

James MacDonald 'Biblically Disqualified' for Ministry, Says Harvest Bible

Former pastor and radio preacher James MacDonald is no longer fit for ministry, said the elders of Harvest Bible Chapel, the megachurch MacDonald founded in the Chicago suburbs in 1988.

In a statement released Sunday (Nov. 3), the church elders found MacDonald was prone to anger, "had a pattern of improperly exercising positional and spiritual authority over others to his own advantage" and sought to profit from the church's ministry.

"Because of these findings, James was biblically disqualified from the position of elder, meaning he did not meet the spiritual standards to which a Harvest Bible Chapel elder is held," the statement read. "The Bible does not teach that disqualification from ministry is permanent; however, with the scope of the damage caused by his behavior, James will not be able to serve again as an elder or pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel."

MacDonald was fired by the church's elders in February for conduct "contrary and harmful to the best interests of the church," after months of controversy.

In recent months, Harvest's elders have conducted a review of MacDonald's tenure as pastor, according to their most recent statement. They found a "substantial pattern of sinful behavior" in nine areas of MacDonald's life in which he fell short of the characteristics a pastor should demonstrate.

The elders' statement, posted to the Harvest Bible Chapel website Sunday, was also read aloud at weekend worship services. The church's elders posted updates this week about

Harvest's finances, including details of how the church cut \$600,000 per month from its budget by reducing staff, ending payments to staff retirement accounts and postponing some buildings and grounds projects.

According to the church website, Harvest is also discussing possible arbitration with MacDonald and has received a "list of issues" from the former pastor. "We are currently working with the Institute of Christian Conciliation (ICC) to determine and finalize which issues would be subject to an arbitration process," the church's elders said in an update on the Harvest website.

The Harvest elders said they were thankful for MacDonald's 30 years of ministry and that he could be returned to ministry in the future if he goes through a restoration process.

"We have communicated to James that he needs to find a small group of godly brothers to restore him biblically in the spirit of gentleness. He needs an extended period of time away from ministry in order to focus on repentance and to seek relational reconciliation and restitution where it is possible," the statement read. "We are all in need of God's grace, and we have implored James to humble himself and fully surrender to the Lord." {eoa}

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