

Bishop Eddie Long Takes Leave of Absence

While some called for Bishop Eddie Long to step down after four young men accused him of engaging in sexual relations with them, the megachurch pastor plowed through what others called spiritual warfare.

But with the revelation that his wife is divorcing him due to “irreconcilable differences” with “no hope of reconciliation,” Long told New Birth Missionary Baptist Church on Sunday that he would take a leave of absence to deal with “family issues.”

“I’m still your pastor. You’ll still receive my direction,” the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* quoted Long saying. “You’ve given me some weeks to take care of some family business.” Long said he would take the time to heal his family.

After prayerful consideration, Vanessa Long on Friday announced plans to divorce her megachurch pastor husband. Within hours, Long appeared to recant in an email complete with New Birth Missionary Baptist church logos. But her attorneys confirmed that she would proceed with the divorce.

Now, new rumors are emerging that Long is stepping down altogether from the church. But New Birth moved quickly to squash them with a public statement.

“Rumors that Bishop Eddie L. Long has stepped down as senior pastor of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church are completely false,” the church said. “As Bishop Long stated in his earlier comments, ‘Vanessa and I are working together in seeking God’s will in our current circumstances.’ As any loving and committed husband would do, Bishop Long will take some time to focus on his family but he will continue to be the senior pastor of New Birth.”

The Longs got married in 1990. They have three children together and one from Long's previous marriage. Together they built New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Ga. But the stress of the varied accusations the charismatic preacher, including four young members of the church claiming that the bishop used gifts, trips and money to coerce them into engaging in sex acts with him beginning when they were 17 or 18, seems to have taken its toll on the marriage.