

I resigned Vision effective April 1, 2021. When I sent in my resignation letter to my pastor at the time and director of the board, I was purposefully vague and intended that letter for them alone. My letter stated the following:

Dear Pastor Gardner and Jeff Bush,

I am thankful to Vision Baptist Church and Vision Baptist Missions for all that God has used you all to do in both my own life and the lives of those in my family. There are many good people at the church and the board. We appreciate how willing you always have been to be available at various times in our lives.

So, it is with great sadness that I wish to tender my resignation to the board effective April 1, 2021. This has not been an easy decision and has come with a great amount of prayer and counsel. We do not believe that God would want us to serve in this ministry. We believe there is something else out there that will be a better fit for us.

We wish you all well. Once again, we are not bitter nor angry in all of this. We will continue to pray for the church and board to grow in a Christ-like way.

For God's Glory Alone,

Ben Johnson

Our plan was to do a short survey trip the first week of April in NYC then come back and begin the process of contacting our churches about our change of church and board. We vowed that we weren't going to speak badly of VBM unless pressed to do so to tell the whole truth. This was mostly out of fear because we knew the leadership at Vision could ruin us if they chose, and our recent conversations with previous missionaries who resigned showed they would not only say negative things about you to supporting churches, but tell lies about you or be purposefully deceptive to make the missionary resigning seem bad.

The night before we were in the hotel near the airport since we had an early flight to NYC. We felt great. We knew we had resigned a toxic and sinful culture and we were going forward. It was quite a surprise when supporting pastors started calling asking what we were doing since our resignation was so vague.

I did not realize Jeff Bush would send my supporters my actual resignation letter that was addressed to him and Austin Gardner. This has never been done to my knowledge. The summer before when Ed De Los Reyes sent his resignation citing multiple specific sins being committed by leadership within the board was not sent with Jeff Bush's letter stating Ed had resigned.

The very first pastor I spoke with sent the following email:

Hello Bro. Johnson,

It sound like there are some exciting possibilities as you continue making steps to plant a church in New York City. I can't think of a needier mission field! There is a faithful pastor just outside of the city in nearby Astoria by the name of Pete Montoro. He has pastored Open Door Bible Baptist for nearly 30 years. I don't know him personally, but from what I know of him, he could be a great help and friend. Hopefully, you will get to meet him.

*I am writing in regard to your resignation from Vision Baptist and joining IBM Global. Let me say from the outset that we plan to continue our support. Let me also say however that we are unhappy with the way this situation was handled. We are relieved to know that there were no doctrinal or moral issues, but a decision of this nature is a major decision, and we wanted to know the reasoning behind it. When I called you a week and a half ago to inquire about your decision, you seemed evasive and unwilling to provide any details. **I was unsatisfied with our conversation. So I called Bro. Bush at Vision Baptist, and he provided the details of how you called the meeting with the deacons and of your concerns over the "spiritual oppression."** I am not sure exactly how the meeting was resolved, but apparently, it was not to your liking as two or three weeks later, you submitted your resignation. **It would have been better handled if this matter had been Scripturally dealt with in using the principles of Matt. 18 to talk with Pastor Gardner alone (Matt. 18:15) rather than to call the whole deacon board.** Vision Baptist sent me a copy of your resignation letter, and in that letter, I felt there was an air of being slightly smug in your desire that the ministry of Vision Baptist becomes more Christlike. Granted we are all on a learning curve and we all need to further grow in grace, but I hope that you will be humble enough to admit that some mistakes were made on your end. I am not intimately familiar with the ministry in Alpharetta, and I'm sure that mistakes are sometimes made, but it is rare to see a church so focused on the Great Commission as Vision Baptist is. Would that we all were more like them in that respect. We all make mistakes and we should give each other some grace knowing each of us are beset by our fallen nature that can manifest itself from time to time. Though we disagree with your responses, we do want to give you grace as you go forward from here. We pray that you will see fruit for the next several decades should the Lord tarry. We usually support a new church plant here in the states for 3-5 years hoping by then that they will be self supporting. New York is an expensive place to operate and may require a some extra time of support. We'll see how things work out in these next few years.*

You do have a beautiful family. We appreciate your dedication and your pioneer spirit. May the Lord bless you as you fulfill your calling.

*Sincerely,
[Pastor's name]*

(Emphasis added)

In my letter to Austin and Jeff confronting the sins of their leadership, I spoke how details would be left out to make themselves look better or insult others. This retelling of what happened in our meeting in January left out many key details which I sent to this pastor. That email goes as follows:

I appreciate your continued support and your reaching out to me about the situation.

I hope you can understand my heart in all this as I write. I have committed as we have made this change to not look to hurt VBM in any way. There are good people with the board and I don't want to jeopardize them in not getting support.

I would also like to clarify the whole situation of which Bro. Bush spoke with you about and explain how we went about doing what we did.

Firstly, my concerns that I had with leadership and the board are not only my own. The issues I approached them with were issues that multiple missionaries over many years have confronted them about and there was no change after those confrontations. As a matter of fact, had I not went to these missionaries and asked them why they resigned, then I too would not have known. The deacons of the church which Vision Baptist Missions is a ministry out of were also not informed of these reasons in the past.

Secondly, I sent an e-mail to both Pastor Gardner and Bro Bush with my concerns. Based on the experiences of those other missionaries as well as our own observances with the board, I did say that I would prefer all communication to be in response to that email because anything that is said could possibly be denied unless it was in writing or some form that could be seen. Bro Bush did respond, but not to what I was saying and Pastor Gardner did not respond at all.

Thirdly, the meeting in which I called the deacons was because, as I have stated, these issues had not been resolved before and because there was no response to my e-mail in regards to the information in the letter.

Fourthly, we took time to pray and seek God over the course of a couple of months after the meeting. We went to trusted counselors after that and explained the situation as much as we could without hurtful details. We received very good, godly counsel from them. After that, we prayed and realized that VBM was not a good board for us because the overall culture was not a culture we wanted to be a part of. All of that was over the course of two months, not 2-3 weeks.

I apologize that I did seem elusive. I was genuinely taken off guard by getting calls so quickly about it. To my knowledge, Vision has not sent actual resignation letters of missionaries before to supporting churches. I was surprised that they would. As I said, I was trying to not bad-mouth the board, because I do believe there are good missionaries there to support. They do genuinely want to do what they can to reach this world with the Gospel.

I would not say we did everything 100% correct and did not make mistakes along the way. I'm sure those could easily be pointed out and we would own up to those. I would say, however, we did everything in prayer and in counsel as biblically and as we best as we believed we could.

At this point for us, we are moving on and not looking to bring up these issues if we could avoid it. God has taught us valuable lessons in this experience and it is our desire that we can continue to serve the Lord. We want to glorify Him and this has always been our desire. I hope this helps clarifies our actions and history with this to you. Thanks again for taking the time to reach out to me. God bless.

After reading my explanation, the pastor responded:

*Hello Bro. Johnson,
Thank for so promptly replying and thank you for clarifying things. I do apologize for jumping the gun here, as I did not realize the deliberate steps you had taken or the attempts you had made to communicate to the leadership there at Vision Baptist. All I had to go on was what Bro. Bush had said. Your response does help my understanding, and I now believe that you did what you felt was right. Having read your email, I now have a deeper respect for the way you*

approached this decision and for being honest and yet above board with your remarks about Vision Bapt. even though there are areas of disagreement. I'm sure this was not an easy decision. We will continue our support as I said, and the reassurances you have given have provided us extra optimism about you and your ministry. Again, please accept my apologies for making some assumptions without getting your side of the story. May the Lord be with you as you labor with the Lord in birthing a new church. Thank you again.

I am thankful this pastor reached out to me and heard me. I know many didn't. I have a feeling other pastors may have reached out to Jeff Bush. But based on this exchange as well as hearing why he said to pastors about Ed and Beth De Los Reyes, my feeling is that he was not entirely truthful with those pastors. **This along with so many more stories shows a consistent pattern of lying about missionaries.**