

Lifeway board chairman drops lawsuit against former president/CEO, seeks 'agreed upon resolution'



Rainer

NASHVILLE (BP and local reports) – The chairman of the board of trustees at Lifeway Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville has decided not to proceed with a breach of contract lawsuit against the immediate past president and CEO of the entity, Thom Rainer.

Trustee chairman Todd Fannin announced in an e-mail to Lifeway trustees that Lifeway will seek instead to resolve the dispute without litigation. An emergency meeting of the full board that had been scheduled for Sept. 30 was canceled by the executive committee.

“In lieu of moving forward with litigation, both parties are currently exploring the possibility of an agreed upon resolution of the differences,” wrote Fannin, owner of Tack Designs in Pryor, Okla., and member of Life Fellowship Church in Pryor. “Our continued prayer is that this will be resolved quickly and amicably.”



Fannin

Fannin asked “all Southern Baptists to join us in a season of prayer” and said trustees will receive additional information within a week. He expressed concern over “numerous public misstatements and inaccuracies surrounding this matter.”

Under Fannin’s leadership, the board’s executive committee authorized the lawsuit Sept. 28 in Williamson County (Tenn.) chancery court, alleging Rainer had violated his transition agreement with LifeWay by publishing with a competitor. The agreement between Rainer and LifeWay upon his 2019 retirement precluded him from having any business association with LifeWay competitors until Oct. 31, 2021. The agreement specifically listed Tyndale House Publishers as a LifeWay competitor. In August 2020, Tyndale announced a multi-book publishing partnership with Rainer that includes video curriculum.



Mandrell

In a statement Sept. 29, Rainer said he had received “a written and amicable release from publishing” from LifeWay, he had discussed the matter with LifeWay’s attorney, and he “assumed all was well” until receiving notice of the lawsuit.

Under his transition agreement, Rainer was to remain a paid

Lifeway employee through Oct. 31, 2020, as chief advisory officer. The end of his employment would then be followed by a 12-month non-compete agreement.

However, Rainer told Baptist Press that Ben Mandrell, his successor as Lifeway's president and CEO, asked him to either stop receiving payments from Lifeway or return the payments. He said he has been returning the payments since late spring.



Scroggins

The lawsuit apparently raised concern among some trustees. Multiple trustees told Baptist Press they did not learn of the lawsuit until the day after it was filed. Jimmy Scroggins, immediate past chairman of the Lifeway board and lead pastor at Family Church in West Palm Beach, Fla., wrote an e-mail to Fannin and his fellow board members Tuesday asking that the lawsuit be withdrawn "until other options can be more fully explored or until the full board has an opportunity" to "discuss appropriate next steps for Lifeway's relationship with Thom [Rainer]."

The full text of Fannin's Sept. 30 e-mail to the board:

Dear trustees,

The trustee executive committee met today to discuss the most recent developments with Dr. Rainer.

"While there have been numerous public misstatements and inaccuracies surrounding this matter, we have been and continue to be hopeful that we may resolve this issue with Dr. Rainer regarding his agreement with Lifeway and his

partnership with a competitor. In lieu of moving forward with litigation, both parties are currently exploring the possibility of an agreed upon resolution of the differences. Our continued prayer is that this will be resolved quickly and amicably.

“In order to give appropriate time for continued discussions with Dr. Rainer to take place, the executive committee passed a resolution postponing this afternoon’s trustee meeting. The executive committee is asking trustees and all Southern Baptists to join us in a season of prayer. This period will also allow us to provide full and accurate information to each board member.

“Again, there will be no board meeting today, and you can expect additional information this week. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me or one of the other board officers.

Todd Fannin

Chairman of the Board

Lifeway Christian Resources”