



# WILLOW CREEK

COMMUNITY CHURCH

## PROCESS UPDATES

[HOME \(/EN\)](#) / [ABOUT \(/EN/ABOUT\)](#)

### Willow Creek Process & Elder Updates

The 2019 process updates will send as-needed to keep you informed on the investigation, our Elders process, our governance review, frequently asked questions, and ways you can be praying. **Sign up to receive the updates via email [here \(https://willowcreek.us1.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080&id=2576ea8fb0\)](https://willowcreek.us1.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080&id=2576ea8fb0).**

We commit to updating you with any major changes using churchwide communication avenues as the need arises.

Updates will also be posted below.

#### Click below to quickly access previous process updates

Listing of Past Updates

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### Elder Update: May 24

Dear Willow Family:

As the Elder Board, we are committed to keeping the congregation informed of ministry direction and important status updates. This message provides an update on the acting senior pastor and our search for the next senior pastor.

We are grateful to Steve Gillen for serving as acting senior pastor during this challenging season in the life of our church. He has provided caring leadership and a stabilizing presence during a time of significant and unforeseen change. We recognize the sacrifice he and his family have made in service to God and our church, and we are grateful for their example. We affirm Steve's leadership and are pleased to share that Steve has agreed to continue as acting senior pastor during the search for our next senior pastor.

We have evaluated several approaches to conducting this search. After much prayer and consideration, we decided to put together a Senior Pastor Search Committee comprised of five Elders. In addition, the committee is partnering with a pastoral search firm to facilitate the process. Our initial estimate is that the search process will take approximately six months, with a goal to conclude by year-end 2019. We ask for your continued prayers in the coming months as we discern the next steps for church leadership.

We trust God to guide and lead this process, and we recognize that there will be many questions in the coming days and months. We value the input of staff and congregants across all campuses and are already planning ways for you to participate in this process.



In the last Elder update, we shared our commitment to send out Elder teams to each of the campuses and we started with visits to Willow Chicago, Willow Huntley, and Casa De Luz in April. The next scheduled visit is for South Barrington. A team of Elders will be available after each service this weekend, May 25/26, in Guest Central at the South Barrington campus.



As we look toward the future, let us be reminded of God's sovereignty. During the time of the prophet Jeremiah, the nation of Israel was exiled from their land, facing what appeared to be a hopeless situation. God spoke words of comfort and hope for their future. May we trust in God's sovereignty and remember the truth of His character as shown in His Word:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. —Jeremiah 29:11-13

In His service,  
The Willow Creek Elder Board

Shoji Boldt  
Barb Butz  
Jeff Choh  
Silvia Escobar  
Steve Kang  
Jeff Mason, Chief Governance Officer  
Michael Roth  
John Sleeting, Secretary  
Mary Square

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## Process Update: May 2

### Process Updates

The process update emails were established in August 2018 to keep you informed on the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) report, our Elder selection process, the governance review, frequently asked questions, and ways you can be praying. This email contains the governance report and a response from the Elder Board, and thus concludes the formal process update emails.

Moving forward, the Willow Creek Elder Board will use this email list to send updates as needed on their progress. If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please opt out [here](#) (\*|UNSUB|\*).

We commit to updating you with any major changes using churchwide communication avenues as the need arises.

### Governance Review

The Governance Review Core Team was formed in the fall of 2018 to review Willow Creek's governance structure (policy governance), determine its effectiveness and weaknesses, and present recommendations to the new Elder Board for possible governance enhancements.

The team was originally comprised of eight individuals: an independent governance expert for churches and nonprofits, two senior-level staff, two congregants, and three former Elders. This team intentionally has more non-Elders than Elders.

To better understand how the church executed the governance mode, the Core Team has thoroughly reviewed all Elder documentation, minutes, policies, and procedures, and individually interviewed each Elder who served on the board from 2014 to 2018. The independent expert, Jim Galvin, was the sole interviewer of former Elders and has provided tremendous expertise, leadership, and guidance as the team continues to review Willow Creek's governance structure.



The Core Team completed their work and provided a report to the Elders for their review. The Elders provided a summary and recommendations in response to the report, which they are releasing in its entirety as presented by the Core Team. Scroll down or click (<https://www.willowcreek.org/en/blogs/south-barrington/elder-update-may-2-2019>) here (<https://www.willowcreek.org/en/blogs/south-barrington/elder-update-may-2-2019>), to read their response and the full governance report.

Questions for the Elders can be sent to [elders@willowcreek.org](mailto:elders@willowcreek.org) (<mailto:elders@willowcreek.org>).

*Ways to pray: Say a prayer of gratitude for the Governance Review Core Team and the work they have done. Continue praying for the new Elder Board as they learn from the past and seek to make changes for the future using the information obtained from the governance report.*

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## Elder Update: Governance Report

Willow family,

In the New Testament, Elders are charged with the responsibility of overseeing, caring for, and protecting the congregation. The apostle Peter wrote:

*To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3)*

In the summer of 2018, the previous Elder Board appointed a Governance Review Core Team. The charter for the Core Team included an evaluation of Willow's governance model in the wake of last year's events and recommendations to help restore trust in Elder Board oversight. As the current Elder Board, we appreciate the forethought of our predecessors and their cooperation with the independent governance consultant. We would also like to acknowledge the work of the Core Team, which was led by an independent governance consultant and consisted of congregants, staff, and previous Elders. Their work has resulted in actionable steps for improved governance at Willow Creek Community Church.

As Elders, we are committed to serving the church in the spirit of 1 Peter. We value the work of the Governance Review Core Team in examining past events. We are listing out the recommendations verbatim, followed by actions taken to date. Our work also requires looking forward and discerning how to implement governance improvements for the next season of ministry at Willow Creek. We ask for your continued prayers as we seek God's direction.

### The 14 Governance Review Recommendations

**1. Retain Policy-Based Governance:** Policy-based governance did not cause or allow the problems the congregation faced in 2018.

Moving away from this form of governance would be a mistake. The board needs to clearly understand the distinction between ends and means, or governance and operations. The board needs to continue to stay out of operations and focus on governing. With an organization with this level of complexity, the board needs to stay in their lane.

**2. Increase Accountability:** Consider changing the governance structure so that the Senior Pastor reports to the Elder Board, is not an elder, does not vote, but instead serves under the authority of the Elder Board. Increase accountability and develop a practice for asking soul-keeping questions. All Willow ministry staff need a personal accountability group of some kind. These can be with people inside or outside of the congregation. Unfortunately, no board can effectively hold a pastor or ministry staff person accountable unless they are willing to invite trusted people into their private life. But creating a culture of accountability can go a long way toward preventing future scandals.

**3. Clarify Communication Protocols:** Revisit the Board Chair role and former restrictive communication patterns. Clarify which staff the elders can contact directly, if any, for additional information. Set this in board policy. Reclarify what kind of contact staff can have with board members. Consider launching an annual retreat or quarterly informational meeting with board and executive team meeting together.



**4. Redefine Consensus Decision-Making:** Train for proper understanding and use of consensus, voting, alignment, and the “one voice” principle. Under policy-based governance, if the board cannot achieve consensus, then they should take a vote. It is not ideal, but it usually serves the organization better than waiting too long to act. After the meeting, the board members should speak with one voice, only saying what action was decided by the board, and should not report the outcome of the vote or who was opposed and why.

**5. Conduct Regular Executive Sessions:** Executive sessions, where the board excuses the Senior Pastor for a part of the meeting, is a best practice in governance. The Elder Board should consider conducting routine executive sessions at beginning and end of each meeting. These can be formalized in the typical agenda for a board meeting.

**6. Enhance Elder Board Policy Governance Manual:** The current board policy manual is generally in good shape. The board needs to review bylaws and all policies annually. The board started well in 2008 but the board policy manual did not get much attention during the 2014 through 2018 time period. Many of the recommendations listed here will need to be formalized as new or revised policies in the board policy manual. Several formatting improvements would make the board policy manual easier to reference for elders.

**7. Upgrade the Crisis Management Plan:** In a time of crisis, a governing board sometimes needs to go beyond existing policies and act, especially if the crisis involves the Senior Pastor. If a Senior Pastor is suddenly incapacitated, the board should act immediately to appoint an interim Senior Pastor. Strengthen the existing crisis management plan with examples of various moral crises and how to respond, including how to handle allegations against the Senior Pastor or a Lead Pastor, and when to put a leadership staff person on an immediate leave of absence.

**8. Form Theological Subcommittees:** As new theological issues emerge; the incoming board should continue the practice of appointing ad hoc subcommittees of the Elder Board or special task forces as needed to develop theological statements for Willow on specific issues. Tapping outside experts can provide valuable assistance to the board in working through challenging issues.

**9. Establish New Board Member Pipeline:** Consider creating a new elder development program that invites those who may wish to be candidates to the Elder Board to attend governance training and increase the opportunities for them to be informally vetted to produce fewer negative surprises. Perhaps these candidates could observe the opening segment of several board meetings as a part of this experience. This will increase the pool of capable candidates ready to serve.

**10. Adjust Elder Selection Process:** Improve the elder selection process with an emphasis on balance between chemistry and courage. In the past, the current Elder Board made the final selection of new elders. For theological reasons, some will want to keep that practice in place. For the purpose of rebuilding and maintaining trust of the congregation, consider changing the elder selection process so the official elder selection committee makes the final decision instead of the Elder Board. Ensure that the selection committee is populated by a majority of non-elders.

**11. Improve Elder Onboarding:** Improve onboarding and mentoring for new board members. All new board members need to be fully briefed on key information and events from the past that may not be public knowledge. All new board members need to receive training or read materials about policy-based governance. This will allow new board members to step in and start contributing productively from their first meeting.

**12. Review Relationship with the WCA:** Given all that happened in 2018, Willow Creek Community Church and the WCA, now called the Global Leadership Network, should undertake a special review of the relationship between the two organizations. These legally separate organizations have a written cooperation agreement that may now need to be updated. For example, going forward, no staff should be employed by both organizations to increase accountability on both sides. Special attention should be given to the use of the name and the brand of Willow Creek.

**13. Send Out Elder Teams:** The church may benefit by encouraging more interaction between the elders and staff. Consider developing a policy where more than one elder will be sent to represent the Elder Board at any campus or with any group of staff.

**14. Build Bridges with Staff:** Except for the practice of inviting staff from specific ministries for dinner each month, the leadership staff and elders have been kept in separate compartments. This lack of familiarity can allow mistrust to fester in a time of crisis. Schedule events and venues where board and staff can get to know each other as fellow believers in Jesus and co-laborers at Willow Creek.

To date, the following improvements have been implemented:

- The senior pastor reports to the Elder Board, is not an Elder, and does not vote. (#2)
- Consensus decision-making has been redefined. (#4)



• Executive sessions are now standard for board meetings. (#5)

• Elders have begun quarterly visits with each Willow Creek location. (#13)

• Elder and staff communication has increased, including more Elder representation at events and meetings. (#14)

We are working through all 14 recommendations. We are also prayerfully considering the governance and structural changes required for the future of Willow Creek. We will continue to provide updates on our current activities, including the senior pastor search and completion of the annual financial audit.

View the full Governance Review report [here](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080/files/6d3bafc4-0b43-450c-8e1e-4eb1c80771e2/Report_on_Governance_Review_2014_2018_FINAL.pdf) ([https://gallery.mailchimp.com/dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080/files/6d3bafc4-0b43-450c-8e1e-4eb1c80771e2/Report\\_on\\_Governance\\_Review\\_2014\\_2018\\_FINAL.pdf](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080/files/6d3bafc4-0b43-450c-8e1e-4eb1c80771e2/Report_on_Governance_Review_2014_2018_FINAL.pdf)).

In His service,

The Willow Creek Elder Board

Shoji Boldt

Barb Butz

Jeff Choh

Silvia Escobar

Steve Kang

Jeff Mason, *Chief Governance Officer*

Michael Roth

John Sleetling, *Secretary*

Mary Square

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## **Elder Update: April 17**

Willow family,

Over 40 years ago God commissioned Willow Creek Community Church to the [mission](https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/beliefs-and-values) (<https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/beliefs-and-values>), of turning irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. We [envision](https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/beliefs-and-values) (<https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/beliefs-and-values>). Willow Creek Community Church to be a biblically functional community of believers so that Christ's redemptive purposes can be accomplished in the world. The events of the last year have highlighted both the importance of staying true to God's calling and the work we must do to collectively live out our church mission and vision. This is the first of multiple updates we will send regarding our progress and direction.

As an Elder Board, we acknowledge the failures of our church to handle the allegations with care, humility, and repentance. We apologize for the failure to hold Bill Hybels accountable while he served as the senior pastor. We apologize for the initial statements that were made disparaging those who brought forward allegations. We acknowledge the harm they have suffered. There is much work ahead to repair and heal what has been broken. We trust God to guide us.

Since the last Elder update, we have initiated conversations with those who made direct allegations against Bill Hybels as well as their advocates. We know that some would have preferred we make a public statement right away. We desire to prioritize the individuals in their own story. We recognize the faith it takes to speak with us as well as the courage it takes to retell stories of harm with the risk of experiencing pain all over again. We will continue the conversations at the rate and depth that is most honoring to them.

We have also initiated communication with Bill Hybels. We are sincere in our desire to pursue communication that facilitates repentance, healing, and restoration. While the Elder Board cannot compel any action, we seek to engage in a process of truth and reconciliation. We remain prayerful that God's will be done.

As a community we find ourselves

- mourning our loss and
- sitting in the tension of the space in between what was and what will be
- while celebrating the victory of a God who is still at work in our church.

While this is a hard place to be, this is a very Christ-centered place to be. During this Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, Christ invites us to

- mourn the death of our Savior,
- sit in the tension of silence, and



We ask our Willow Creek family to approach this holy week with a new resolve.

Let us gather on Good Friday and mourn. We will mourn the loss of relationships. Mourn the suffering inflicted by sin. Mourn a Savior who bore the penalty of our sins on the cross.

Let us pray and diligently seek God on Saturday. We will pray for God's wisdom in reconciling with the past. Pray for God's direction for the future. Pray to a Savior whose mission remains to seek and save that which is lost.

Let us gather again on Sunday to celebrate the victory of our Savior. We will celebrate the God who is faithful to His people. We will celebrate the hope He brings for the future of our church.

Reconciliation is a process. Collectively we will engage in truth-telling, humility, apology, and grace. This holy week serves as an important starting point for our church to lean into the work of redemption as expressed through the death, burial, and resurrection of our Savior. We will provide an update on public statements and next steps based on our conversations with those involved in the events of last year.

In His Service,

The Willow Creek Elder Board

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### **Elder Remarks, Weekend Service: March 2 & 3**

On Thursday your Elders and your executive staff received, for the first time, the report from the Independent Advisory Group (IAG). This group was established last August by our predecessor elder board to consider allegations related to Bill Hybels, review the organizational culture of this church, and make recommendations to us. Our first decision with regard to this report was to make it publicly available immediately to the entire Willow Creek community.

While we will need some time to adequately consider the full report and respond appropriately, we'd like to be quick to thank the members of the IAG for their work. We suspect some of you will think the report was too short or too long, too weak or too strong, but because this truly was an independent advisory group, the report is their work—based on hundreds of hours of interviews and meetings—and was not directed by us. We humbly accept their report in its entirety.

We know many of you will want to hear more about what we intend to do in light of this report's recommendations—and you will. We must seek God humbly and patiently as we consider what aspects of our church need to change and what apologies need to be given.

Moving forward, we will provide Elder updates regarding our efforts to bring healing to the past, along with the necessary changes to governance and management. We believe this will enable us to honor Jesus Christ and His testimony in and through our church with excellence and integrity. We pledge to do all of this prayerfully, humbly, and transparently. We ask again for your prayers and patience as we seek to provide servant leadership to this church we all love so much.

Finally, while we have only been on your Elder Board for six weeks, we are all longtime members of the Willow Creek family. We recognize this is God's church—not ours, and we want His will, not our own. Thank you for bearing with us as we embark on this remarkably important journey together.

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### **Elder Update, February 28: IAG Report**

Willow Family,

As your new Elder Board, we have an important update for our church about the events brought to light during this past year. Our desire is to move forward into this new season with transparency, acknowledging that truth coming to light can oftentimes be difficult and painful.

In April 2018, Bill Hybels stepped down as senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church at a public gathering of the Willow community. Much has happened since then: additional public accusations have been made about Bill; Lead Teaching Pastor Steve Carter and Lead Pastor Heather Larson resigned; Steve Gillen was named acting senior pastor; the entire Elder Board resigned; and an Independent Advisory Group (IAG) was commissioned by the resigning Elder Board and the Willow Creek Association Board (WCA). The WCA is now named the Global Leadership Network.



We are an entirely new Elder Board of nine members, formally installed in January 2019. We are committed to working together to learn from the past as we look toward our future together as a church, incorporating the recommendations of the IAG's report.



The IAG has now completed its work, and we thank them for their time and commitment. As we provide the findings, we'd like to remind you of their scope. Specifically, Willow Creek Community Church and the WCA asked the IAG to do the following:

1. Consider allegations related to Bill Hybels.
2. Review the organizational culture of the church and association.
3. Make recommendations to the church and association for future actions based on their findings.

We'd like to also tell you what the IAG's work was *not*. This was not a court of law or a legal proceeding. While the IAG members conducted scores of interviews, they did not have subpoena powers and could not place people under oath. They could not compel anyone to speak with them who refused to participate. In addition, this was not a self-assessment or internal examination. None of the four members of the IAG worked for or had formal ties to Willow Creek Community Church or the WCA. The IAG did not seek direction or opinions from Willow Creek Community Church or the WCA in this process. The expenses for the work of the IAG were funded by an external anonymous donor, and IAG members were not compensated for their time. Their work was truly independent.

We received the IAG report on February 28, 2019, and are making the full, unedited report available to the entire Willow Creek community and the public at large. The IAG has completed its work and is not taking questions. We cannot speak on their behalf regarding their findings.

Following are commitments and requests from us:

1. As a new Elder Board, we ask for your prayers and patience as we process this report and prepare appropriate responses and actions.
2. We commit to honor and respect the work of the IAG and the entirety of their report.
3. We verify that the report posted on willowcreek.org is the exact report received from the IAG. A third party will provide a verification by the end of February 28 that will also be posted on the website. (*Click [here \(/media/images/7-0-about/wccc-2019-aup-report.pdf?la=en\)](/media/images/7-0-about/wccc-2019-aup-report.pdf?la=en) to view a third-party verification of the report.*)
4. We commit to provide ongoing communication regarding our deliberations on this report's findings and recommendations. If you would like to receive our process updates, please click [here \(https://willowcreek.us1.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080&id=2576ea8fb0\)](https://willowcreek.us1.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080&id=2576ea8fb0).
5. We are prayerfully looking at our church culture, policies, and governance model in light of the IAG's report in order to better honor Jesus Christ and His testimony in and through our church.
6. If you wish to communicate with our Elder Board, please email [elders@willowcreek.org](mailto:elders@willowcreek.org). We will do our best to respond, and we ask for your patience.

While we cannot change the events of the past, we grieve what has happened, ask for forgiveness, and commit ourselves to pursuing healing and reconciliation.

Thank you for your prayers and faithful engagement in the life and ministry of our church during this season. We remain confident in God's goodness and in His plans for us, His church.

In His service,

The Willow Creek Elder Board

**View the IAG report [here \(/media/images/7-0-about/elders2019/iagreport-022819.pdf?la=en\)](/media/images/7-0-about/elders2019/iagreport-022819.pdf?la=en).**

*Click [here \(/media/images/7-0-about/wccc-2019-aup-report.pdf?la=en\)](/media/images/7-0-about/wccc-2019-aup-report.pdf?la=en) to view a third-party verification of the report.*

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*Read more about previous process update below*

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## **Process Update: January 19**

### **2019 Elder Board**

We are pleased to announce that the 2019 Elder Board has been installed. Thank you for your input, participation, and prayers throughout this process. The following individuals are serving as the new Willow Creek Elder Board:

- Shoji Boldt
- Barb Butz

- Silvia Escobar
- Steve Kang
- Jeff Mason
- Michael Roth
- John Sleetings
- Mary Square

Click [here](https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/elders-and-leadership/willow-creeks-elders) (<https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/elders-and-leadership/willow-creeks-elders>) to read bios for each Elder.

*Ways to Pray: Pray for each of these Elders as they take on the responsibility of leading our church. Ask that God's wisdom and guidance would be abundant in their lives as individuals and as a new Elder Board.*

#### **Final words from the Elder Selection Committee**

Click [here](https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/elders-and-leadership/elder-affirmation) (<https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/elders-and-leadership/elder-affirmation>), to read a note from the Elder Selection Committee regarding the Elder selection process.

[Return to top.](#)

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### **Process Update: January 14**

#### **Elder Affirmation**

We want to provide a brief update confirming that the 30-day Elder affirmation period ended on December 31, 2018. The Elder Selection Committee is grateful for everyone who offered input on the process and the candidates, and they have taken all information into consideration before announcing the final Elder Board. The 2019 Elder Board and an update on the process will be announced this weekend, January 19/20, during weekend services. A process update email will follow the announcement during the Saturday evening service.

*Ways to Pray: Pray that this new year will bring a renewed sense of hope for the future of our church. Pray for wisdom and discernment for the new Elders as they transition into their roles.*

[Return to top.](#)

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### **Process Update: January 8**

**Please read an update from the Willow Creek Independent Advisory Group below:**

The Willow Creek Independent Advisory Group (IAG) has been fully engaged in its assignment since its formation this past August. Its task is threefold: 1) consider allegations related to Bill Hybels as founder and pastor of Willow Creek Community Church (WCCC) and founder and spokesperson of the Willow Creek Association (WCA); 2) review organizational culture of the church and association; and 3) make recommendations to the church and association for future actions.

The IAG works autonomously. Neither WCCC nor WCA are represented on the IAG nor party to the group's work except for providing information as requested. Both WCCC and WCA have pledged their full cooperation and to date have been fully cooperative of all requests made of them.

Extensive written documents have been reviewed by the IAG, including submissions to its fully confidential hotline. A lengthy list of interviews has and is being conducted, and additional consultations have been engaged. The IAG continues to receive broad and candid engagement.

The IAG is on track to meet its completion target of sometime in the first quarter of 2019.

Members of the IAG serve without remuneration. Expenses are covered by an anonymous donor outside of WCCC/WCA and administered by a third party. The group is co-chaired by Jo Anne Lyon, General Superintendent Emerita of The Wesleyan Church, Indianapolis, IN, and Leith Anderson, President of the National Association of Evangelicals, Washington D.C. Other members are Margaret Diddams, Provost of Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, and Gary Walter, past president of the Evangelical Covenant Church,

THE IAG IS NO LONGER ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS AS THEIR WORK HAS BEEN COMPLETED (UPDATED 2/28/19).

[Return to top.](#)

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## **Process Update: December 18**

### **2019 Process Updates**

This email concludes the 2018 process updates. Because the investigation and governance review are not completed, email updates will continue in 2019 as information becomes available, but you can expect to receive these emails less frequently than in 2018.

Thank you for your commitment to God and to lifting up our church in prayer. We are grateful for God's faithfulness and the family rising in our church community as people lean in and roll up their sleeves to do the hard work of repentance and reconciliation.

### **Elder Affirmation Period**

The process for selecting Elder candidates is complete, and these candidates have been presented to the Willow Creek congregation for the next step in the process: the affirmation period. According to church governance, the Willow Creek congregation is given 30 days to affirm these Elders. During the affirmation period, the congregation is asked to voice any concerns about the process and/or any of the candidates. Congregational input is extremely valuable to the Elder Selection Committee (ESC) and is taken into consideration when determining which candidates are installed as the new Elder Board. Learn more about the candidates and the process [here \(https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/elders-and-leadership/elder-affirmation\)](https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/elders-and-leadership/elder-affirmation).

In January, at the conclusion of the 30-day affirmation period, the new Elder Board will be installed, and an onboarding process will begin to prepare them for their new roles.

If you have any concerns whatsoever, please contact Capin Crouse at 630-682-9797, ext. 1291, or [willowcongregationhotline@capincrouse.com \(mailto:willowcongregationhotline@capincrouse.com\)](mailto:willowcongregationhotline@capincrouse.com). If you call, you will be prompted to leave a message, and a representative from Capin Crouse will return your call within two business days to hear your concern.

*Ways to pray: Pray that God will use the future Elder Board to lead with humility and courage, guided by the Holy Spirit.*

### **Financial Update**

As stated on the weekend of December 8/9, we have seen a decline in the South Barrington weekly giving in 2018. The decline has leveled off, and the 2019 weekly operating budget has been set accordingly to \$550,000/week. *(Update: Due to a final year-end budget review, the South Barrington weekly operating budget was increased to \$555,000 to account for Willow Creek TV giving.)*

Due to the decline in giving, we have a significant gap of \$3.3 million in the South Barrington general operating budget as we near the end of 2018. This year, we are focusing our year-end giving efforts on a Close the Gap initiative. If you feel prompted to help, simply select "Close the Gap Initiative" in the drop-down box [here \(https://pushpay.com/g/willowcreek?src=hpp\)](https://pushpay.com/g/willowcreek?src=hpp), or write "Close the Gap" in the memo of a check and drop it in the offering basket during any service. Learn more about each regional's year-end campaigns on their location pages.

Our 2017 year-end fund was designated to Forward, a campaign to fight for every family, call out the best in every Christ follower, and reach our friends who are far from God. While many of the Forward initiatives were put on pause, we still have funds allocated for those purposes, and we will use the funds as intended in 2019.

*Ways to pray: Thank God for His continued provision and faithfulness, and ask for His blessing as we seek to close our 2018 budget gap. May He continue to entrust us with the resources to do the work He set before us in 2019 to serve those in our church, community, and world.*

### **Investigation**

As was stated in the October 11 process update, we are not involved with the investigation or the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) activities, so we do not have an update at this time. We are committed to passing along any updates we receive.

## **The GC2 Summit**

On Thursday, December 13, Wheaton college hosted the GC2 to address sexual misconduct in the church and pursue healing and a path forward. This TED Talk–style summit featured pastors and leaders who have been victims and advocates for those who have experienced abuse, and Willow Creek hosted a live stream of the GC2 for our staff. Some speakers had associations with Willow Creek, and we are committed to informing you of any major media publications that cover Willow in this time. Please read related articles from the *Daily Herald* [here](https://www.dailyherald.com/news/20181213/we-are-here-to-gather-our-courage-wheaton-college-summit-addresses-sex-abuse-in-evangelical-churches) (<https://www.dailyherald.com/news/20181213/we-are-here-to-gather-our-courage-wheaton-college-summit-addresses-sex-abuse-in-evangelical-churches>), and *Christianity Today* [here](https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/december/metoo-evangelicals-abuse-beth-moore-caine-lucado-gc2-summit.html) (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/december/metoo-evangelicals-abuse-beth-moore-caine-lucado-gc2-summit.html>).

*Ways to pray: Pray for continued discussions in the church on how to address sexual misconduct. As Beth Moore challenged, pray for the church to be a safe place for victims to find healing and restoration. Pray for our church to be a place where nothing is hidden in the darkness and a place where people learn about the God in whom there is no darkness.*

## **FAQs**

### **Leadership**

"Where is Bill? How is his family doing?"

- Many have asked for updates on Bill, both out of concern for him and his family and in a desire for the church to more directly address the events of this past year. We can't speak for Bill or his family.
- We are praying that the coming year brings closure for many and a rising hope of restoration. We will continue to seek God and His plans for our church, searching our own hearts and surrendering our pain, even if lingering questions remain unanswered.

### **Elder Selection**

"Why are there only Elder candidates from two campuses?"

- Nominations were received from every campus. The ESC felt it was most important to first focus on spiritual maturity, leadership skills, competencies, and the biblical attributes of being an Elder. The campus of each candidate was a secondary focus.
- As each phase came to a close, the ESC chose candidates to move forward based on the criteria for an Elder, not a campus quota, which resulted in a well-rounded board in skill set, experience, gender, and diversity.
- One of the Elder candidates is an active participant in Casa de Luz, which meets at the South Barrington campus, but does have its own services, pastors, and Leadership Advisory board.
- If you have additional questions or concerns about the process, please contact Capin Crouse at 630-682-9797, ext. 1291, or [willowcongregationhotline@capincrouse.com](mailto:willowcongregationhotline@capincrouse.com) (<mailto:willowcongregationhotline@capincrouse.com>).

"Why are there women on the Elder Board?"

- At Willow Creek, we believe the church should be led by both men and women with God-given leadership gifts, as men and women equally bear His image. Mutual acceptance between men and women and teamwork on the basis of full equality are foundational to the biblical understanding of community as we practice it at Willow Creek, in both staffing and volunteer roles. Learn more about our stance on men and women working together on page 30 of the [Elder statements](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080/files/b9760cbb-24f1-41fc-9e94-c7b51923cb04/ElderStatements2017.pdf) (<https://gallery.mailchimp.com/dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080/files/b9760cbb-24f1-41fc-9e94-c7b51923cb04/ElderStatements2017.pdf>).

[Return to top.](#)

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## **December 4: Elder Affirmation**

The Elder selection process is complete, and 11 candidates have been presented to serve on the Elder Board. According to church governance, the Willow Creek congregation is given 30 days to affirm these Elders. The onboarding and installation of the new Elder Board will occur in January. Please view candidate bios and a letter from the Elder Selection Committee [here](/en/about/elders-and-leadership/elder-affirmation) (</en/about/elders-and-leadership/elder-affirmation>).



If you would like to raise any concerns about an Elder during this 30-day affirmation period, please call 630-682-9797, ext. 1291, or email [willowcongregationhotline@capincrouse.com](mailto:willowcongregationhotline@capincrouse.com) (mailto:willowcongregationhotline@capincrouse.com).



*Ways to pray: Pray for the candidates during the 30-day affirmation period, and thank God for His guidance throughout this process.*

### **Additional Questions**

How was this Elder Board chosen?

- The 2019 Elder Board was selected by the Elder Selection Committee (ESC), a group comprised of congregants, staff, and Elders. The ESC provided extended updates on their process in the [September 27, October 25](https://mailchi.mp/ec6bd707d9a5/willow-update-132877) (<https://mailchi.mp/ec6bd707d9a5/willow-update-132877>), and [November 8](https://mailchi.mp/520f549120b9/willow-update-132981) (<https://mailchi.mp/520f549120b9/willow-update-132981>), emails.

Were any senior leaders at Willow involved in the selection?

- No. The senior pastor no longer serves as an Elder and therefore had no influence or knowledge of the final candidates prior to the ESC choosing them. Additionally, no other senior-level leaders served on the ESC (see full list of ESC members [here](https://mailchi.mp/e5f795dd78e0/willow-update-132749) (<https://mailchi.mp/e5f795dd78e0/willow-update-132749>)).

Do any of the Elder Board candidates have experience at other churches?

- Yes, multiple candidates served on staff or in volunteer roles at other churches prior to attending Willow. Please read their bios below to learn more.

[Return to top.](#)

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## **Process Update: November 29**

### **Elder Selection**

The Elder Selection Committee has concluded their process and will present those chosen to be our new Elder Board on December 1 & 2, which begins a 30-day affirmation period. Candidate names, photos, and short biographies will also be sent via email next week.

*Ways to pray: Pray for the candidates as they prepare for the 30-day affirmation period.*

### **Investigation**

As was stated in the [October 11 process update](https://mailchi.mp/c82faf2567c0/willow-update-132785) (<https://mailchi.mp/c82faf2567c0/willow-update-132785>), we are not involved with the investigation or the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) activities, so we do not have an update at this time. We are committed to passing along any updates we receive.

*Ways to pray: Pray for each of the individuals in the IAG: Leith Anderson, Jo Anne Lyon, Margaret Diddams, and Gary Walter. Pray for God's guidance as they discern who to speak with and continue to seek truth.*

### **Financial Update**

As stated in the [October 25 process update](https://mailchi.mp/ec6bd707d9a5/willow-update-132877) (<https://mailchi.mp/ec6bd707d9a5/willow-update-132877>), the South Barrington weekly operating budget for 2019 will be set at \$550,000/week, decreased from \$685,000/week in 2018. The senior leadership team and all ministry directors have been working together to identify expense reductions over the course of the past month. (*Update: Due to a final year-end budget review, the South Barrington weekly operating budget was increased to \$555,000 to account for Willow Creek TV giving.*)

Through a combination of operating expense reductions and staffing reductions, the church was able to balance the 2019 budget with minimal impact on long-term reserves. A cross-departmental team of staff is working to find additional ways to cut operational spending.

Willow will not take an above-and-beyond offering as a separate Year-End Fund like we have in the past. The financial goal of 2018 is to



close the budget gap that currently exists (about \$3 million).

*Ways to pray: Pray for wisdom and creativity for the staff as they find new ways to do ministry with the resources they have. Pray that we, as a church, continue to seek God as our provider and trust Him to care for us in the midst of this difficult season.*

### **Staffing Updates**

Since Steve Gillen's financial update on [October 20/21 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-jLv812yhM&t=1232s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-jLv812yhM&t=1232s), our senior leadership team has been meeting with every ministry director. Together, this team has been prayerfully determining ministry strategy, budget, and staffing next steps for each of the ministries.

This week, announcements were made regarding the staff whose positions have been eliminated in this season. In total, there were approximately 50 FTE (full-time equivalents) eliminated from the budget. Half of the staffing reductions were accomplished by closing open positions. The other half involved transitioning current staff members. Each staff member affected will receive three weeks of severance for every year on staff, with a minimum of 3 months and a maximum of 12 months.

This process has been painful for all involved, and our staff is deeply saddened by the layoffs. In the spirit of honoring the staff members who recently lost their jobs, we are not posting their names in this email. Each ministry, however, is committed to communicating the layoffs to their leaders, volunteers, and participants in a timely manner and in a way that honors each of the staff members whose positions have been eliminated.

*Ways to pray: Please pray for each staff member who has been affected by the layoffs, both those whose positions have been eliminated and those who are still employed. In a season with multiple losses, the need to let go of staff is heartbreaking. Pray that we honor the work God has done through each and every staff member.*

### **Additional Questions**

Are any entire ministries being eliminated?

- No.

Was there any other way to cover the deficit without eliminating staff?

- As Steve mentioned last month, the three levers available to balance the church's budget were reducing operating expenses, reducing staff, and utilizing long-term reserves. All three of these levers were needed to make the budget balance.

Will there be nondisclosure agreements signed by the affected staff?

- No.

If we are cutting the budget, why is there still construction happening in Promiseland?

- The funds to complete the Promiseland renovation were raised by previous Year-End Fund campaigns. As designated gifts, they must be used for the purposes detailed in the campaign. The Promiseland space will reopen December 8/9.

[Return to top.](#)

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## **Process Update: November 8**

These emails are intended to keep you informed during this transitional season at Willow Creek. You will receive updates about twice a month through the end of 2018 regarding the investigation, our Elder selection process, governance review, staff changes, frequently asked questions, and ways you can pray.

Willow's senior leaders have met with ministry directors to assess their current budget and staffing realities. They have worked to identify each ministry's key purpose and create a strategy for staff and operation costs that support those purposes. These meetings have helped gain clarity on key goals for each team to better serve our congregation and communities. Additional budget planning meetings will continue throughout the month of November.

*Ways to pray: Pray for the staff who are making key budget decisions in the coming days, that they will sense God's guidance and direction. Pray for God to use the gifts and offerings we receive for His purposes in our ministries, making each ministry's vision clear and impact effective.*

### **Elder Selection**

The Elder Selection Committee (ESC) has moved to the next round of the selection process and is slowly narrowing the field of candidates. There are currently 15 candidates still in the process. The ESC continues to be very impressed by all the candidates, and we are grateful to God for the diversity among this group and for the many people who are invested in leading us into a new season at Willow.

*Ways to pray: Pray for wisdom and discernment for the ESC and the candidates in this next stage, that God will bring clarity and peace to all in the process.*

### **Investigation**

As was stated in the October 11 process update, we are not involved with the investigation or the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) activities, so we do not have an update at this time. We are committed to passing along any updates we receive.

*Ways to pray: Pray for each of the individuals in the IAG: Leith Anderson, Jo Anne Lyon, Margaret Diddams, and Gary Walter. Pray for God's guidance as they discern who to speak with and continue to seek truth.*

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **Senior Pastor and Staffing**

"Are we currently looking for a new senior pastor?"

- Our policy governance model outlines the Elder Board's responsibility for determining the process of hiring a senior pastor. In order to keep the process clean and separate from past Elder involvement, all efforts to identify a new senior pastor have been put on hold. It will be one of the first priorities of the new Elder Board once they assume their roles in January.

"What is the general 'vibe' out there for finding new senior staff to join Willow?"

- We have not been in a season of hiring senior-level staff, but the support from pastors and churches across the world has been abundant. Pastors have volunteered their time to preach at Willow and have spent time pastoring our staff. One of the blessings of this difficult time is the way so many have supported, encouraged, prayed for, and offered wisdom to our church staff.

"Will the candidates for senior pastor be provided (at the appropriate time in the process) full transparency to any and all known issues that have been handled in recent years that might pop up again?"

- Yes. Senior pastor candidates will receive access to the governance review and investigation report, which will comprehensively capture the events of this past season. Additionally, it is our hope that the candidate will cultivate relationships with staff members and congregants who were at Willow during this season to better understand the effects this had on individuals and the culture of the church.

*As always, feel free to submit questions you have during this transitional season to [info@willowcreek.org](mailto:info@willowcreek.org) (<mailto:info@willowcreek.org>).*

[Return to top.](#)

One area the Governance Review examined was Elder qualifications (<https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/elders-and-leadership/elder-qualifications>) and how well those qualities were integrated into the Elder selection process. The review is still in process, but preliminary findings revealed that the current Elder qualifications are appropriate. Additionally, it noted the trait of courage needs to be better balanced with the trait of chemistry. Because we are in an Elder selection period, this information was given to the Elder Selection Committee (ESC) before the conclusion of the review. The ESC has been very intentional about incorporating questions regarding the value of courage when interviewing candidates.

*Ways to pray: Pray for wisdom in knowing how governance can be healthier and wiser for our church. Pray for discernment and courage to make changes that will serve our church best.*

### **Elder Selection**

The ESC is in the midst of the Elder selection process and has been greatly impressed by the quality of candidates that went through the first round of interviews. In total, there will be four phases of interaction before the affirmation period.

In the first round, the ESC used a standardized process for interviewing created by ESC members with expertise in interviewing, talent identification, and executive leadership development. In total, 82 candidates were interviewed. Every candidate is a valued congregant in our church, and the ESC worked together to discern the candidates who would move on to the second round of interviews, which began earlier this week.

There are 25 candidates entering round two of the selection process, which will focus on the depth of biblical characteristics an Elder should have and examples of where those characteristics have been evident in the candidates' lives. As highlighted by the governance review, questions will also focus on courage, spiritual gifts, and leadership experience.

The majority of second-round candidate interviews will be completed by different ESC members than the first round, gaining increased exposure of candidates to ESC members throughout the process. The intention is that by the end of the four rounds, the remaining candidates will have interacted with the majority, if not all, of the ESC members.

*Ways to pray: As the ESC heads into the second round of the selection process, pray for wisdom and discernment for the ESC. Pray for the remaining candidates, that they would have peace about the process, feel confident in their interviews, and that their answers fully reflect the gifts, talents, and passions God has given them.*

### **Financial Updates**

During weekend services on October 20/21, Acting Senior Pastor Steve Gillen shared a financial update regarding the current financial reality of the South Barrington campus. You can listen to the full announcement [here](https://www.youtube.com/embed/L-jLv812yhM?start=1232#announcements) (<https://www.youtube.com/embed/L-jLv812yhM?start=1232#announcements>). Here is a brief summary:

Willow Creek budgets are based on the calendar year (January–December), and each fall, we prayerfully review expenses and giving trends to establish a weekly revenue target for the following year. Once the revenue target is set, we carefully build out our ministry budgets based on how we think we can accomplish the mission we feel God has called us to.

Last fall, the leadership of the church set a revenue target of \$685,000/week. From January to July, we fell 10% below the target. From August to October, we received a large, one-time donation from a family in our community that helped us remain about 9% below budget. However, when we look at our revenue from August to present without the large gift, we are 25% below budget.

Our staff has done a great job of cutting back on spending, but as we plan ahead for 2019, we are faced with the reality of needing to set a significantly lower revenue target. We need to live within our means and only spend money that comes in, so we are currently planning on a 2019 revenue target at \$550,000/week. *(Update: Due to a final year-end budget review, the South Barrington weekly operating budget was increased to \$555,000 to account for Willow Creek TV giving.)*

A decrease of this magnitude will be quite a challenge, and there are three primary buckets we will look to adjust to close this gap: long-term cash reserves, ministry operating expenses, and staffing. All three of these buckets will be affected by the budget cuts.

Please note: Each Willow Creek campus operates on separate budgets established by the giving at that respective campus. The



updates in this email speak directly to the financial reality at the South Barrington campus. Each lead pastor is committed to updating their congregations if the need arises.



*Ways to pray: God has always guided our church, and He has led us through challenges like this before. Pray for continued wisdom on how to best steward the money God has entrusted to us. As we look at making cuts, we are seeking God's guidance to navigate these difficult decisions with discernment and courage. Pray for God's continued provision to do the ministry He has called us to do.*

### **Investigation**

An update from the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) was sent yesterday, October 24. You can read it [here](https://mailchi.mp/cc13548b344c/willow-update-132885) (<https://mailchi.mp/cc13548b344c/willow-update-132885>). We are committed to passing along any future updates as we receive them.

*Ways to pray: Pray for each of the individuals in the IAG: Leith Anderson, Jo Anne Lyon, Margaret Diddams, and Gary Walter. Help them follow your guidance as they discern who to speak with and continue to seek truth.*

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **The Elder Board**

"Now that Pastor Steve [Gillen] is no longer on the Elder Board, does that mean he no longer participates in the Elder meetings? If not, why is the senior pastor excluded from the meetings, and how will the Elders stay in touch with what is happening with the staff?"

- While Acting Senior Pastor Steve Gillen is not on the Elder Board, he is invited to, and actively participates in, all the regularly scheduled Elder meetings. He normally brings two to three others from the Senior Leadership Team so that the Elders have an up-to-date and accurate idea of what's going on around the church and with staff. As with most well-run boards, there is an executive session at the end of each meeting that Steve does not participate in. Steve and the senior staff do not vote on motions at the meetings.

#### **Financial Updates**

"How long can Willow last if giving is down?"

- This is a difficult question to answer simply because it depends on how much giving is down. Thankfully, we have been able to set aside funds in a cash reserve, so we are in a place where Willow has significant time to respond to a downturn. As with any emergency fund, we want to use as little of the cash reserve as possible. Our heart is to use the reserves wisely and strategically and to avoid using them for operating expenses. Part of the heart in Steve sharing our financial reality this past weekend was to be transparent about our finances early in the process and make sure that we can weather this storm together as a church.

"Was this financial update really new information?"

- From March until August, there wasn't a significant decline in giving at Willow South Barrington. The resignations of Heather Larson, Steve Carter, and the Elders raised understandable uncertainty in our congregation. Additionally, August is historically one of the lowest giving months of the year, after which giving increases with the start of the school year. When September giving was reviewed, it was the lowest giving month in the past five years. We first informed the staff and then announced it to the congregation as quickly as possible.

"Will South Barrington staff get laid off? Why not just spread out the cuts across all of the staff salaries?"

- At this point, there is not a reasonable alternative to making the financial cuts necessary without affecting some staff roles. We are not able to predict exactly how this will play out, but we are in the process of reviewing operating costs and staffing with every ministry director to make sure we are working as efficiently as possible. In an effort to distribute the burden, South Barrington staff members will not receive raises in 2019.

### **Investigation**

"Will the investigation include what the Elders did previously and what mistakes were made?"

- Yes, that's our understanding.

[Return to top.](#)

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**Below is an update from the Willow Creek Independent Advisory Group.**

The Independent Advisory Group (IAG) has been regularly meeting since its formation this past August and is fully engaged in its assignment. The task is threefold: 1.) consider allegations related to Bill Hybels as founder and pastor of Willow Creek Community Church (WCCC) and founder and spokesperson of the Willow Creek Association (WCA); 2.) review organizational culture of the church and association; and 3.) make recommendations to the church and association for future actions.

Due diligence has included extensive review of documents, initial sets of interviews (with more to come), and ongoing receipt and review of communications submitted through the confidential hotline.

The IAG works autonomously. Neither WCCC nor WCA are represented on the IAG nor party to the group's work except for providing information as requested. Both WCCC and WCA have pledged their full cooperation and to date have been fully cooperative in all requests made of them.

The target date for completion of the IAG work remains during the first quarter of 2019.

Members of the IAG serve without remuneration. The group is co-chaired by Jo Anne Lyon, General Superintendent Emerita of The Wesleyan Church, Indianapolis, IN, and Leith Anderson, President of the National Association of Evangelicals, Washington D.C. Other members are Margaret Diddams, Provost of Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, and Gary Walter, past president of the Evangelical Covenant Church, Chicago, IL. The group may also engage additional resources and consultants as needed.

*THE IAG IS NO LONGER ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS AS THEIR WORK HAS BEEN COMPLETED (UPDATED 2/28/19).*

[Return to top.](#)

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## **October 11: Elder Selection, Investigation, and FAQs**

### **Elder Selection**

The ESC concluded the first round of interviews on October 7 after 82 interviews (a number of people chose to exit the process for time commitment and other reasons). The ESC is meeting this week to determine next steps for nominees. The second round of interviews will begin next week. The ESC is pleased with the quality of nominees, their skill set, their hearts for our church, and the representation of diversity. They are experiencing God's goodness and grace in this process and are on track to hit the target date of December 1 for completing the selection process.

### **Investigation**

On September 18, we announced the commissioning of the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) consisting of Leith Anderson, Jo Anne Lyon, Margaret Diddams, and Gary Walter. The IAG is moving ahead with its work, reviewing documents, and scheduling conversations and meetings. Because we are not involved with their activities, we may not always have substantive updates in the weeks to come, but we will pass along any updates we receive.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

We have received several questions regarding the hiring process at Willow and the organizational structure. We have also received follow-up questions about Care Center attendance.

### **Hiring Process/Organizational Chart**

"Have we lost staff beyond the more prominent senior staff and Elders that were announced? If so, is it going to be harder than usual to replace them? Understanding Willow has high standards and often takes a long time to hire people, will a smaller than usual pool of applicants make it that much harder?"

- An important note: the Elder role is a volunteer position so those candidates go through an evaluation process separate from the hiring process.



Although we have lost staff beyond the more prominent staff announced, many were not directly related to the season we are in. Year over year staff turnover is consistent with 2017. And the number of applications in 2018 is consistent with 2017 applications. One difference this year is, more candidates are local or already part of Willow, seeking to help rebuild during this coming season.

- We continue to trust that God will bring the people we need to fill the open positions. During this season of transition, we are fully committed to a streamlined interview process that honors all involved.

“Who is responsible for finding a new lead pastor and new lead teaching pastor? If it is the Elders, will the process be on hold until January when a new Elder board is in place?”

- The new Elder board will be responsible for determining the process of hiring a new senior pastor, and it will be one of their top priorities once they assume their roles.

“Will the new organizational chart for leadership be sent through the email updates?”

- Yes, we do have an update on the leadership structure. Formerly, there were two meetings each week for senior leadership members, the executive team, and lead pastors. In an effort to be less siloed and have more diversity of thought, the new leadership team is made up of executives from the South Barrington campus, as well as the lead pastors from each regional. While the structure is relatively flat, the group will report to the acting senior pastor and acting executive pastor. This new group of people includes:
  - Steve Gillen (Acting Senior Pastor)
  - Matt Wright (Acting Executive Pastor)
  - Marcus Bieschke (Crystal Lake Lead Pastor)
  - Colby Burke (Human Resources Director)
  - Rob Campbell (Chicago Lead Pastor)
  - Gina Cherian (Acting South Lake Lead Pastor)
  - Paul Johnson (South Barrington Director of Ministries)
  - Todd Katter (Huntley Lead Pastor)
  - Josie Michalak (South Barrington Director of Ministries)
  - Amy Mikal (Acting North Shore Lead Pastor)
  - Matt Sundstedt (CFO/Director of Operations)
  - Reece Whitehead (Wheaton Lead Pastor)

*Ways to pray: Pray for the current and future staff of Willow, that God will bring the right people to lead us into this new chapter of our church. Many staff members have expressed weariness as a result of the past six months, so please pray that they will find rest, healing, and a fresh sense of calling. Pray specifically for our leadership as they continue to lead us through this challenging season, that they will have a renewed vision for the future of Willow, deeper humility as they learn from mistakes, and courage to make changes that glorify God.*

## Attendance

“Is the number of visits to the Care Center down as a result of the current circumstances? Are we losing the opportunity to help people because they are reluctant to come? If so, are we reaching out to people?”

- The Care Center is down 6.8% in volunteerism and 5.2% in guest visits year over year.
- This summer, the Care Center went mobile with a Love Everyone, Always truck to meet needs and serve families facing transportation struggles at four local schools (read an update [here \(https://www.willowcreek.org/en/blogs/south-barrington/willow-weekly-august-28-2018\)](https://www.willowcreek.org/en/blogs/south-barrington/willow-weekly-august-28-2018)). The Mobile Care Center was not a direct result of visits being lower but was a dream set in motion more than a year ago to reach more people who couldn't visit the South Barrington Care Center.

*Ways to pray: The Care Center serves more than 15,000 families each year, empowering them to a more stable future. Pray for more people in need to discover the resources offered through the Care Center—and to ultimately discover the hope and light of Jesus in the midst of their hardship.*

[Return to top.](#)

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## **September 27: Elder Selection Committee and Nomination**

*Elder Selection Committee*



The Elder Selection Committee (ESC) has been finalized. The 26 members include 18 Willow congregants, 6 staff members, and 2 Elders. The ESC members are:



### **Elders**

Harold Engelmann  
Paul Rigby

### **Staff**

Elizabeth Andaas  
Pat Cimo  
Erin Leonard  
Felix Nieves  
Kim Rasmussen (Administrator)  
Scott Woods

### **Regional Congregants**

Evelyn Gutierrez  
Dave Rider  
Jen Smith  
*Ann Choh\**  
Render Dahiya  
Kirsten Richards  
Josh Fredell  
Andy Schmidt  
*Shinna Alava\**

### **South Barrington Congregants**

Kevin Belton  
Clare Bourne  
Dennis Danicek  
Ted Harro  
Joan Kelley  
Joshua Perry  
Denise Stein  
Marsha Vaughn  
Chris Way

\*These previously listed ESC Members stepped down from the Committee after the September 27 email was sent.

### ***Elder Nomination***

The Elder nomination period is now closed. We received 99 nominations with a wide representation of diversity. Here is the breakdown by gender and campus:

### **Campus**

- Casa de Luz: 3
- Chicago: 2
- Crystal Lake: 4
- Huntley: 1
- North Shore: 9
- South Barrington: 74
- South Lake: 4
- Wheaton: 2

### **Gender**

- Male: 66

Each nominee will learn more about the requirements of being an Elder prior to becoming a candidate. Candidates will then enter a series of three interviews with the ESC to determine which of the candidates are best equipped and called to serve in this role at this time. The interviews help discern relational health, character, competencies, chemistry, and courage to become a future Elder. As the interview process continues, the ESC keeps all candidates informed with next steps.

*Ways to pray: Pray for the nominees as they explore serving our church as an Elder for the season ahead. Pray for discernment for both the ESC and the nominees, that God will guide this process and bring us into a season of healing under their leadership.*

## Frequently Asked Questions

Below are questions we have received in our inbox regarding the Elder selection process and attendance, along with ways to pray for each circumstance.

### Elder Selection

“Can you please shed more light on the selection process of the ESC? How do we know that we won’t end up with the same problems we had before? How do we know that they are not friends of Bill, that could be guided by him offline?”

- Information on the qualifications and vetting process for the Elder Selection Committee can be found in the first FAQ from September 16. The goal in creating the ESC was to utilize people who are already trusted by the congregation and who will continue to rebuild trust and pursue restoration in our church. ESC members will seek to be as objective as possible, and have stated they have no current or previous engagements with anyone listed in the Willow allegations that would influence their decisions and prevent them from being open-minded.
- *Ways to pray: Pray for the members of the ESC, that they will have an infusion of discernment and wisdom as they interview Elder candidates. The coming months will require a large time commitment from them—pray for God's presence and peace to be abundant in their lives.*

### Attendance

“How is attendance doing, both in-person at each campus as well as online, year over year (to account for seasonal ebbs and flows)?

- Overall, attendance is down 9% year over year. Attendance at the South Barrington campus was down 16% prior to the public allegations in March and is now down 15%. Year-to-date, overall weekly attendance is just over 24,000. Here's an update on our year-to-date regional attendance:
  - Casa de Luz: Up 16%
  - Chicago: Down 10%
  - Crystal Lake: Down 3%
  - Huntley: Down 6%
  - North Shore: Up 3%
  - South Lake: Up 3%
  - Wheaton: Up 3%
- Willow Creek TV attendance is more difficult to determine, as some watch live and some on-demand, but year over year, views on Willow Creek TV increased 26%.
- *Ways to pray: We have heard many stories of new people still coming to Willow in the midst of this difficult season—God is still at work! Pray for people at Willow to have wisdom and discernment about their involvement with our church and for new people to continue to be connected to Christ and His church in the midst of this season.*

“Is volunteerism down in any ministries as a result of current circumstances? If so, how will we go about the process of finding new volunteers?”

- Volunteerism sees a normal decline during the summer months, and people re-engage in the fall. A staff team is dedicated to streamlining the process to discover serving opportunities, which we hope will help people discover their gifts and use them to bless others.
- *Ways to pray: Willow is always looking for people to volunteer. Pray for people to discover their gifts and to easily find ways they can be uniquely used!*

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## September 18: Willow Creek Independent Review

The Willow Creek Community Church (WCCC) and the Willow Creek Association (WCA) joined to commission an external independent review and advisory group. The request is for this group to 1.) Consider allegations related to Bill Hybels as founder and pastor of the church and founder and spokesperson of the association; 2.) Review organizational culture of the church and association; and 3.) Make recommendations to the church and association for future actions.

Evangelical Christian leaders outside of Willow Creek Community Church and the Willow Creek Association nominated members for the advisory group. Once organized with co-chairs additional members were added. The group chose to be called the Willow Creek Independent Advisory Group (IAG).

The group is co-chaired by Jo Anne Lyon, General Superintendent Emerita of The Wesleyan Church, Indianapolis, IN, and Leith Anderson, President of the National Association of Evangelicals, Washington D.C. Other members are Margaret Diddams, Provost of Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, and Gary Walter, past president of the Evangelical Covenant Church, Chicago, IL. The group may also engage additional resources and consultants as needed to fulfill its mandate.

The IAG will work autonomously. WCCC and WCA have pledged their full cooperation, but neither will be represented on the IAG nor party to the group's work except for providing information as requested. The group hopes to complete its work in early 2019.

The Independent Advisory Group has decided to decline press inquiries and interviews while they complete their review and develop their recommendations. *THE IAG IS NO LONGER ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS AS THEIR WORK HAS BEEN COMPLETED (UPDATED 2/28/19).*

[Return to top.](#)

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## September 16: FAQs

**Below are questions we have received in our inbox regarding the Elder selection process, financial and legal concerns, the investigation, and leadership changes.**

### **Elder Selection**

- “Explain who picked the committee to be on the Elder Selection team? Who is running the Elder selection process?”
  - The Elder Selection Committee (ESC) is running the Elder selection process in this season. Lead Pastors, staff members, and Elders were asked for recommendations from each campus for the ESC. After interviews with each person, and allowing space for all to talk with God and their families, a final ESC was chosen and is composed of 20 Willow congregants, four members of staff, and two Elders. Approximately 60% of the ESC members are from the South Barrington campus and 40% from Regionals. The diversity on the ESC represents the diversity of our congregation. The names of ESC members will be shared in the coming weeks. In order to remain compliant with our legal and fiduciary requirements, an Elder chairs the ESC.
- “What makes someone qualified to be on the Elder selection team?”
  - Qualifications for ESC members include: being part of the 2:42 Community, attending and serving at Willow for at least 5 years, a high level of spiritual maturity, and a strong sense of discernment.
- “What is the candidate vetting process, who does the vetting, and who makes final decisions? What criteria will be used to find new Elders?”
  - Elder nominees begin the process by reading the qualifications of an Elder, which are clearly stated on our website. Next, they complete a thorough questionnaire as part of the screening process, and staff members have the opportunity to complete questionnaires for any Elder nominees serving in their ministries. Getting to know nominees through both formats will set the ESC up for their future interviews. All nominees are invited to attend a gathering to learn more about the Elder role, Policy Governance, and Elder Statements in this initial phase.
  - As nominees continue in the process, they become candidates. Candidates enter a series of three interviews with the ESC to determine which of the candidates are best equipped and called to serve in this role at this time. The interviews help discern relational health, character, competencies, chemistry, and courage to become a future Elder. As the interview process continues, the ESC keeps all candidates informed with next steps.



The ESC will determine which candidates are best to serve as Elders. Upon deciding, selected future Elders undergo a 30-day affirmation period during which the congregation will be able to affirm, or raise concerns on, all recommended Elder Board members. The affirmation process begins the weekend of December 1 & 2.

- “Will we have more diversity in the Elders? Race, family status, etc.”
  - It is the intent of the ESC to select the most qualified candidates to be Elders, and to select Elders that reflect the diversity of our church congregation. The nominations received comprise a wide range of diversity in background, ethnicity, race, family status, and life experience, which will hopefully create a more balanced Elder board in the future.

### Financial/Legal

- “Are we paying Bill's legal fees?”
  - No, Bill is responsible for his own legal fees for any causes against him personally. If in the event a claim is brought against Bill in his capacity as an employee of the church, the church's insurance carrier would likely cover his legal fees.
- “Are there any current lawsuits against Willow?”
  - No.
- “If tithes and offerings are down for a period of time, how will the church continue to operate within its means? What will be the process for determining where cuts are made? Will this process be communicated to the congregation?”
  - South Barrington has made no cuts to date and is kicking off the 2019 budget planning process this month. For the next several weeks, we have asked ministries to only spend funds on mission critical expenses as we determine our financial position. We are committed to providing quarterly updates regarding the church's financial standing.
  - Each regional campus operates with its own budget and planning. Lead pastors will update their congregations accordingly.

### Investigation

- “Why are we having an investigation into the women's stories?”
  - We want to pursue truth however we can, and we specifically want to make things right with the women and the others who have been hurt. Ultimately, we want to lay the foundation for a new and better Willow that honors God in all dimensions, whatever that looks like.
- “Will Bill be a part of the investigation?”
  - Our desire as a church is that Bill would participate in the investigation. Whether or not he chooses to do so or not is outside our control.
- “Who is the independent research company doing the investigation on all the alleged accusations?”
  - An advisory group is being formed to oversee the investigation. This group of individuals is finalizing a few details before confirming their commitment to serve in this capacity. They will determine the appropriate scope and breadth of the investigation. We hope to share their names shortly. We will keep you informed as it progresses.
- “Who is paying for this investigation? Does it come out of our tithes?”
  - The investigation is being funded by a donor who wishes to remain anonymous and is not connected to Bill, Willow Creek, or those who made allegations in order to avoid bias. The donor will have no influence or involvement in the investigation, and the funds will be deposited by the donor into an account maintained by a third-party organization.

### The Elder Response Team

- “What is all this ERT business? Is this lawyer really sending letters to people banning them from campus?”
  - The Elders hold the responsibility for discipline and safety within our church. They delegated the responsibility to a group of staff and volunteers called the Elder Response Team (ERT). With the resignation of the current Elder board, and the decision that no staff, including the Senior Pastor, can be an Elder, it was decided to disband the current ERT in order to rebuild with a fresh foundation. The new Elder board will revisit how to best carry out church discipline.
  - The ERT got involved in many situations. While many cases resulted in a reconciliation or healing process, some resulted in restrictions or boundaries around serving or attending specific service times or workshops. In rare situations where reconciliation and restoration was not achieved, or there was still concern about divisiveness or danger, cases have resulted in complete attendance restriction, and a letter from the church's attorney was sent to the individuals.
- “How does the Elder Response Team define ‘case work’?”

## Willow Staff and Leadership

- “How will leadership begin to build trust and transparency in this season? It’s not honoring to hear things from the bottom up instead of top down.”
  - We acknowledge that rebuilding trust takes time, and our heart is to take many steps to demonstrate an openness and desire for transparency. Here are just a few:
    - We are seeking to rebuild trust with our staff teams by providing spaces to worship, grieve, process, and grow together. We are creating new ways to bridge gaps between levels of management and have formed cross-departmental, cross-regional teams to better collaborate and move forward. Our prayer is that as the staff continues to heal and work together, we will be able to better pastor our congregation.
    - A team has been formed to help pastor the congregation through this season. They are devoted to identifying multiple avenues for people to process. They have plans to lead us on a collective journey of forgiveness, confession, extending grace, and rebuilding trust.
    - We know we have been reactive in our communication with the congregation, we are sorry, and we want to change that. We created a new opt-in email avenue for those who wish to receive more regular updates. This email will be sent at least twice a month through the end of 2018, and the content will include updates on the Elder process, Policy Governance review, the investigation, major staff changes, answers to frequently asked questions, and ways to get involved and pray. You can sign up for this email [here \(https://willowcreek.us1.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080&id=2576ea8fb0\)](https://willowcreek.us1.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080&id=2576ea8fb0).
    - We are committed to updating you with any major changes using churchwide communication avenues such as announcements during weekend services, additional emails, and 2:42 meetings, as the need arises.
- “How can we keep up with the staff changes?”
  - With more than 350 people on staff, it is difficult to inform you on all the changes that take place in our organization (retirement, moving, new job opportunities, etc). With that being said, each ministry is responsible for updating their leaders, volunteers, and participants on any staff changes within that ministry. Our goal is to provide the congregation with director-level staff updates through our opt-in email in this season. Sign up [here](https://willowcreek.us1.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080&id=2576ea8fb0). (<https://willowcreek.us1.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=dfd0f4e0c107728235d2ff080&id=2576ea8fb0>)
- “Who is the leadership team? Can we have their names? Do you have an organizational chart?”
  - In the past, the leadership team team was comprised of ministry directors. We are in the process of developing a new organizational chart and identifying a new structure of leadership.
- “Does Willow use NDA’s (non-disclosure agreements) when firing staff to keep them from talking about their experience?”
  - We believe the questions raised regarding NDAs are likely referring to the church’s financial care package offered to staff who are transitioning from their roles. There are various situations in which the church provides financial care to a transitioning staff member. There are times when a ministry restructures and a staff member’s position is eliminated or is fundamentally different from the one for which she or he was hired. There are situations when the scope of a position changes over time such that it no longer matches the skill set of a staff member and no alternative position within the organization is found. There are also times when the church ends a staff member’s employment due to performance reasons. In all these cases, the primary goal is to care for and assist the staff member and his or her family in the time of transition. We recognize the importance of every staff member’s contribution to building the church and are also mindful of the impact of a transition. The spirit of the financial care the church provides is one of coming alongside to help bridge the gap during the transition to new employment. For all staff members, we understand this time at the church is one part of their journey; when this time comes to a close, for whatever reason, we care that they and their family are well.
  - Willow provides a legal document that outlines the details of the financial care, including specifics of the compensation and benefits. The document includes a brief paragraph that asks the staff member to refrain from making disparaging or untrue statements about the church for the duration of the financial care agreement. A staff member is given time to consider the agreement. It does not prohibit a person from reporting any type of abuse or ethical violation. It does not prohibit the person from sharing her or his experience on staff. Transitions can be hard and our desire is for both the church and the transitioning staff member to be respectful of each other. As a church, we generally don’t share specifics of staff transitions, recognizing that in some cases this is necessary to protect and honor the transitioning staff member. As part of this desire for mutual respect, the document includes an agreement to engage in biblically-based mediation if there is unresolved relational conflict between the transitioning staff member and the church. As we move ahead, we’re considering how to best care for transitioning staff members and their families.
  - The Elder Response Team has never used NDAs.
- “What is the process to find new pastors and senior staff? How much visibility will the congregation have to the candidates and the process?”

- “How are Heather, Steve, and their families doing with regards to their emotional well-being, spiritual well-being, and future job prospects?”
  - Heather, Steve, and their families are finding space to rest and heal. Heather’s family is still connected to their communities at Willow. Steve also gave an update on his personal blog that you can read [here \(https://www.steveyancarter.com/stevewrites/a-time-to-mend\)](https://www.steveyancarter.com/stevewrites/a-time-to-mend).

[Return to top.](#)

### The latest from Instagram

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