

# Dominoes Continue to Fall as Hillsong Phoenix Announces Its Separation From Global Denomination

The dominoes in the Hillsong Church saga continue to fall. Days after co-founder Brian Houston resigned as Hillsong senior pastor, Hillsong Phoenix Senior Pastor Terry Crist announced Sunday that he and his congregation were pulling out of the Hillsong denomination. The timeline has yet to be determined.

In speaking to his congregation, Crist says there were several reasons why it became apparent that Hillsong Phoenix, located in Mesa, Arizona, could no longer be a part of Hillsong Church's global family.

Over the past year, Hillsong global has seen a great deal of scandal rock the church, including Houston's resignation amidst sexual allegations as well as sexual allegations brought in 2020 against former New York City Hillsong senior pastor Carl Lentz. Last week, Hillsong Atlanta senior pastor Sam Collier announced his resignation from his post—but with no similar claims against him. Collier, 33, launched Hillsong Atlanta less than a year ago and became the global megachurch's first Black senior pastor.

"There are many reasons why we can't continue," Crist says in his message to his congregation Sunday. "Chief among them is our loss of confidence in the global board to continue leading us as a congregation. I understand there are a lot of questions from all of you, questions that I received in my email inbox. If you look through the questions, most fall into two categories: No. 1 is why are we taking this action, and

category No. 2 is why is this so urgent? Couldn't we just wait and see what happens?

"Over the past year, the sin that was exposed in Hillsong Church New York City and the subsequent investigation that was conducted into sexual misconduct and into financial misappropriation ... I encouraged the results of that report to be made into some general form, and I understand the sensitivity of it," Crist says. "In the report, I asked for names to be protected. For whatever reason, that request was denied.

"As information began to leak out what was in the report, lead pastors were suddenly asked to sign nondisclosure agreements and noncompetes," he adds. "Some of us simply could not do that in good conscience. This has played out in recent weeks. It came down in recent weeks for the demand to sign nondisclosure agreements and noncompetes, meaning that if we were removed from our positions, we could not plant churches again within our community for at least one year. Last Saturday, after months of trying to gain approval of trying to reseal our local board, we formally requested the release of our church back to us. Specifically, that simply meant the release of our church to be governed by a local board and also to include a couple of non-Hillsong pastors who are wise and credible and who have proven ministries to also be seated on our local board for the sake of accountability for nonvested pastors who have nothing to lose by speaking truth to power."

Crist says he requested to the global board that his church be allowed to continue under the banner of Hillsong Phoenix, but the global board refused the request.

The Phoenix church has been a member of Hillsong since 2016.

"I was told this past week that, 'It is all or nothing,'" Crist says. "We had to have the global board govern our church and to own our properties, or we had to leave. So, with great

sadness, we chose to leave. I've spent the week in counsel with pastors. I've run this sermon I'm sharing with you today through a multitude of pastors asking for their wisdom. I am heartbroken.

"When we began this journey many, many years ago as a Hillsong Network church, in 2012 and 2013, we were then invited to become part of the Hillsong family, with me leaning in saying, 'Make us a Hillsong church,' he says. "In 2016 when that was announced and my dream was realized, I never thought I would be standing here today telling you all of this."

"It has become clear that we cannot continue in our global family, as much as we love it."

For the rest of Crist's message, please watch this video, beginning at the 1:07 mark. {eo}

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