

# Mark Driscoll removed from the Acts 29 church planting network he helped found

Sarah Pulliam Bailey August 8, 2014, Religion News Service



(RNS) Seattle megachurch pastor Mark Driscoll has been removed from a church-planting network of more than 500 churches he helped found after a pattern of “ungodly and disqualifying behavior.”

Driscoll, co-founder of the Acts 29 Network, has been an influential but edgy pastor within conservative evangelical circles for several years. His own Mars Hill Church attracts some 14,000 people at 15 locations across five states each Sunday.

At the same time, however, Driscoll has been controversial in evangelical circles for years. The New York Times Magazine [called him](#) “one of the most admired — and reviled — figures among evangelicals nationwide.” He has been provocative, occasionally profane and has faced allegations of plagiarism and inflating his book sales.

After Acts 29 board action, all of Driscoll’s Mars Hill Church locations have been removed from the website of the network.

“It is our conviction that the nature of the accusations against Mark, most of which have been confirmed by him, make it

untenable and unhelpful to keep Mark and Mars Hill in our network,” the Acts 29 board wrote in a [letter](#). “In taking this action, our prayer is that it will encourage the leadership of Mars Hill to respond in a distinctive and godly manner so that the name of Christ will not continue to be dishonored.”

In a longer [letter](#) obtained by blogger Warren Throckmorton, the Acts 29 board asked Driscoll to “step down from ministry for an extended time and seek help.”

“Over the past three years, our board and network have been the recipients of countless shots and dozens of fires directly linked to you and what we consider ungodly and disqualifying behavior,” the board wrote. “We have both publicly and internally tried to support and give you the benefit of the doubt, even when multiple pastors in our network confirmed this behavior.”

Driscoll, who’s been facing the same heavy criticism in recent years that he was known for dishing out to others, recently admitted to and apologized for [comments](#) he made under the pseudonym “William Wallace II” where he posted statements critical of feminism, homosexuality and “sensitive emasculated” men.

The Acts 29 board’s letter suggested that it could not lean on Mars Hill’s own board for discipline.

“In response, we leaned on the Mars Hill Board of Advisors & Accountability to take the lead in dealing with this matter,” the letter states. “But we no longer believe the BoAA is able to execute the plan of reconciliation originally laid out. Ample time has been given for repentance, change, and restitution, with none forthcoming. We now have to take another course of action.”

As Throckmorton has reported on his [blog](#), the Acts 29 action comes after evangelical leaders Paul Tripp and James MacDonald

resigned as members of the church governing board, and ex-members staged a recent protest at the church.

The Acts 29 Network is a network of churches attempting to be “gospel-centered” and “missional.” Its [mission](#) is to plant new churches with an emphasis on holiness, humility, diversity and evangelism.

Driscoll stepped down as president of Acts 29 in March 2012, appointing Matt Chandler as his successor and moving the headquarters to Dallas, where Chandler is a pastor.

Driscoll’s spokesperson did not return requests for comment.

Earlier this year, Driscoll [apologized](#) for missteps in publishing and quit social media for the rest of 2014.

## **Acts 29 Network Removes Co-founder Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church From Membership (UPDATED)**

In a stunning move, the [Acts 29 Network](#) leadership has removed network co-founder and Mars Hill Church lead pastor Mark Driscoll from the organization’s membership. I obtained a letter from several Acts 29 pastors which was sent to Driscoll and Mars Hill Church removing Driscoll and the church as members of the network, as well as calling on Driscoll to step down due to a pattern of complaints from Acts 29 pastors. Mark Driscoll was instrumental in founding the Acts 29 Network and has been president of the group. According to the letter, the information will soon be posted on the Acts 29 website. The letter is below:

Mark,

As the Board of Acts 29, we are grateful to God for the leadership, courage, and generosity of both you and Mars Hill in not only founding the network but also sustaining it through the transition to this board three years ago. The very act of giving away your authority over the network was one of humility and grace, and for that we are grateful.

Over the past three years, our board and network have been the recipients of countless shots and dozens of fires directly linked to you and what we consider ungodly and disqualifying behavior. We have both publicly and internally tried to support and give you the benefit of the doubt, even when multiple pastors in our network confirmed this behavior. In response, we leaned on the Mars Hill Board of Advisors & Accountability to take the lead in dealing with this matter. But we no longer believe the BoAA is able to execute the plan of reconciliation originally laid out. Ample time has been given for repentance, change, and restitution, with none forthcoming.

We now have to take another course of action. Based on the totality of the circumstances, we are now asking you to please step down from ministry for an extended time and seek help. Consequently, we also feel that we have no alternative but to remove you and Mars Hill from membership in Acts 29. Because you are the founder of Acts 29 and a member, we are naturally associated with you and feel that this association discredits the network and is a major distraction.

We tell you this out of love for you, Mars Hill, Acts 29, and most significantly, the cause of Christ, and we would be irresponsible and deeply unloving not to do so in a clear and unequivocal manner. Again, we want you to know that we are eternally thankful for what you as a man and Mars Hill as a church have meant to our network. However, that cannot dissuade us from

action. Instead, it gives added significance and importance to our decision.

We hope and pray that you see this decision as the action of men who love you deeply and want you to walk in the light—for your good, the good of your family, and the honor of your Savior. Shortly after sending this, we will be informing the members of Acts 29, your Board of Advisors and Accountability, and your elders, as well as putting out a public statement on the Acts 29 website. It brings us no joy to move forward in this direction, and we trust that the Lord will be at work in all of this.

In sorrow and with hope, The Board of the Acts 29 Church  
Planting Network

Matt Chandler

Darrin Patrick

Steve Timmis

Eric Mason

John Bryson

Bruce Wesley

Leonce Crump

All Mars Hill Church locations have been removed from the [Acts 29 website](#). The news has been added to the organization's [website](#):

A Message from the Board of Acts 29 concerning Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church

It is with deep sorrow that the Acts 29 Network announces its decision to remove Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church from membership in the network. Mark and the Elders of Mars Hill have been informed of the decision, along with the reasons for removal. It is our conviction that the nature of the accusations against Mark, most of which have been confirmed by him, make it untenable and unhelpful to keep Mark and Mars Hill in our network. In taking this action, our prayer is that it will encourage the leadership of Mars Hill to respond in a distinctive and godly manner so that the name of Christ will not continue to be dishonored. Matt Chandler  
Darrin Patrick Steve Timmis Eric Mason John Bryson Bruce  
Wesley Leonce Crump

According to the organization's [website](#), the network includes over 500 churches and focuses on church planting:

Over the last ten years Acts 29 has emerged from a small band of brothers to over 500 churches around the world. We want to allow a unifying, uncommon movement of God to happen through Acts 29. Centered on the Gospel, we desire to advance the mission of Jesus through obediently planting church-planting churches. It is our hope to see this leading to millions of lives changed by the power of the Spirit for the glory of God.

Acts 29 is not a model or a style. We have churches with live preaching and others with video-delivered sermons. We have independent church plants, replants, and existing churches that want to focus on planting new churches out of their existing congregations. Simply, we seek to be a movement of church-planting churches.

In 2005, when Driscoll headed the group, [charges were filed against him by Ron Wheeler](#). Wheeler planted the first Acts 29 Network church in Mt. Vernon, WA and was an early protege of Driscoll's. However, Wheeler later became disillusioned with his former mentor and asked Acts 29 to discipline Driscoll. Yesterday,

[Wheeler posted a lengthy open letter to Driscoll](#) asking him to resign based on his experience with the Mars Hill pastor. The Acts 29 action comes on the heels of the [resignations of Paul Tripp and James McDonald](#) as members of the church governing board and [a recent protest](#) primarily by ex-members. Update: One of the Mars Hill ex-pastors who has been initiating mediation with the church, Kyle Firstenberg, had this reaction to Acts 29's announcement.

I have been greatly discouraged with the response from the BOAA in the charges that both I and others have brought. Years have gone by with what appears as only damage control and not any clear act of love for Mark in holding him accountable as brothers in the faith should.

This action from Matt Chandler and the other members of the board of A29 is one of the most loving acts I have seen in leadership in the Church world in recent years.

I do believe that these men love Mark and Mars Hill just as I and countless others do. I agree with their findings and pray that Mark Driscoll, Sutton Turner and Dave Bruskus would repent and step down. I believe this would be the most God honoring thing to do as it would show their love for Jesus and the Gospel is greater than their position, authority and influence.

Update 2: A group of 75 ex-members were set to present over 50 new charges against the executive elders of Mars Hill Church today, but have decided to delay their action in light of the removal of Mars Hill by Acts 29 Network. For the press release, [click here](#).

Update 3: Ron Wheeler, who pastored the first Acts 29 church plant in Mt. Vernon, WA, reacted to the Acts 29 decision:

To Matt Chandler and the Board of Acts 29: Thank you for finally taking a position. I know it's not easy. I know there were existing relationships between members of the board and Driscoll, but

ultimately you prioritized obedience and faithfulness to Christ, above friendships and allegiance to a founder. For this, you are to be commended. Not only did you recognize the credibility damage to the network due to the continuing association with Mark Driscoll, but more importantly, you recognized that the cause of Christ was truly more important than Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill, Acts29 or anything else. The message for all of us here – individual, organization, church, or otherwise- is that silent passivity in the face of obvious sin and destruction, only gives birth to more sin and destruction in the end. Integrity was well served today. Also, thank you for taking action that only an organization such as yours could take. There are thousands of hurting individuals, both inside and outside of Mars Hill, who lacked a voice or any kind of real influence in this situation. They feel like cogs in the machine as they desperately long to see the Mars Hill Board of Advisors and Accountability, Acts29, somebody... step up and take difficult action and call for true Biblical repentance.

UPDATE 4: Mars Hill Church [Board of Advisors and Accountability responds](#) to the removal of the church from the Acts 29 Network. For all posts on [Mark Driscoll](#) and [Mars Hill Church](#), click the links.