

Megachurch Pastor's Death Officially Ruled a Suicide

Megachurch pastor Darrin Patrick's cause of death has officially been ruled a suicide, according to the Franklin County Sheriff's Department.

Patrick died May 7 in Pacific, Missouri, just outside of St. Louis. The cause of death was a gunshot wound and the medical examiner ruled it a suicide, Franklin County Sheriff Steve Pelton told Religion News Service.

Patrick was a teaching pastor at Seacoast Church, a multisite megachurch based in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, and the founding pastor of the Journey Church in St. Louis, where he lived.

Seacoast Church announced in a May 8 statement that Patrick had died of what appeared to be a "self-inflicted gunshot wound."

His death came as a shock to friends and colleagues.

Patrick, who was known for helping people grow and overcome adversity, was remembered as being "passionate about the Lord."

He had been a rising star in Reformed evangelical circles and served as vice president of the Acts 29 church planting network. He was later fired from Journey for what church elders called misconduct, including "inappropriate meetings, conversations, and phone calls with two women" and an abuse of power.

Patrick received counseling and went through a restoration process that lasted 26 months, according to a 2019 blog interview posted at Christianity Today. He returned to the

ministry as a preacher but not as a senior pastor of a church.

"You generally don't see guys bounce back," said Robby Gallaty, pastor of Long Hollow Baptist, in Hendersonville, Tennessee, who was a friend of Patrick.

Gallaty said pastors are great at helping other people but often don't know what to do when they themselves struggle. They try to keep up appearances, he said, and try to handle their struggles on their own.

Patrick's death follows a number of high-profile suicides among pastors, including two from California.

Jarrod Wilson, a 30-year-old pastor at megachurch Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, died by suicide in September 2019, and 30-year-old Andrew Stoecklein, a pastor at Indian Hills Church in Chino, in August 2018. They both preached about depression and mental health.

In part as a response to Wilson's death, evangelical leaders filled a sold-out auditorium in December at the Billy Graham Center for a one-day summit focusing on clergy burnout and mental health.

Among the speakers was Saddleback Church senior pastor Rick Warren, whose son, Matthew, died by suicide in 2013 after a long battle with depression.

Warren said he also experienced mental illness as a young pastor. He encouraged pastors not to give up on ministry and to admit their own weakness.

"We never help people with our strengths like we think we do. We help people with our weaknesses," he said.

Emily MacFarlan Miller contributed to this report.