

July 19, 2019

Dear Willow Family:

As we consider the future of our church, we are humbled and encouraged by the truth that the gospel is unchanging. In our time of devotion, we have been challenged to consider the good news as explained by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17–21:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

The good news God commissioned the church to share is the gospel of reconciliation through Jesus Christ, first to God and then to one another. In this season, we believe God has given Willow Creek Community Church the opportunity to live out the ministry of reconciliation. And so, as a church, we take a step into the future as Christ's ambassadors, with the appeal to reconcile to God and to one another.

In the aftermath of the events made public in March 2018, we experienced a fracture in our church marked by disbelief, confusion, fear, and hurt. After such a traumatic experience, what does it look like to enter into a gospel-centered season of reconciliation? Because reconciliation is from God, we prayerfully entered into His work with humility and grace, undertaking a systematic approach to actively listen, learn, and apologize. Over the past six months, we, as an Elder Board, have reached out to and listened to people involved in the events that came to light in 2018.

We have intentionally talked with former Elders, former staff, and the individuals who raised concerns regarding our senior pastor starting in 2014 and went public in 2018. We have also sought to listen to church attenders and current staff who have come forward. We have reached out to Bill Hybels; however, he has chosen not to engage in dialogue at this time. We welcome the opportunity to meet with him to aid in healing and reconciliation. We are issuing this statement because in listening, we recognize that there are some specific harms that must be named.

To the women and their advocates: In the days and months following the March 2018 *Chicago Tribune* article, the church's response led to verbal and written attacks. We have heard about the impact this has had on you, your families, and your professional standing

within the Christian community. We learned that the narrative persists in identifying you as liars and colluders despite the apology released by the lead pastors in June 2018 and the former Elders in August 2018. In early 2019, the IAG report found your allegations to be credible, and we unequivocally support their findings. We believe your allegations about Bill. We ask anyone who participated in verbal and written attacks to prayerfully examine their actions, apologize for wrongdoing, and seek to mend the relationship.

To Compassion International and Menlo Church: Your leaders spoke up for the women who were harmed. We have learned of mail and email messages threatening these advocates and their ministries. We again ask anyone who participated in sending threatening messages to prayerfully examine their actions, and seek to reconcile with those who have been harmed.

To the Elder Board of 2018: We acknowledge that there was an unfair assumption that you acted with malice. We have seen the public anger and judgment directed toward you. We acknowledge the harmful impact on you and your families. We believe that Bill's denials and failure to acknowledge sinful, intimidating, and overly controlling behavior led leaders to make statements that were misinformed and incomplete. The former Elders, along with the former lead pastors, apologized, expressed remorse, and resigned in 2018. We extend God's grace just as we have freely received grace. We invite our fellow believers to join us in extending God's grace.

To the staff of Willow Creek Community Church, both past and present, and to those who have called Willow their church home: We acknowledge your service and sacrifice for the kingdom of God. We recognize that you too have suffered harm in broken relationships, trust, and sense of community. We believe that the God who heals will help restore us all. We affirm the words in Hebrews 6:10: "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them."

God has blessed Willow Creek Community Church to have a profound impact for His kingdom. Bill Hybels served and contributed to Willow for more than 40 years. Simultaneously, unchecked sin and intimidating behavior resulted in harm that is still felt in this present day. Christ died to free us from the power of sin. It is in that spirit that we appeal to Bill to reflect on his years in ministry, repent where necessary, and seek to live out the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:14 that it is the love of Christ within that compels us toward reconciliation. Our path forward must include the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, we encourage all Christ followers from Willow Creek, past and present, to consider the words from Ephesians 4:4–6, "there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." May we grow in compassion, grace, forgiveness, and unity on the path of reconciliation that we now walk.

This is our last public statement intended to directly address the events of 2018. However, we will continue to work privately with individuals seeking renewed relationships and reconciliation.

As we look ahead to the future, we trust God will guide our steps. We invite all past and present Willow family to join the Elders for a worship and reflection service. This service will be Elder-led, and we will share more on reconciliation, our vision for the future, and the gospel-centered hope that anchors our church. Join us on Tuesday, July 23 at 7 p.m. in the Lakeside auditorium of the South Barrington campus.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.” —Ephesians 3:20–21

In His service,

The Willow Creek Elder Board

Shoji Boldt  
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