

Megachurch Pastor Resigns Amid More Sexual Allegations Against Predecessor

Steve Carter, the lead teaching pastor of Willow Creek Church, resigned following further sexual allegations against his predecessor, Bill Hybels.

“Since the first women came forward with their stories, I have been gravely concerned about our church’s official response, and it’s ongoing approach to these painful issues,” Carter writes in a blog. Carter took on the role of co-pastor along with Heather Larson after Hybels accelerated his resignation after allegations surfaced.

“After many frank conversations with our elders, it became clear that there is a fundamental difference in judgment between what I believe is necessary for Willow Creek to move in a positive direction, and what they think is best. That is not to say that I am right and they are wrong. But I must follow the path that I believe God has laid out for me to live with integrity, and that path now diverges from Willow Creek. I offered my resignation many weeks ago, but I was requested to delay an announcement and continue with my duties until the leadership determined how to make the decision public. At this point, however, I cannot, in good conscience, appear before you as your Lead Teaching Pastor when my soul is so at odds with the institution,” he continues.

Accusations against Hybels first came to the forefront earlier this year.

On Sunday, *The New York Times* posted an article detailing a sexual relationship between Hybels and a young woman who lived with the Hybels family during the 1980s.

Pat Baranowski was a young divorcee who worked for Willow

Creek and lived with the Hybels family during the '80s. Baranowski alleges Hybels took her to dinner when his family was out of town. When the two returned home, Hybels gave Baranowski a back rub before pursuing more sexually overt activities. Though she was stunned, she chose to remain silent.

"I never had an inappropriate physical or emotional relationship with her before that time, during that time or after that time," Hybels tells the newspaper in an email.

But for Carter, Baranowski's accusations were the final nail in the coffin.

"I wish I could appear before you to say goodbye. I wish I could tell each of you, personally and individually, how much I treasure the time I have been able to serve you. But it would be misleading of me to stand on that stage as if presenting a unified front. I defer to the wisdom of the leadership of this church, so I must stand aside," Carter says.

He continues:

Sarah and I are heartbroken over this decision. We love our Willow Creek family. Nothing would have given me more joy than to pastor this church for many years to come.

To all the congregants, staff, believers, supporters, and wonderfully faithful people who make up this community, thank you so much for the opportunity to be a part of your world. I thank God for every moment I've had with you here, and we will continue to pray for this community and hold it dearly in our hearts.