

Dear General Mission Board,

I am writing as Will's pastor and as a brother passionate about the great possibilities of growth in the Kingdom through our network. The Church at Severn Run has certainly had major challenges of its own in terms of staffing. In cases where there was not outright rebellion or moral failure, we worked long and hard to try and redeem the situation (two years in one case). Sometimes we succeeded, and sometimes we did not. Every time we failed and fired was a tragedy that left scars for all involved for years to come. Such will be the case here regardless of intention.

Please understand I speak for myself, and am not writing at Dr. McRaney's request. Please also understand I have no interest in promoting further division in the network, nor in disrespecting you. I don't claim to be God's mouthpiece. I'm just a fellow pastor attempting to seek the Kingdom of God in humility. I have always been amazed that in conflict, we Baptists who believe God's word is inerrant, make the fruit of the Spirit completely irrelevant in our battles. I pray that I, and we, will not be guilty of that hypocrisy here. Whatever lacks the breath of the Spirit cannot in the end be from God.

My concerns are as follows:

- Complex organizational change is always risky, messy, and rarely successful. In my experience, 90% of attempts to transition plateaued churches into growing churches fail. In the end, the deck is stacked toward the status quo. God *can* do anything (Luke 18:27), but we rarely ever "let" Him.
- I was not part of the search process, but was called with you to follow an individual we knew to be an innovator and a professor at heart to lead us into the future. If we failed to discern our needs, real wants, or Will's gifting, that is on us. We have essentially made him an unintentional interim, and sent an unmistakable message to the next executive leader, "Don't lead significant change. Don't disagree with NAMB. Don't cross your staff."
- There has been a consistent recounting of issues and events from both sides. It is not so much now a process of discovering proprietary information, as it is weighing its meaning.
- In conflict we tend to reflexively make the other person the sole focus. The issues here are not merely NAMB, overcoming staff conflict in organizational change, or Will's leadership style. The issue we'll live with for years is, "Who are we?" What kind of *followers* are we? What are we modeling for our churches in terms of resolving conflict? How will we live an extravagant, generous, and ridiculously underserved grace when it makes no earthly sense? If we deeply value Kingdom over corporate, how will we live out Galatians 5:22-23 in humility so that our love reveals the patience of God? Jesus seems to always flip things and makes *us* the issue when we're convinced we're in the right. When we're slapped on the cheek, Jesus just ignores the injustice. He focuses His attention on our responsibility to be like Him. In His power, we are able.

- I believe firing an executive director for non-moral reasons in a single meeting of the GMB is profoundly wrong and sets a terrible precedent. This seems to me to be a classic case of “build up and blow up.” The alternative is healthy system and process. Healthy system and process means in faith and hope we redemptively address perceived performance issues as they arise over time. It means we communicate clearly a path forward to success, and clearly spell out consequences if the path is rejected. It means we exercise patience as we formally walk *together* through conflict over an extended period of time. Bad happens quickly; good always takes time. *There was no formal redemptive process here.* It should take at least three successive GMB meetings over a period of months to fire an executive director for non-moral reasons, and that only as a last resort. If the tragedy of a firing has to take place, then shouldn't it be at the end of a long process, not at its beginning?
- The only thing we have to stand on every week as we preach the Gospel is the ridiculously extravagant, all-powerful, and utterly unmerited grace of God. In my fallible opinion, we are modeling little of that as Kingdom leaders. We say, “This is beyond repair” yet tell people no relationship in life is beyond repair. We tell people God's love is bigger than life; that no brokenness is beyond the healing touch of Jesus—and we believe it! Yet here we do not. How can we tell a divorcing couple there is supernatural hope for their relationship and then turn around and say there is no supernatural hope for this one? Is God too small for this? He can work with lost people, but not with a bunch of preachers? How can we tell people “nothing is impossible with God” and then say, “This is impossible to reconcile?” In a corporation, I would agree—the fat lady has sung; it's over. But we are Sons of the Kingdom, not clients in a corporation.
- None of us as pastors would wish to be treated this way. None of us would want to be fired within a week of a formal notification.
- Most tellingly to me is the simple reality that we have no God story to tell here. When we preach grace next, we cannot tell *this* story as a brilliant illustration for our churches to follow, and that to me says it all. This feels very corporate, very logical, defensible, reasonable, and human. But it just doesn't reveal Jesus in any supernatural way. It doesn't have the life-giving breath of the Almighty on it. I have failed on a thousand occasions, but I cannot let myself, or us, off the hook of redemptive grace. We are nailed there and have nowhere else to go. I totally understand hell is real and that people rarely let grace win (Matt. 7:14). But it should be their choice, not ours. If we had to play out the tragedy of firing Dr. McRaney as our leader, then it should have been at the end of a healthy, lengthy process of reconciliation that he was either unwilling or unable to work. That simply was not the case here. In what sense can we convince ourselves God's will was done?
- I understand that the board has voted, and I honor you men for your service to the church and the convention. Yet if our model for navigating conflict is totally earth-bound, more corporate than Kingdom, who are we? Where's the power of

the resurrection? This is a story with a lot of hurt and humanity, with a lot of opinions and lost faith, but it is not now a Jesus-revealing story. We should at least wrestle like Jacob with the question, “When in Scripture was the majority ever right?”

- I believe Dr. Will McRaney is a very good man with a great heart. I believe he has a professor’s brilliance and an evangelist’s passion. His last act in packing up his office was to take the time to compellingly share Jesus with the moving man (I’ve driven to Baltimore to follow up). He has demonstrated humility to me in owning his part in this broken story. I believe we still stand at the edge of some of the most exciting Kingdom possibilities I’ve seen in Maryland and Delaware in the twenty-three years I’ve been here. But how often in Scripture did God’s people miss God’s promise? No leader is perfect (least of all me) and real conflict is inevitable in any church or network navigating change and seeking growth. I still believe we could let grace win and allow God do the impossible here. We could still have a great God story here. And if we spent the next six-months trying to make this work and still failed, it would be the biggest win possible.

Thank you for your grace in hearing from one fellow pastor. You are honestly in my prayers for God’s very best.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13

Sincerely,
Dr. Drew Shofner
The Church at Severn Run