

Pastor Heather Larson, All the Elders Just Resigned From Willow Creek

The entire elder board and the remaining lead pastor, Heather Larson, resigned from Willow Creek Community Church Wednesday night.

"We, as a board, know Willow needs and deserves a fresh start, and the entire board will step down to create room for a new board. This board replacement process will start promptly and proceed in waves to ensure an orderly transition, with all current Elders leaving by the end of the year. The first wave of Elders will leave by Aug. 15. The members of the current board will not control the implementation of the findings of the governance review and investigations we are announcing tonight," according to elder spokesperson Missy Rasmussen.

"We want to be the kind of church God is calling us to be. A church that learns lessons and grows through painful situations. A church that is filled with hope for healing and that demonstrates the love of Christ. A church that reflects the heart of God and is about lives changing, hope, and through Him, making the impossible possible. We believe that God is still building His church," the elder statement continues.

On Sunday, lead teaching pastor Steve Carter resigned, citing the church's response to sexual allegations against former senior pastor Bill Hybels.

Carter co-pastored with Larson, who announced her resignation Wednesday.

"In recent days and weeks, it has become clear to me that this church needs a fresh start. The staff, this staff that I

dearly love, they also need a clean running lane to heal, to build, to dream," Larson says in her statement.

"As hard as I have tried, I simply have not been able to get the momentum that we need to address the issues that need to be addressed and to bring about the fresh start. I have spent a lot of time seeking God and asking Him for guidance. He has given me clarity and peace. I am stepping down from my role as lead pastor. Trust has been broken by leadership, and it doesn't return quickly. There is urgency to move in a better direction. It is the job of a leader to define reality, and it is the job of a leader to put the team and the organization first, and I am committed to doing that," Larson continues.

Several prominent evangelical women accused Hybels of sexually inappropriate acts including Nancy Beach, Nancy Ortberg and Vonda Dyer. Pat Baranowski, a woman who lived with the Hybels family during the 1980s, told *The New York Times* that Hybels groomed her and then sexually coerced her.

When *The Chicago Tribune* reported the allegations earlier this year, the elder board initially accused the women of lying and firmly sided with Hybels.

"Several years ago, an allegation was made against Bill. The elders thoroughly investigated it. They even sought outside counsel to conduct a thorough and independent investigation. After doing so, we found no concerns, nor did outside counsel. To be clear, there is no ongoing investigation of wrongful conduct. We have looked into every allegation that was brought to our elders," elders spokesperson Pam Orr said at the time. "We have full confidence in Bill's character, and we look forward to him continuing in his role as senior pastor until he transitions as planned in October of this year."

In its most recent statement, the elder board apologized for its actions.

"To all of the women who have come forward, the church should

always follow in Jesus' footsteps to help the wounded find healing, and we are sorry we added to your pain. That was not our intention, and we regret that it has taken us this long to acknowledge that. While we will probably never know with certainty everything that's true about each of your stories, we have no reason not to believe you. We are sorry that our initial statements were so insensitive, defensive and reflexively protective of Bill. We exhort Bill to acknowledge his sin and publicly apologize," Rasmussen says on behalf of the elders.

Steve Gillen is stepping in as the interim pastor.

These are tough days, Willow, and we desperately need each other to get through them. May we come together, lean into God and seek Him for guidance.

We are doing an unfortunate dance of grief and sadness, and I am praying for the day when we are overwhelmed with joy again. We can look back on decades of God's faithfulness to us, and we can be grateful for those, like Heather and Steve, who helped shape tremendous values in our culture, like a heart for compassion and a pursuit to love everyone, always.

The church is the bride of Christ, and this church is dearly loved by God—it deserves our very best through the good and bad times. I pray that we can come together and do the hard, and much needed, work of reflection, repentance and healing. Please continue praying for our church as we navigate this season. I look forward to getting to know many of you and walking with you in the weeks and months ahead.

For the full Willow Creek Statements, [click here](#).

Watch the Willow Creek announcement [here](#).