

Willow Creek Pastor Resigns Over Conflicting Values, Vision for Healing

Another Willow Creek pastor is resigning. Marcus Bieschke, lead pastor of Willow Creek's Crystal Lake campus, says his "heart and values are not in full alignment" with the church and the direction it's going.

In an email to the church, Bieschke says he will leave Willow on Dec. 1. He admits the decision may come as a surprise to many, but it was also one that came from months of struggle.

"Over the past 20 months, it has become increasingly clear to me that my heart and values are not in full alignment with Willow's current direction," he says.

"I cannot pastor and lead to the best of my ability without being fully aligned in these fundamental areas. I've longed for and encouraged Willow to pursue a different path toward healing. But due to a difference of opinion on what that path should be, I believe I must depart. While this is immensely difficult for me, because I love and will miss you all so very much, I do have a peace that my departure is appropriate and necessary."

Bieschke says Executive Pastor Dave Smith will take his place as interim lead pastor.

"He knows and loves you and has served our church faithfully, with great diligence and uncompromised integrity," he says.

Several other leaders have resigned in the aftermath of accusations of sexually inappropriate behavior against former Senior Pastor Bill Hybels. The accusations first surfaced in March 2018. While at first the church defended Hybels and

called the accusations false, the former senior pastor eventually decided to step down earlier than planned.

As more accusations came out, former Teaching Pastor Steve Carter resigned over a “difference in judgment” between what he and the church believed to be the best course of action. An independent investigation found the women’s accusations to be credible, and as a result, the entire elder board resigned, apologizing for not taking the accusations as seriously as they should have.

The new elder board has pursued reconciliation, including holding a service in which they called Hybels to repent, but some women who accused Hybels say the church’s attempts leave much to be desired.

In July, Willow Creek’s Wheaton campus lead pastor, Reece Whitehead, resigned. He says the Holy Spirit convicted him to leave his position after spending six months trying to correct character issues directly relating to his leadership.

“This is not who I want to be or how I want people to feel,” he wrote.