

Mark Driscoll Resigns From Mars Hill Church

Mark Driscoll, the larger-than-life megachurch pastor who has been accused of plagiarism, bullying and an unhealthy ego that alienated his most devoted followers, resigned from his Seattle church Tuesday, according to a document obtained by RNS.

The divisive Seattle pastor had announced his plan to step aside for at least six weeks in August while his church investigated the charges against him. Driscoll's resignation came shortly after the church concluded its investigation.

"Recent months have proven unhealthy for our family—even physically unsafe at times—and we believe the time has now come for the elders to choose new pastoral leadership for Mars Hill," Driscoll wrote in his resignation letter.

Driscoll was not asked to resign from the church he started 18 years ago, according to a letter from the church's board of overseers.

"Indeed, we were surprised to receive his resignation letter," they wrote.

Seven elders and one member of the board of overseers conducted this investigation, and the board of overseers provided findings and conclusions:

- "We concluded that Pastor Mark has, at times, been guilty of arrogance, responding to conflict with a quick temper and harsh speech, and leading the staff and elders in a domineering manner. While we believe Mark needs to continue to address these areas in his life and leadership, we do not believe him to be disqualified from pastoral ministry."

- “Pastor Mark has never been charged with any immorality, illegality or heresy. Most of the charges involved attitudes and behaviors reflected by a domineering style of leadership.”
- “We found some of the accusations against Pastor Mark to be altogether unfair or untrue.”
- “Other charges had been previously addressed by Pastor Mark, privately and publicly. Indeed, he had publicly confessed and apologized for a number of the charges against him, some of which occurred as long as 14 years ago.”

In his resignation letter, Driscoll noted that he was not being disqualified from future ministry.

“You have also shared with me that many of those making charges against me declined to meet with you or participate in the review process at all,” Driscoll wrote. “Consequently, those conducting the review of charges against me began to interview people who had not even been a party to the charges.”

Driscoll hinted, though, that his continued presence would be a distraction.

“Prior to and during this process there have been no charges of criminal activity, immorality or heresy, any of which could clearly be grounds for disqualification from pastoral ministry,” Driscoll wrote.

“Other issues, such as aspects of my personality and leadership style, have proven to be divisive within the Mars Hill context, and I do not want to be the source of anything that might detract from our church’s mission to lead people to a personal and growing relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Driscoll’s boisterous personality seemed to dominate Mars Hill, a congregation he built up to an estimated 14,000 people at 15 locations across five states. Weekly attendance is now

reportedly about 7,600.

“The Board of Overseers has accepted that resignation and is moving forward with planning for pastoral transition, recognizing the challenge of such a task in a church that has only known one pastor since its founding,” states the letter, signed by Michael Van Skaik, Larry Osborne, Jon Phelps and Matt Rogers.

Mars Hill shuttered its Downtown Seattle and University of Washington District churches due to financial challenges.

“During the month of August, we received \$1,552,817 and expenses were \$2,222,274, so our net over expenses (loss) after depreciation and capitalizing assets was \$647,768,” stated a report released to church members in September and obtained by World magazine. “Our income target was \$1,842,414, and we missed this target by almost 16 percent.”

Driscoll, who came into evangelical prominence as multisite churches and podcasts rose in popularity, found a niche within a largely secular Northwest culture. Though he has been controversial for years for statements on women and sexuality, several tipping points likely led up to Driscoll’s resignation.

Driscoll admitted to and apologized for comments he made under the pseudonym “William Wallace II” that were critical of feminism, homosexuality and “sensitive emasculated” men.

The church-planting network he co-founded, Acts 29, removed Driscoll from its membership after influential leaders such as Paul Tripp and James MacDonald stepped down from helping the church. LifeWay Christian Resources, the nation’s second-largest Christian book retailer, pulled Driscoll’s books from its website and its 186 stores.

In the past, Driscoll has been provocative, occasionally profane, and has faced more recent allegations of plagiarism

and inflating his book sales. "Mistakes were made that I am grieved by and apologize for," he said late last year of plagiarism charges.

A front-page story in *The New York Times* on Aug. 23 had suggested that Driscoll's empire was "imploding."

"He was really important—in the Internet age, Mark Driscoll definitely built up the evangelical movement enormously," Timothy Keller, the senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, told the Times. "But the brashness and the arrogance and the rudeness in personal relationships—which he himself has confessed repeatedly—was obvious to many from the earliest days, and he has definitely now disillusioned quite a lot of people."

During Driscoll's planned sabbatical, elders within his own church asked him to step down from all aspects of ministry. All nine elders who signed the letter resigned or were laid off.

Members of Mars Hill have sought more transparency from church leadership. A petition was launched requesting the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability to suspend Mars Hill's membership over allegations of financial impropriety.

At the height of his influence and popularity, Driscoll admitted that he harbored grand ambitions, both for himself and the church he built from scratch.

"I'm a guy who is highly competitive," Driscoll said in a 2006 sermon. "Every year, I want the church to grow. I want my knowledge to grow. I want my influence to grow. I want our staff to grow. I want our church plants to grow. I want everything—because I want to win."

Driscoll conceded that he wouldn't be content with remaining the same.

“That’s my own little idol and it works well in a church because no one would ever yell at you for being a Christian who produces results. So I found the perfect place to hide,” he said.

“And I was thinking about it this week. What if the church stopped growing? What if we shrunk? What if everything fell apart? What if half the staff left? Would I still worship Jesus or would I be a total despairing mess? I don’t know. By God’s grace, I won’t have to find out, but you never know.”

Copyright 2014 Religion News Service. All rights reserved. No part of this transmission may be distributed or reproduced without written permission.