

Christian leader resigns as former staff describe “toxic masculinity” in workplace

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) leaders also rescinded their recommendation of a book by Noel Castellanos, former president of the Christian Community Development Association, for church members to read and discuss.

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [December 19, 2018](#) issue

The president of the Christian Community Development Association resigned after former staff members came forward with accounts of abusive workplace behavior especially directed toward women.

Several women who worked for CCDA [created a website](#) describing “the toxic masculinity that is pervasive within the organization,” giving examples such as Noel Castellanos berating them in front of others, questioning their competence, and having angry outbursts perceived as physically threatening.

Two of the women, Audrey Velez and Evelmyn Ivens, described a meeting with Castellanos in which he yelled and slammed his fists on the table after they requested that a mediator and board members be present at a staff retreat. Velez also wrote about a period of weeks when her supervisor and Castellanos got into verbal altercations in the office so often “that staff started wearing noise-canceling headphones while working.”

The former employees also raised broader concerns about mismanagement, citing as one instance an organizational assessment required for a grant being conducted by a company whose executive director was a friend of Castellanos.

The CCDA board announced in a mass email that it had accepted Castellanos’s resignation prior to its 30th annual conference November 1–3 in Chicago, but waited to make it public to “keep the focus on this tremendous milestone as well as honor the life and commitment of our founder, Dr. John Perkins.”

Castellanos's resignation letter, in the same email, cited "the conflict with former staff" as one reason for his departure after 14 years with the organization.

"The board's appointment of Ava Steaffens two years ago to colead the organization alongside me has created a healthier staff environment which was lacking in the past," he wrote.

Steaffens continues in her role, and the organization published [a statement of repentance](#) apologizing to former staff members and acknowledging "occasional problems" with the workplace environment.

The group of former staff who created the website had called for Castellanos's resignation and wrote that for a decade they and others had attempted to address the issues with supervisors, the CEO and president, and the board.

An apology is not enough, they wrote: "The harm done to the staff, especially to the women, has had a long-lasting effect on their mental and emotional health, career opportunities, and capacity to lead."

On November 17 the co-moderators of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) rescinded their recommendation of a book by Castellanos, *Where the Cross Meets the Street*, for congregations and members to read and discuss this year, the *Presbyterian Outlook* reported.

"Toxic leadership that abuses power and authority has no place within the church and is anathema to the body of Christ," said Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri, one of the co-moderators.

A version of this article, which was edited December 10, appears in the print edition under the title "Christian leader resigns as former staff describe a 'toxic' workplace."