

Mars Hill Pastor Confesses Sin, Asks for Mercy

In the wake of Mark Driscoll's resignation as lead pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, a campus pastor is opening up to members and former members with a confession that he had bought into a sin-tainted ministry culture there and is seeking their forgiveness.

"I am deeply sorry that so many people have experienced profound hurt over the years at Mars Hill," Steve Tompkins, pastor of Mars Hill Shoreline wrote in a letter posted online this week. "It breaks my heart that many continue to live with deep emotional and spiritual wounds, even long after leaving the church. I also realize that in my role as an elder, including as Lead Pastor at Shoreline, I share responsibility and complicity in some of the ways you have been hurt, disappointed, and sinned against at Mars Hill."

Tompkins has been at Mars Hill for over 12 years, on full-time staff for more than 11, a pastor for 10 years and has served as lead pastor of Mars Hill Shoreline for more than eight years.

Mars Hill has been roiled in controversy since long before Driscoll left under pressure two weeks ago. Driscoll, the larger-than-life megachurch pastor, was accused of plagiarism, bullying and an unhealthy ego that alienated even his most devoted followers. 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.

Concerning Driscoll's leadership, a report from the church's board of overseers said, "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.”

However, the overseers noted, “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.”

Tompkins confessed that he had been a willing participant in a leadership culture that often quashed dissension or even slight complaints with bullying tactics that often attempted to turn accusations back at the accusers. However, he gave no indication of any plans to step down.

In his letter, Tompkins wrote, “if the leadership and ministry culture at Mars Hill has been marked by arrogance (and it has), then I am coming to see how I have been marked by that same arrogance, and how I was blind to it, both in others and in myself. I now see how my own sin of arrogance within our arrogant culture therefore went unrecognized and unchallenged. In saying this, I am in no way blaming my sin on others or on the culture. On the contrary, my sin is my own sin which I freely confess. That is what I am now seeing with painful clarity.

“The same is true with the sin of domineering leadership. In fact, if you mix ministry arrogance together with top-down domineering leadership along with idolatry of church growth and numbers, then inevitably you create a ministry culture where many end up hurt, burned out, feeling used. I see this now, and I see how I helped to build such a culture.”

Tompkins concluded in part, “In many ways I feel like I am late to the table, but I am grateful to be here now. ...

Brothers and sisters, I humbly ask your forgiveness for my sin in my role as a Mars Hill elder. I am deeply sorry for your suffering, and pray that Jesus will grant emotional, spiritual, and relational healing."