

Sent: Tue, 16 Oct 2007 7:01 pm
Subject: Statement from the elders

Dear Members of Mars Hill,

Mars Hill Church is an elder-governed church under the headship and authority of Jesus Christ our senior pastor and chief shepherd. It is our calling and desire to glorify Jesus as we lead and serve this church body that He has entrusted to us. Our leadership and service requires faithfulness to Him and the Scriptures in both times of blessing and in times of hardship. This month we've experienced both.

On October 7th we celebrated our 11th anniversary with more than 6,000 people gathered across our five different campuses. For the first time in the history of our church, we have also experienced two staff pastor terminations. It has always been our policy to communicate with the members of Mars Hill in an open, honest, and forthright way, regardless of the circumstances, and we commit to continuing this practice.

The purpose of this letter is to communicate the charges, investigation process, results, and resolution of the elders regarding Pastor Paul Petry. The disciplinary process has not concluded with Pastor Bent Meyer as he was not available to attend the elders meeting on October 15th. Upon conclusion of that process we will also communicate those findings and outcome.

Some members have expressed frustration regarding a lack of information in the announcement of these elders' termination and pending investigation. We understand this, however, it would have been a grievous mistake on our part to speak publicly regarding the specifics prior to the full investigation and decision of all of the elders. There is a fine line between disclosure and gossip and we have been careful to walk in a manner that is above reproach in these circumstances. We did want to communicate the terminations forthrightly but could not speak fully because of the ongoing investigation and disciplinary process. Thank you to those of you who understood this and prayerfully supported your elders during this difficult time.

On October 2nd, we informed the church members that Paul Petry was being terminated from staff employment with Mars Hill Church. As a result, his eldership status was suspended pending a full investigation according to our bylaws and Scripture. Being a pastor on the payroll and a legal elder of the church are two distinct roles and are not mutually inclusive, thus requiring a separate process for each in regard to discipline and removal. The elders have completed the process and have made their ruling regarding Paul Petry's fitness as an elder of Mars Hill Church.

According to our bylaws, Article III, Section E, when investigating charges brought against an elder, the elders must establish an Elder Investigation Taskforce (EIT) and during the investigation the elder in question must be put on temporary leave. A taskforce was assembled made up of four elders: Scott Thomas, Gary Shavey, Dave Kraft, and Steve Tompkins.

These men had the unenviable task of investigating two fellow pastors and reporting their findings to the entire Elder Council. They spent significant time in silence and solitude, reading and meditating on Scripture, repenting of personal sin, and praying for God's wisdom. This was important because our enemy will use every opportunity he can to cause division, fear, doubt, confusion, and personally attack the leaders in the church, especially at a vulnerable time like this.

After consecrating themselves, the EIT began the investigation by collecting information regarding the charges from all of the elders. Based on these charges, the EIT formulated questions for a personal meeting with Paul Petry where he would be given a chance to respond to the charges. Upon completion of the investigation, the EIT was asked to review the evidence and the results of their meeting with Paul, and for each man to produce a statement that reflected their conclusion. The next step was for all of the elders to convene and make a final determination regarding Paul's eldership status, which is a binding and final decision.

The elders gathered with Paul on Monday, October 15th. The EIT presented the charges they found to be credible, which included lack of trust and respect for spiritual authority and improper use of confidential information. Each elder on the EIT read their personal statement and Paul was given a second opportunity to respond to the charges, make his own statement, and field questions from the elders. Upon completion of the questions and Paul's responses, Paul was dismissed and the elders deliberated over the matter. According to our current bylaws, the elders must determine by a 75 percent majority whether the charges have been established as credible, and if so, the appropriate discipline that should take place.

The following two motions were proposed and seconded.

Motion 1: I vote that Paul Petry is in violation of biblical qualifications of eldership (e.g., 1 Tim. 3; Titus 1; Acts 20:27- 28; 1 Peter 5:1- 5).

Motion 2: Paul Petry should be removed from Eldership at Mars Hill Church based on his violation of the biblical qualifications of eldership.

It was unanimously decided that Paul Petry was in violation of the biblical qualifications of eldership and further resolved that Paul should be removed as an elder of Mars Hill Church. This was not an easy decision for the elders because we all have a personal friendship with Paul and his family. We love Paul and are committed to making Mars Hill Church a safe place for him and his family to continue to worship and serve as partners in the Gospel. A team of pastors has been assembled to care for Paul and his family through this time. We would encourage all of you with a relationship with the Petry family to reach out to them and continue to be a part of their lives. Furthermore, as stated in our previous announcement, Paul will receive full salary and benefits through the end of December 2007.

This has been a difficult time for our church but we have embraced this challenge because it is the right thing to do. We believe that in God's sovereignty we have been forced to deal with this situation at a very crucial time in our church as we spread out to many campuses and build local elder teams at each campus that are charged with the oversight and care of their particular campus. It is a sanctifying and clarifying time for your elders as we re-commit ourselves to leading Jesus' church faithfully.

While your elders are not perfect, I pray that you see we are seeking to lead Mars Hill under Jesus' headship faithfully and that we are as committed as ever to preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ boldly. We are further committed to establishing a biblical eldership that takes sin and grace seriously and that is willing to lead by example.

This is the Elders' official statement regarding the matter and we do not intend to engage in further discussion because that would lead to gossip. We would encourage you to continue to trust and pray for your elders in a way that is faithful to the Bible's instruction on these issues. We must all act and respond in a manner that is worthy of the calling we have received and not in a manner that is harmful to Jesus and His church. Despite difficult circumstances, the elders are moving forward together and we would ask you to do the same.

Sincerely,

Pastor Jamie Munson, Lead Pastor
On behalf of the elders of Mars Hill Church