

Megachurch Pastor James MacDonald Fired Following 'Highly Inappropriate Comments'

James MacDonald, pastor of the megachurch Harvest Bible Chapel (HBC), was fired from the church after a radio show host aired the first of several inflammatory audio clips. In the clips, a man who is presumed to be MacDonald makes crude comments about *Christianity Today*, reporters and even discusses a plan to plant child pornography on someone's computer.

According to HBC:

Following a lengthy season of review, reflection, and prayerful discussion, the Elders of Harvest Bible Chapel had determined that Pastor MacDonald should be removed from his role of senior pastor. That timeline accelerated when on Tuesday morning, highly inappropriate recorded comments made by Pastor MacDonald were given to media and reported. Given that and other conduct under consideration, in accordance with the procedures in our bylaws, Pastor MacDonald was removed as senior pastor and as an elder of the church for engaging in conduct that the elders believe is contrary and harmful to the best interests of the church. His employment has been terminated from Harvest Bible Chapel, effective today, Feb. 12, 2019. This decision was made with heavy hearts and much time spent in earnest prayer, followed by input from various trusted outside advisers.

Julie Roys, a Chicago-area reporter and watchdog blogger, offered more information:

"[Tuesday], Chicago radio personality Mancow Muller played

shocking clips of someone sounding exactly like Harvest Bible Chapel Pastor James MacDonald discussing putting child porn on the computer of *Christianity Today* CEO Harold Smith.”

She continues:

Mancow told me he didn't definitively identify MacDonald to protect himself from potential litigation. Yet MacDonald's trademark voice, though somewhat distorted, was unmistakable. I've also now heard the complete 50 minutes of audio that Mancow referenced, and heard the clips in context, and they are credible. I've also reached out to MacDonald for comment, and he did not respond with either a confirmation or denial.

Mancow said he plans to air the entire 50-minute conversation on an upcoming podcast. I will save some of my comments about the recording until then.

But the clips Mancow played today are breathtaking. On them, the man who's presumably MacDonald jokes about me having an affair with Mark Galli, editor-in-chief of Christianity Today (CT). That's not funny. It's disgusting. Galli and I have never had anything but a professional relationship, and it's repulsive that anyone—a pastor, no less—would make a joke about that.

MacDonald also makes vulgar references to Harold Smith and Ed Stetzer, CT contributing editor and the executive director of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. He also allegedly insults CT, calling it a “... pipe-organ protecting, musty, mild smell of urine, blue-hair Methodist loving, mainline dying, women preacher championing, emerging church adoring, almost good with all gays and closet Palestine promoting Christianity” magazine.

However, especially disconcerting to me is an excerpt where MacDonald alleges that I and “another person who used to attend (Harvest)” approached the houses of people who were victims in a DCFS investigation and shouted at them about a

cover-up at Harvest. He alleges that I'm "off the rails" and predicts that in 30 days, I'm going to be "riding a tricycle with a midget on (my) shoulders."

Roys previously reported that MacDonald took money from church coffers.

HBC previously filed a suit against Roys, among others, for her articles. The suit was eventually dropped.

According to *Christianity Today*:

MacDonald took an "indefinite sabbatical" in January, following a tumultuous few months defending Harvest in a defamation lawsuit against its critics and in the aftermath of a World magazine investigation into mismanagement at the church.

The public scrutiny continued with pushback against MacDonald's decision to preach at a Harvest affiliate in Florida during his sabbatical. Then, a famous friend of his, Chicago shock jock Mancow Muller, spoke out in a local newspaper against the manipulation and ego he observed around MacDonald's "cult of personality" at Harvest. On his show, Muller later aired what sounded like clips of MacDonald making harsh comments toward media who had covered the story.

This is not MacDonald's first brush with controversy.

In 2014, MacDonald confessed that the Harvest elder board slandered three elders as "false messengers."

MacDonald founded HBC in 1988. He hosted a daily radio and TV program called *Walk in the Word*. MacDonald also worked with Mission Harvest, Harvest Training Center, Vertical Church Conferences and Vertical Church Network.

MacDonald wrote several books and Bible studies, including:

Act Like Men; Vertical Church; Lord, Change Me; Lord, Change My Attitude; When Life is Hard; Always True and most recently, *The Will of God IS the Word of God*.

The church asked for prayer as they move forward.

Our elders and staff are committed to fulfilling our fiduciary duty as the leadership of this congregation, knowing that at times the outcome may be misunderstood or emotionally painful. A more detailed communication regarding next steps for our church will take place in our weekend services.

We sincerely thank you for your prayers, your support and your patience as we work together to restore a trust in leadership, a humility to surrender to biblical authority and a firm resolve to move forward as a church family. Please continue to uphold our church, the elder board, staff and the MacDonald family in prayer at this time.