

June 8, 2016

To the Southwest Church Family,

It is with an extremely heavy heart that I write these words. My wife Gesa and I have loved you deeply from the day we first met. We have cherished serving alongside you and have rejoiced at what we've been able to accomplish together. We watched the Spirit of God move among us both outside of our church walls as we've served the neediest among us in our valley and inside our walls as we've watched 1,160 people take the step of baptism during the nearly four years we have shared together.

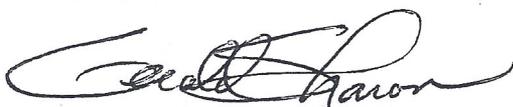
A number of months ago the Elder Board and I began a dialogue related to our understanding of human sexuality and in particular the extent to which a homosexual individual could be involved in the life of Southwest Church. Although there was distance between the position held by our Elders and my position, it truly seemed that we would be able to find common ground where we could authentically say everyone is welcome at Southwest.

However, the Elders recently sent me a certified letter informing me that they had unanimously affirmed the current position of Southwest Church. That position is expressed in papers on Homosexuality and Human Sexuality, which serve as guiding documents for Southwest. My heart sank realizing that no homosexual person who would read these documents would truly feel welcome at Southwest Church. And, if the positions held in these papers are followed, they will effectively exclude homosexual individuals from the life of Southwest. My desire was to rescind these papers, neither affirming nor condemning homosexuality so that all individuals regardless of their perspective could feel completely welcome and fully loved at Southwest. This would have allowed us to handle each situation on a relational case-by-case basis, following the kind of love modeled by Jesus, rather than by a policy.

I would not join the Elders in affirming the aforementioned papers since I believe they will limit the church's ability to love people where they are. So, on Monday, June 6, 2016 the Elders asked for my resignation. At their request, I am resigning as the Lead Pastor of Southwest Church. Because the Church Bylaws require a 30-day notice of resignation from the Lead Pastor I'm submitting my resignation effective July 8, 2016.

The reason I have not taught the past four weekends is because the Elders would not permit me to, nor did they want Gesa and I even attending services. However, I don't want there to be any doubt that my heart and Gesa's heart intensely longs for you every day. We will always love you. We will not be leaving the valley and so we will look forward to those times when we see you in the community and can give you a hug.

You are loved!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gerald Sharon". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a horizontal line.

Pastor Gerald Sharon