

# Willow Creek Elders: We Owe These Women Apologies

The Willow Creek Board of Elders apologized to the women who have come forward to report former pastor Bill Hybels conducted inappropriate relationships with them.

"The tone of our first response had too much emphasis on defending Bill and cast some of the women in an unfair and negative light. We are sorry. Initially, it was stated that the stories were all lies and the individuals involved were colluding against Bill. We apologize for those sweeping statements. We do not believe the stories were all lies or that all the people were colluding against him. It takes courage for a woman to step forward and share her story, and we are doing everything we can to listen respectfully," Pam Orr, the board spokeswoman, says in a statement posted to the Willow Creek website.

Orr's term as elder chair ends this month, and she will be replaced by Lane Moyer.

"I will leave the seat with a heart that is broken over the grief this season has brought to so many," Orr says.

The board's statement continues: "Based on the conversations we have had to date, we believe at least some of Bill's choices were inappropriate. We are grieved that this situation is difficult for so many people. On behalf of the Elders, both past and present, we now see that while we have many policies in place, they did not prevent the situation we are now in. We regret that, and we are looking into what additional safeguards could be implemented in the future."

Hybels resigned as senior pastor in April.

"This decision was mine and mine alone, but after much

discussion, my decision earned the unanimous support of the Elders and the Executive Team,” Hybels says in a statement posted to the Willow Creek website.

“Further, I have decided to step out of my usual teaching and hosting roles at the upcoming Global Leadership Summit. This, too, was my decision, but after discussion and prayer it was agreed upon by the WCA Board,” Hybels says. “Going forward, I feel the need to humbly look deep inside myself and determine what God wants to teach me. I intend to continue surrounding myself with wise counselors and trusted friends, and to ask them to speak honestly into my life so that I can learn every single lesson I need to learn from all of this. I have complete peace about this decision and will not rush this process. Your prayers would be much appreciated during this upcoming season of reflection.”

The *Chicago Tribune* issued a report in March alleging Hybels treated women inappropriately during his time as pastor.

Popular evangelical leaders, including John and Nancy Ortberg, say the allegations are true. Hybels firmly denied them.

His statement reads:

*In recent times, I've been accused of many things I simply did not do. However, let me humbly acknowledge three things I have done.*

*First, my first response to some of these recent accusations was anger. I confess to feeling very angry these last few weeks as I watched harmful accusations fly around without accountability. I felt attacked and knew that my loved ones and this church family would be affected. I sincerely wish my initial response had been one of listening and humble reflection. If I could go back, I would have chosen to listen first, and then to seek to learn and understand. I apologize for a response that was defensive, instead of one that*

*invited conversation and learning.*

*Secondly, I realize now that in certain settings and circumstances in the past I communicated things that were perceived in ways I did not intend, at times making people feel uncomfortable. I was blind to this dynamic for far too long. For that I'm very sorry.*

*Thirdly, I too often placed myself in situations that would have been far wiser to avoid. I was, at times, naive about the dynamics those situations created. I'm sorry for the lack of wisdom on my part. I commit to never putting myself in similar situations in the future.*

*Additionally, I want to acknowledge that anytime allegations like these are made, they must be received with great humility and gravity. I reaffirm to you that I have taken these allegations very seriously, as have our church's Elders. While some of the stories that have been told about me are misleading and others are entirely false, and while investigations have found no evidence of misconduct, I have been sobered by these accusations, and as I said earlier, I have invited the input of wise counselors, friends, and family members to help me engage in a process of humble reflection.*

Hybels announced last fall that he would be transitioning out of ministry and two co-pastors would step up in his place. Hybels said he would complete the transition by October 2018, but accelerated the move after the allegations surfaced.

Heather Larson succeeded Hybels as lead pastor. Steve Carter is the lead teaching pastor.

"There is no way to get around it; this season has been difficult beyond words. Some of the women who brought their stories are women who have mentored me and invested in me. To those women, I want to say that I have love and gratitude for

you and the role you played in my life, and I am so deeply sad for all of us that we find ourselves in this place,” Larson says in a statement.

She continues:

*Now, let’s turn our focus to starting the next chapter. The Elders and Bill set us up for this back in October. This new season starts a little early for us, but God has always, only, ever been faithful to us, and He knew about this night long before the rest of us. We will keep our eyes on Him, and we will trust Him in the days ahead. Our church needs every one of us, more than ever, to link arms together and join in building a radically inclusive, biblically grounded, people loving, Acts 2 church. Not only does our church need that, but the world around us needs that. Let’s return our focus to our neighbors around us. So many of them are wondering about God and who He is. Let’s live in ways that draw them in and show them the love of God that has transformed our lives.*

*I want to acknowledge that we’re all going to need time and space to process. Let’s come together and support each other in that. But in the midst of how sad and how hard it is, let’s also resolve together that this is not the end of the story. It’s not the end of Bill’s story. This is not the end of Willow’s story, and it’s certainly not the end of God’s story. God is still writing new chapters for all of us. We will depend on Him for that. We will keep learning and growing, we will keep serving the world around us, and we will keep being the church together! God will do the rest!*

The church discussed the announcement in a recent family meeting. You can watch the video [here](#).

Hybels founded Willow Creek Church in October 1975.

More than 25,000 people now attend weekend services at eight Chicago-area locations.

Hybels also founded Willow Creek Association, which inspires, encourages and equips Christian leaders transform their communities. According to the site, WCA has served leaders for more than 25 years.