thereafter.