

Fwd: A story from a former employee

From: Tasha Vinson Brown ([REDACTED])

To: [REDACTED]

Date: Monday, February 20, 2023 at 09:39 AM MST

This is the submission.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Tasha Vinson Brown** < [REDACTED] >

Date: Sun, Nov 6, 2022, 9:35 PM

Subject: A story from a former employee

To: < [REDACTED] >

Hi.

I was made aware that you were collecting stories of interactions employees had with William Bill Shiell and I wanted to share a few of my experiences with you.

I met Bill in 2015 when he was tapped by Scot McKnight to apply to be Northern's next president. Apparently, Scot visited Bill's church, and while in Bill's office, Scot shared information about Northern's search for a new president. I am not clear on all the particulars but it appears that Bill was recommended by Scot.

I met Bill when he visited Northern to interview. I was invited to be a part of the search committee. My role was essentially to participate in the interviewing of candidates that were already selected. I remember only interviewing two candidates, one of which was Bill.

Following Bill's installation as president, I tried my best to make him feel welcome. I extended myself when he and his family temporarily lived in student housing. He wasn't very warm but always flashed a polite smile.

One of the first major tasks I performed under Bill's leadership was visiting HBCU campuses. I was the Director of Urban Relations for the Seminary and it was decided that visiting HBCUs could potentially help us create a pipeline to the seminary for those who may be interested in pursuing a career in ministry. Northern was already engaging in racial reconciliation work and recognizing the disparities that existed in hiring minority faculty and staff so my role was vital role for helping the seminary maintain a presence in the African American community. I was the director of the New Kind of Preacher program, an adjunct professor, and later the director of urban relations. The connections for the southside campus were formed under my leadership and I was credited for helping institute it along with getting the NKP program off the ground. I noticed that Bill's interactions with me changed when we discussed that little was being done for minority students and how scholarships were disproportionately offered to white males despite the rising entrance of black females. We had a very public heated discussion in a chapel service on June 16, 2016, where we argued about the gospel and what it meant to be reconciled to one another. Bill wanted to move forward and not engage in Northern's racial reconciliation work and I disagreed with his approach. The disagreement was witnessed by several people including Karen Walker Freeburg.

After my disagreement, Bill had the new VP of Advancement (I do not remember his name - he wasn't at Northern long) assign me menial tasks. I was a director but was tasked with making phone calls and doing data entry work. Bill asked me what I wanted to do, noting that I was one of the higher-paid staff. I told him I wanted to stay and that I enjoyed the work of working in the community but did not enjoy being a data entry clerk. The small tasks continued and the culture around the seminary shifted swiftly under Bill's leadership. Bill was moving me further from the work I was recruited to perform (working with the minority population through the NKP program, working as the director of urban relations, attending the Racial Reconciliation training with Jason Gile, leading racial reconciliation conversations with students, instituting chapel for Black History Month, instituting convocation in the conference center, representing Northern at the Black Women's Expo, etc.) The focus on race and equity ended, and so did my role with the seminary.

I believe Bill no longer wanted me at the seminary. Our relationship was strained to begin with but became even more strained after our public heated discussion in June. Consequently, the work became unbearable. Bill opted to take the

seminary in a different direction but did it in a manner that was not sensitive to the struggles of those who endured discrimination and hardship because of decisions that were made. Some of those decisions were made before Bill but others were made while under his leadership such as the awarding of scholarships to more white young men than black women. He did not address the issue when it was brought to him and appeared to want it to go away just like me. I invited several black female students to join me for one of my last chapel services on July 12, 2106. We all decided to wear black. You can see our picture below. We're smiling because we were happy to commune with one another despite the challenges that each of us was facing.

I decided to cut all ties with Northern following my leave in 2016. My time at Northern was one of the most painful experiences I've ever had. What was originally thought to be a dream job turned into one of the worst experiences I've had to date. The experience left a very deep wound and interfered with my well-being. I appreciate your taking the time to hear others' experiences and I pray for good success in working to right the wrongs that were exacted by William Bill Shiell.

In Him,

Tasha M. Brown

