

https://newsadvance.com/news/local/liberty-university/falwell-apologizes-after-outcry-over-blackface-tweet/article_b187edcb-4b88-5d17-a9bf-58a5760ac83b.html

Falwell apologizes after outcry over blackface tweet

Richard Chumney

Jun 8, 2020



Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. speaks to former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley during convocation at the Vines Center on Nov. 15.

The News & Advance file

Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. on Monday issued a rare apology for invoking Gov. Ralph Northam's blackface scandal while attacking the state's new mask requirements — a controversial episode that helped spark protests across the city and prompted at least four black employees to resign from the Christian institution.

“After listening to African American LU leaders and alumni over the past week and hearing their concerns, I understand that by tweeting an image to remind all of the governor’s racist past I actually refreshed the trauma that image had caused and offended some by using the image to make a political point,” Falwell said on Twitter. “Based on our long relationships, they uniformly understood this was not my intent, but because it was the result I have deleted the tweet and apologize for any hurt my effort caused, especially within the African American community.”

Falwell’s public statement came hours after he met in Lynchburg with Allen McFarland, a black Portsmouth pastor and the Vice Chairman of the school’s board of trustees.

Reached by phone, McFarland declined to discuss the details of his conversation with Falwell, calling it private and personal.

“I just wanted to get with him today with my heart,” he said.

Falwell has faced an avalanche of criticism in the nearly two weeks since posting a tweet aimed at undermining an order by Northam that masks be worn inside all retail stores, government buildings or while using public transportation to help slow the spread of the coronavirus.

“I was adamantly opposed to the mandate from @GovernorVA requiring citizens to wear face masks until I decided to design my own,” Falwell wrote in the May 27 tweet. “If I am ordered to wear a mask, I will reluctantly comply, but only if this picture of Governor Blackface himself is on it!”

Attached to the tweet was an image of a mask bearing a racist photo that appeared on Northam’s medical yearbook page and — when made public last year — sparked a scandal that nearly forced him from office. The photo showed a person in blackface and another in a Ku Klux Klan costume.

At least four black employees have resigned from the school in protest of the tweet, according to public posts and conversations with workers.

“It is morally unconscionable for me, as the Director of Diversity Retention, to ask students of color to stay at a university and within a space that not only does not value their well-being and lives, but actually perpetuates very real and damaging racial trauma against them,” longtime employee LeeQuan McLaurin **wrote in a resignation letter, which was obtained by The News & Advance.**

In response to Falwell, nearly three dozen black alumni **penned a letter demanding Falwell immediately withdraw the tweet**, calling it racist. The group denounced Falwell for what they said was “infantile behavior” and suggested he step down to focus on a career in politics.

“You have belittled staff, students and parents, you have defended inappropriate behaviors of politicians, encouraged violence, and disrespected people of other faiths,” the group, which includes 35 black pastors and athletes, wrote in a June 2 letter.

On Monday, the same group **sent a letter to Falwell thanking him for the apology**. But they also urged him to surround himself with more ethnically diverse pastors and advisors.

“Thousands of alumni, students, parents, and staff want you to build on this act of humility,” they wrote. “We all believe that Liberty deserves leadership that is Christlike in his actions and rhetoric, for you and those under your leadership.”

The controversy has roiled the Lynchburg community.

In a reply to Falwell’s tweet, Josh Read, the owner of the popular Lynchburg restaurant Fifth and Federal Station, offered to provide the masks to his staff members. The comment ignited a fierce protest outside the restaurant on May 31, which police said later turned violent and led to five arrests.

Read said last Monday he was focused on the financial devastation restaurants have suffered during the coronavirus pandemic — made to close by state orders — when he tweeted about the masks.

“I was so sort of in tune with that, that I didn’t take into consideration the actual racial factor, that it was harmful to a lot of people in the community,” he told The News & Advance. “I am very sorry for that, that was absolutely the farthest thing from my mind.

Two days later, dozens of peaceful demonstrators gathered on the edge of Liberty’s campus in outrage over Falwell’s tweet.

In an interview Monday before Falwell publicly apologized, Lynchburg NAACP President Carl Hutcherson said Falwell has a duty to make amends for his actions, even after the outcry subsides.

“People want to know what’s going to happen next,” Hutcherson said. “I believe that President Falwell is going to have to ask himself that same question. What is going to happen when the rallies are over and the marches are over?”

Richard Chumney covers Liberty University for The News & Advance. Reach him at (434) 385-5547. The Associated Press contributed to this report.

https://newsadvance.com/news/local/liberty-university/falwell-confirms-resignation-calls-departure-a-relief/article_dfb560be-3b3a-56ea-b8d7-60179a5c5a6b.html

Falwell confirms resignation, calls departure 'a relief'

Richard Chumney

Aug 25, 2020



Former Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. talks to Donald Trump Jr. about Trump Jr.'s book, "Triggered," during convocation at Liberty on Nov. 13, 2019. A financial consulting firm hired by Liberty to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by Falwell has launched a website for employees to report evidence of misconduct.

The News & Advance file

Jerry Falwell Jr., engulfed in a string of escalating scandals, has resigned as president and chancellor of Liberty University, ending an often tumultuous 13-year reign as the face of the evangelical institution.

Falwell submitted his resignation late Monday night after a stunning series of reversals, in which he first agreed to resign, but later backtracked and then finally capitulated to mounting calls — including from individual board members — to permanently step aside.

“It’s a relief,” Falwell said in a brief telephone interview Tuesday. “The quote that keeps going through my mind this morning is Martin Luther King Jr: ‘Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty I’m free at last.’”

Falwell said he does not know where he will land next but has no intention of returning to the school synonymous with his family name.

“I’ve done all I can do at Liberty and I’m ready to move on to something else,” he said. “This happened for a reason and the board treated me very, very generously and I am very grateful for that.”

In a statement Tuesday afternoon, a university spokesperson said the board had unanimously accepted Falwell’s resignation and offered him a severance package of an undisclosed amount.

Jerry Prevo, a longtime board member and a prominent evangelical preacher, will continue to serve as acting president as the board looks to appoint a search committee to find a permanent president.

Falwell, who was placed on an indefinite leave of absence two weeks ago after posting a controversial image on social media, was thrust back into the spotlight this week after a former business partner claimed he had a yearslong affair with the evangelical leader and his wife — a claim Falwell denies.

In an 11 p.m. Monday statement released several hours before Falwell’s final resignation, Liberty’s interim leadership said recent revelations about Falwell “made it clear that it would not be in the best interest of the University for him to return from leave and serve as President.”

The decision to step down in the face of board pressure marks a dramatic fall for the 58-year-old son and namesake of Liberty's late founder, the Rev. Jerry Falwell Sr.

Under his leadership, the younger Falwell has seen the university grow to new heights, with record student enrollment and an endowment of \$1.6 billion. His decision to endorse Donald Trump's successful presidential bid in 2016 solidified his status as a conservative powerbroker.

But for much of the last year, Falwell has been dogged by an avalanche of scandals, ranging from accusations of self-dealing to claims of racism.

The growing scrutiny reached a fever pitch earlier this month after Falwell apologized for posting — and quickly deleting — a photo showing him with his pants partially unzipped and his arm around a woman with her pants partially unzipped. Falwell later said the photo was taken during a costume party and that the woman was his wife's assistant.

The controversy prompted Liberty's board of trustees to suspend him indefinitely on Aug. 7.

The news of Falwell's imminent departure, which came on the first day of the fall semester, sent shockwaves through the larger Liberty community. Some reacted with disappointment, while others declared support for the decision.

"A lot of the student body is tired of the scandals," junior Isaac Liu, a mechanical engineering student, said. "There are so many things that President Falwell has done that have been deserving of the board reprimand and that didn't happen. The fact that it takes a scandal of this size and of this magnitude to change things is very upsetting."

Falwell still enjoyed significant support from a large number of Liberty alumni, current students and faculty members who credit him with turning around the financial difficulties the school once faced.

“This is the end of an era,” said Craig Storrs, a former Liberty student who worked closely with Falwell as a member of the student government. “I don’t even know who the board would consider replacing Jerry with.”

Storrs, who earned an undergraduate degree from Liberty in 2013, said Falwell embodied the principle of “love thy neighbor” and deserved to stay on in a leadership role.

A year of scandals

The first details of the affair with the now-estranged business partner, just the most recent in a long run of scandals, became public Sunday after Falwell spoke exclusively to The Washington Examiner in an apparent attempt to preempt the coming revelation.

In an extraordinary 1,200-word statement to the conservative outlet, Falwell said his wife, Becki, struck up “an inappropriate personal relationship” with the man after meeting him on vacation about eight years ago. Falwell claimed the man later threatened to reveal the relationship if he was not paid “significant monies.”

Falwell said the alleged extortion scheme inflicted a traumatic emotional toll and prompted him to seek help from “mental health professionals.”

“Over the course of the last few months this person’s behavior has reached a level that we have decided the only way to stop this predatory behavior is to go public,” Falwell wrote in the statement, adding he remains “fully devoted” to his wife.

Falwell denied participating in the affair and, in his statement, did not identify the man. But on Monday, Reuters identified him as Giancarlo Granda, a former pool attendant at a Miami hotel.

According to the report, Granda claimed Falwell participated in some of the liaisons as a voyeur. Falwell “enjoyed watching from the corner of the room,” he told the outlet.

The Reuters story cites text messages and audio recordings, which Granda said shows Falwell was aware of the relationship. Granda denied attempting to extort the Falwells, according to the report.

The controversy, which comes as Liberty begins in-person classes amid the coronavirus pandemic, caps nearly a year of headline-grabbing incidents for Falwell and Liberty.

Last September, Falwell was accused of leveraging the university's business interest to enrich himself, family members and friends.

In the spring, he faced a fierce backlash — and a class-action lawsuit — after encouraging students away on spring break to return to campus during the coronavirus pandemic.

In recent months, he has battled accusations of racism after posting a tweet invoking Gov. Ralph Northam's blackface scandal to mock coronavirus-related restrictions. The tweet included a controversial image from Northam's medical school yearbook printed on a face mask.

The ensuing scandal prompted several prominent Black student-athletes and faculty members to leave the school and provided fuel for protests in downtown Lynchburg and on Liberty's doorstep.

What comes next?

Liberty's 30-member board has not yet announced a permanent replacement for Falwell but said Tuesday it will begin the process of convening a search committee at its next meeting. The board is currently scheduled to meet next in late October.

Some have called for Liberty's leadership to remain in the Falwell family. The Rev. Jonathan Falwell, Jerry Falwell Jr.'s brother and the senior pastor at Thomas Road Baptist Church, has often been suggested as a possible successor. Jonathan Falwell could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Elmer Towns, a Liberty co-founder and a former dean, praised the Falwell family for its stewardship of the school but rejected the notion that a descendant of the Rev. Jerry Falwell Sr. must always lead the institution.

“I think it’s God’s school,” he said. “God has always been at the head. I don’t think there’s any type of heritage that we need to talk about. The school belongs to the graduates.”

Some critics expressed skepticism at how the board would go about selecting a successor.

LeeQuan McLaurin, Liberty’s former director of diversity retention who resigned this spring after Falwell’s blackface tweet, said Falwell’s departure is a good first step but it must be followed by a concerted effort to improve the diversity of the school’s largely white student body and administration.

“It’s been a long time coming, and it shouldn’t have taken this long to get here, but I’m glad all the same to see it happen,” McLaurin said. “It still doesn’t mean that the university is anywhere closer to where they should be.”

Save71, a group of four former Liberty students who had lobbied the school to permanently terminate Falwell, are now calling on the board to appoint an independent search committee made up of former students and faculty members to select the next president.

The group has also called on the board to “permanently remove all the beneficiaries of Falwell’s inappropriate nepotism” and to hire independent investigators to probe accusations of financial impropriety.

“We must look beyond Falwell’s personal behavior and confront the failure of the university’s derelict Board of Trustees,” the group said in a statement. “Dramatic changes are necessary.”

https://newsadvance.com/news/local/liberty-university/liberty-university-owes-jerry-falwell-jr-10-5-million-after-resignation/article_2d74a279-7f76-5e39-b73a-f8d6c6cb416c.html

Liberty University owes Jerry Falwell Jr. \$10.5 million after resignation

Richard Chumney

Aug 26, 2020



the news & advance file

Liberty University will pay Jerry Falwell Jr. \$10.5 million over the next two years following his resignation from the religious institution. Falwell, 58, generally made around \$1 million per year as president, according to tax records.

Emily Elconin

Liberty University will pay Jerry Falwell Jr. \$10.5 million over the next two years following his resignation from the religious institution, the former university president confirmed Wednesday to The News & Advance.

Falwell, who permanently stepped down late Monday night following a rash of scandals, will receive \$2.5 million over two years and \$8 million at the end of that time period.

Falwell said the terms of his separation were a condition of his contract, which he renegotiated in 2019. The compensation requirements outlined in the contract were based “on what presidents at comparable sized universities had been paid,” he said in a text message.

Falwell, 58, generally made around \$1 million per year as president, according to tax records. His departure from the school came after a former business partner alleged he had a yearslong affair with the evangelical leader and his wife — a claim Falwell disputes.

Falwell, who was on an indefinite leave of absence when he submitted his resignation, repeatedly has denied wrongdoing and was quick to note Liberty’s board did not fire him for cause, which he said entitled him to full compensation.

In a telephone interview Tuesday, he called the exit deal generous and thanked the board for approving the terms. In the same interview, however, he accused the board of violating his contract for placing him on leave and restricting his duties as president of the university.

“That was the reason I resigned,” he said. “They put me on leave and the contract says they can’t take away my duties without cause.”

In a statement Tuesday afternoon, the university said the board had unanimously accepted Falwell’s resignation and offered him a severance package. The statement did not disclose the package’s exact terms but said Falwell’s severance “was dictated by the terms of his pre- existing employment agreement without any adjustment by the University or its Board.”

A Liberty University spokesperson Wednesday declined to discuss the terms of the exit deal.

The size of the payout, which first was reported by the Wall Street Journal, drew surprise from current and former Liberty students.

“For him to be still profiting off this university while giving it absolutely nothing in return is just incredible, and I mean that in the worst sense possible,” said Elizabeth Brooks, a Liberty senior who organized a campus protest against Falwell’s leadership last fall. “It’s incredibly disheartening.”

Brooks took issue with the board’s decision to allow Falwell to resign on his own. She argued Falwell deserved to be fired for cause for actions she said tarnished the reputation of the school.

The leadership upheaval at Liberty comes as the fall semester gets underway for about 15,000 residential students.

On Wednesday morning, Acting President Jerry Prevo, a longtime board member and a prominent evangelical preacher, welcomed the student body back to campus during the first livestreamed convocation of the academic year. The thrice-weekly assemblies usually are held in person but are being livestreamed for the foreseeable future due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In his remarks, Prevo called Falwell “the inspiration and builder of this great campus” and pledged to uphold the school’s long-held traditions as its interim leader.

“I want to reassure our entire Liberty University family that we’re committed to the spiritual and academic mission we began almost 50 years ago,” Prevo, 75, said.

Liberty’s board has not yet named a permanent president to replace Falwell. The university said earlier this week the board intends to name a search committee at its next meeting, which currently is scheduled for late October.

https://newsadvance.com/news/local/liberty-university/liberty-university-campus-pastor-apologizes-for-falwells-sinful-behavior/article_771d7635-0587-5ff8-8a31-a7e0fa3a7aac.html

Liberty University campus pastor apologizes for Falwell's 'sinful' behavior

Richard Chumney
Aug 27, 2020



David Nasser, a senior vice president who has led spiritual programs at the religious institution for the past six years, is shown at a Liberty University convocation in April 2018.

The News & Advance file

David Nasser, Liberty University's campus pastor, extended what he called a personal apology to the school's student body Wednesday for the "sinful" behavior of ousted former president Jerry Falwell Jr.

“I am sorry,” Nasser, a senior vice president who has led spiritual programs at the religious institution for the last six years, said. “In my opinion, you as a Liberty student deserve better. And the embarrassment that's been brought upon you as a Liberty student, and more importantly brought upon the name of Christ, is wrong.”

“I know that many of you are hurting and that breaks my heart,” he added. “Your concerns — if you're concerned — are valid. If you're not concerned, you should be concerned.”

Nasser's comments, which came during the first campus-wide worship service of the academic year, represents the first — and only — public rebuke of Falwell by a current Liberty official since the scandal-plagued evangelical leader submitted his resignation late Monday night.

Falwell, who had been on an indefinite leave of absence since Aug. 7 when he resigned, stepped down after a former business partner alleged he had a yearslong affair with him and his wife, Becki Falwell — a claim the Falwells dispute.

In about an hourlong sermon delivered at Liberty's Williams Stadium before hundreds of students, Nasser said those concerned about Falwell's alleged actions are “right to want to see stern and swift accountable action for sinful behavior.”

But he stressed that any accountability must be paired with “extravagant grace and forgiveness.”

“It's okay to call sin, sin,” he said. “You know why? Because it is the only way to actually start to deal with it. It is not love to simply stay in the dark, and not call shameful what God calls shameful. And if we're not willing to stand on that truth, then what in the world are we calling ourselves Christians for in the first place?”

Falwell has repeatedly denied allegations of wrongdoing during his tenure. In a brief interview Thursday, he disputed the suggestion that he had sinned.

"I called Nasser and asked him exactly what sin I committed," Falwell said. "He couldn't and wouldn't answer. He just hung up and now won't answer."

Nasser confirmed Falwell's account in a statement after the initial online publication of this story.

"It is true that Jerry Falwell called me and that I hung up the phone," Nasser said. "The reason I did so was because it quickly became clear that he was not interested in an actual, sincere discussion about his sin. I love Jerry and Becki and would welcome a genuine conversation."

Wednesday's evening outdoor worship service, known as Campus Community, was the first large gathering of students since the fall semester began earlier this week amid the still-raging coronavirus pandemic.

In a video of the event, the vast majority of the students in the audience could be seen wearing face masks and spaced out at least a few feet from one another. A university spokesperson declined Wednesday to discuss coronavirus-related precautions at the school.

At one point in his remarks, Nasser recounted the departures of several Black staff members who resigned in protest this summer after Falwell posted a tweet invoking Gov. Ralph Northam's blackface scandal to mock coronavirus-related restrictions.

The tweet, posted in late May, included a racist image of a person in blackface standing next to a person in a Klu Klux Klan robe printed on a face mask in an apparent effort to ridicule Northam's statewide mask mandate. Falwell later apologized for the tweet after facing stiff backlash and after several prominent Black student-athletes and faculty members left the school.

Nasser said one now-former staffer told him that he felt he could no longer be associated with Liberty after seeing the controversial tweet.

"I asked him to reconsider," Nasser said. "But after he said no, I also told him that I love him, and that I understood and respected his choice. I believe that he was being obedient to what God was calling him to do personally."

Nasser's sermon, which was live streamed to more than 30,000 viewers, was well received by the larger Liberty community, even among longtime critics of the school's leadership.

“Thank you @davidnasser for apologizing to Liberty students tonight,” Save71, a group of four former Liberty students who had lobbied the school to permanently terminate Falwell, said on Twitter. “Many more of Liberty's leaders need to do the same. Saying you are sorry is the first of many necessary steps, and we are glad you took it.”

Save71 and other former students have criticized Nasser in the past for actions they argued enabled Falwell's behavior. For years, students and others affiliated with the university have called on Nasser to publicly and directly speak out against Falwell's previous scandals.

Earlier in the day, Jonathan Falwell, Jerry Falwell Jr.'s brother and the senior pastor at Thomas Road Baptist Church, delivered his own live-streamed sermon to Liberty students. In a passing reference to his brother's resignation, the younger Falwell acknowledged the challenges students now face, including taking classes during a pandemic and confronting "uncertainty because of change within, even our own campus."

Nasser, in his apology to students, attempted to make clear to his audience that he believed the university is not defined by its relationship to the former president. To make his point, he turned to a phrase often used by the Rev. Jerry Falwell Sr.

“Liberty is more than a college. We are God's college,” Nasser said. “And as our founder always said, ‘If it's Christian, it ought to be better.’ Certainly better than this.”

https://newsadvance.com/news/local/liberty-university/jerry-falwell-jr-sues-liberty-university-alleging-defamation-breach-of-contract/article_b060f5f2-de65-5b09-9c37-004c1fa6f8ea.html

Jerry Falwell Jr. sues Liberty University alleging defamation, breach of contract

Richard Chumney
Oct 29, 2020



Former Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. talks to Donald Trump Jr. about Trump Jr.'s book, "Triggered," during convocation at Liberty on Nov. 13, 2019. A financial consulting firm hired by Liberty to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by Falwell has launched a website for employees to report evidence of misconduct.

The News & Advance file

Jerry Falwell Jr. on Thursday sued Liberty University alleging defamation and breach of contract, saying the religious institution damaged his reputation after it forced the evangelical leader to resign.

Falwell stepped down as president and chancellor of the school in August following a string of scandals, including a stunning allegation he and his wife, Becki Falwell, had a yearslong sexual affair with a now-estranged business partner.

In a 29-page complaint filed in Lynchburg Circuit Court, Falwell claims Liberty's board pressured him into resigning before properly investigating the accusation by Giancarlo Granda, a former pool attendant who first met the couple in 2012.

"By forcing Mr. Falwell's resignation from Liberty immediately following Granda's false and defamatory statements, Liberty sent the unmistakable message to the public that Granda's false statements were, in fact, true," the complaint alleges.

Granda claimed Falwell participated in some of the liaisons as a voyeur — an allegation Falwell repeatedly has denied. Falwell has accused Granda of attempting to extort him.

The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages and a court order barring Liberty from repeating defamatory remarks about Falwell.

In a statement, Falwell said he was saddened university officials "jumped to conclusions about the claims made against my character."

"While I have nothing but love and appreciation for the Liberty community, and I had hoped to avoid litigation, I must take the necessary steps to restore my reputation and hopefully help repair the damage to the Liberty University brand in the process," Falwell said.

Robert Raskopf, an attorney for Falwell, said in a statement he was forced to file the lawsuit on behalf of his client after Liberty's new leadership refused to meet with him to discuss defamation allegations.

A Liberty University spokesperson was not immediately available for comment. Falwell's suit was filed on the same day Liberty's 30-member board met for a scheduled meeting, in part to discuss the university's search for a new president.

Falwell's suit takes aim at what it calls a series of defamatory statements, including a university news release accusing Falwell of a "lack of spiritual stewardship" and a university magazine article noting Falwell's actions had "broken trust" in Liberty.

The complaint also highlights a public apology made by David Nasser, Liberty's campus pastor, to the student body days after Falwell's resignation. In Nasser's speech, which came during a campuswide worship service and was streamed online, he apologized for Falwell's "sinful" and "shameful" behavior.

"In my opinion, you as a Liberty student deserve better. And the embarrassment that's been brought upon you as a Liberty student, and more importantly brought upon the name of Christ, is wrong," Nasser said at the time.

The suit claims Liberty violated its employment agreement with Falwell because the contract included a non-disparagement clause. Neither Falwell nor the university have made the employment agreement public.

The suit alleges Liberty's actions have "drastically reduced" Falwell's ability to be publicly involved in businesses and charity organizations. It also claims Falwell has not been invited to appear on television as a result of defamatory statements.

"In addition, the Defamatory Statements have caused Mr. Falwell immense anguish as he now is deeply concerned that third parties will hold horribly false impressions of him," the suit states.

https://newsadvance.com/news/local/liberty-university/liberty-university-tells-staffers-to-stop-speaking-with-jerry-falwell-jr-while-on-the-job/article_01a400c6-5318-51a4-b92b-b56cec4bfad4.html

Liberty University tells staffers to stop speaking with Jerry Falwell Jr. while on the job

Richard Chumney

Sep 4, 2020



Liberty University as seen from Candler's Mountain in Lynchburg on Wednesday, July 22, 2020.

The News & Advance file/

Liberty University's top lawyer instructed staff members Thursday to refrain from communicating with ousted former president Jerry Falwell Jr., who he warned had placed "uncomfortable" calls to various employees in the days following his resignation.

In an email obtained by The News & Advance, David Corry, Liberty's general counsel, informed employees they are barred from providing information about the school, taking orders, performing tasks or offering favors for Falwell while on university time.

Corry suggested any ongoing interactions could create the perception Falwell still is assisting in managing the university.

“This impression is not well received by our supporters who do not want Mr. Falwell to be running Liberty University behind the scenes,” Corry wrote.

Falwell, who did not return a request for comment, stepped down early last week after a former business partner alleged he had a yearslong affair with the evangelical leader and his wife, Becki Falwell — a claim the Falwells dispute.

In his email, which was sent Thursday afternoon, Corry said he was relaying the message on behalf of Acting President Jerry Prevo. He said Prevo, a longtime board member, is the only Liberty official authorized to communicate with Falwell about university business.

“If you are uncomfortable taking a call or engaging in other types of communication with Mr. Falwell, you are free to decline to do so and you are also free to refer them to Jerry Prevo,” Corry wrote.

A university spokesperson declined to comment.

Falwell, who is owed \$10.5 million as part of his separation deal with the school he led for 13 years, has reached out to multiple former subordinates since he stepped aside nearly two weeks ago, according to Corry's letter and current employees.

After Campus Pastor David Nasser apologized to the student body last week for what he called “sinful” behavior by Falwell, the former university president called Nasser and asked the preacher to name the sin he committed. Nasser ended the call without answering.

“The reason I did so was because it quickly became clear that he was not interested in an actual, sincere discussion about his sin,” Nasser said in a statement to The News & Advance last week. “I love Jerry and Becki and would welcome a genuine conversation.”

Corry’s instruction for staffers to limit their interactions with Falwell raises questions about Liberty’s existing ties to members of Falwell’s family who still are employed by the university, critics said.

Jerry “Trey” Falwell III, Falwell’s oldest son, for example, still holds the title of vice president of university support services and is considered a member of the school’s senior leadership.

“This email reveals how much remaining influence Jerry Falwell, Jr. has at Liberty. While he should not try to exert authority he no longer has, the Board of Trustees can do more to prevent this,” Save71, a group of four former Liberty students who had lobbied the school to permanently terminate Falwell, said in a statement. “If Liberty is going to fully free itself from Falwell’s negative influence, the Board cannot allow Falwell to advise President Jerry Prevo in any capacity, and should remove Falwell’s son, Jerry Falwell III, from his role as Vice President of University Support Services.”

According to Liberty’s website, the vice president of university support services works with the president and chief operating officer “to identify and execute opportunities for growth, improved productivity, and organizational effectiveness.” Trey Falwell was paid \$189,075 in 2017 for that work, Liberty’s most recent publicly available tax records show.

In 2017, at least four other members of Falwell’s family collected a salary from the school, according to tax records. Falwell’s second son, Calvin, was paid \$54,744, and Calvin’s wife, Laura Falwell, was paid \$57,751. Trey’s wife, Sarah Falwell, was paid \$64,315. The records do not indicate what positions Calvin, Laura and Sarah held at the time.

Jonathan Falwell, Falwell's brother and senior pastor at Thomas Road Baptist Church, was paid \$55,000 for his work as a trustee and vice chancellor for spiritual affairs.

Falwell himself took home more than \$1 million. His wife Becki does not appear in the tax records for that year.

https://newsadvance.com/news/local/liberty-university/liberty-university-launches-website-to-report-misconduct-under-jerry-falwell-jr-s-tenure/article_2e9a0544-1f09-5969-af8a-08aaa465736a.html

Liberty University launches website to report misconduct under Jerry Falwell Jr.'s tenure

Richard Chumney
Oct 21, 2020



Former Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. talks to Donald Trump Jr. about Trump Jr.'s book, "Triggered," during convocation at Liberty on Nov. 13, 2019. A financial consulting firm hired by Liberty to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by Falwell has launched a website for employees to report evidence of misconduct.

The News & Advance file

A financial consulting firm hired by Liberty University to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by former president Jerry Falwell Jr. has launched a website for employees to confidentially report evidence of misconduct.

The launch of **the website** represents the first public phase of an independent and wide-ranging investigation by Baker Tilly US, an accounting and advisory firm, into Falwell's tenure as president. Liberty's board retained the Chicago-based firm in late August after Falwell resigned following a string of scandals, including allegations of self-dealing.

At the time, the board said it was committed to conducting a thorough investigation into "all facets" of the university's operations under Falwell, including but not limited to financial, real estate and legal matters.

The reporting site, launched Tuesday evening, asks employees, contractors and business affiliates to voluntarily report any information that suggests current or former members of Liberty's leadership engaged in conduct that may have been illegal, unethical or improper in the context of running a nonprofit organization.

The site lists kickbacks, embezzlement, misuse of university funds and other actions as examples of potential misconduct. Individuals have until Dec. 20 to submit a report.

"The Liberty Board and the independent investigative team are encouraging anyone with pertinent information to not delay in submitting a report through the platform," the university said in a statement Tuesday.

For much of the past year, Falwell has been dogged by accusations he leveraged the university's business interests to enrich himself, family members and friends.

Falwell, who did not return a request for comment Wednesday, repeatedly has denied allegations of wrongdoing. He told the news outlet Reuters last month that he welcomed an investigation into his 13-year tenure as president.

Save71, a group of four former Liberty students who had lobbied the school to fire Falwell, expressed skepticism at the investigation's purported independence Tuesday. The group suggested the investigation's focus on Falwell may obscure the board's own wrongdoing.

“The firm is working on behalf of LU’s board of trustees,” the group said on Twitter. “There is no guarantee that it will investigate each claim that points to problems. But there IS a guarantee that when the investigation is over, the board will claim it exonerates them and no further action is needed.”

According to Baker Tilly investigators, Liberty employees will not have access to the information submitted through the website, which is hosted on an encrypted server by a third party. Individuals also have the option of submitting an anonymous report.

Instructions on the site note the reporting form should not be used to report allegations of employment discrimination or harassment, health and safety complaints and Title IX violations.

“Since the platform is independent of Liberty University, it is not a substitute for employees or students to report complaints of misconduct where the University has an established complaint procedure,” the university said.

Liberty said the investigation has been active since early September. In its statement Tuesday, the university revealed for the first time it had tapped Baker Tilly to direct the inquiry.

Investigators for the firm have already collected documents and conducted interviews, but it is unclear exactly who or how many people have been interviewed. University officials have not said when the investigation is expected to conclude.

To visit the website:

<https://lu.integrityline.org>

https://newsadvance.com/news/local/liberty-university/liberty-university-to-restructure-leadership-model-in-wake-of-falwell-scandal/article_1748fee8-1a9e-5c33-9146-7e2ac5e2d8e8.html

Liberty University to restructure 'leadership model' in wake of Falwell scandal

Richard Chumney
Nov 2, 2020



Liberty University as seen from Candler's Mountain in Lynchburg on Wednesday. Instead of testing for COVID-19, LU students must complete an electronic health questionnaire before returning to campus.

The (LYNCHBURG) News & Advance/

It may take more than a year, but Liberty University plans to overhaul its leadership.

Two months after former president Jerry Falwell Jr. resigned amid a series of escalating scandals, the university Monday announced its board of trustees formally had voted to restructure its “leadership model.”

In a brief two-paragraph statement, Liberty said the 32-member body had unanimously agreed at a meeting last week to hire two senior officials to run the vast religious institution: a president to oversee the school’s academics and a chancellor to serve as the spiritual leader.

According to the statement, the president will be tasked with administering Liberty’s academics, operations and employees while the chancellor will ensure the university is faithful to its Christian mission.

The decision to restructure the school’s leadership comes after Liberty’s board faced immense criticism for its response to mounting controversy during the last year of Falwell’s presidency.

Falwell, who simultaneously served as president and chancellor during much of his 13-year tenure, resigned this summer after a former business partner alleged he had a yearslong affair with the evangelical leader and his wife, Becki Falwell. The Falwells have denied the claim and have accused the business partner of extortion.

Liberty’s announcement offered few details about the individual duties of the new leadership roles. But in late August, days after Falwell’s resignation, the university said the board of trustees was reviewing options to establish a top position focused exclusively on the school’s spiritual teachings.

At the time, the university described the position as a coach, mentor and guide who would help ensure university leadership “fulfills his or her spiritual responsibility to live out the Christian walk expected of each and every one of us at Liberty.”

The university said Monday the board plans to approve a more detailed job description for both roles at a future meeting. The body is next scheduled to meet in mid-April.

In the meantime, a 10 member search committee made up of unnamed Liberty board members will begin the process of helping to identify candidates for the roles. The search committee has been tasked with naming an advisory committee of students, faculty and former students to assist in the search.

The entire process is expected to take more than a year, according to the university.

“This is a significant step forward,” said Karen Swallow Prior, a former Liberty professor who has been publicly critical of the board’s leadership. “I realize that it has been slow. But Liberty is an institution that has never seen these kinds of changes before.”

Still, Prior has concerns about the search process. She suggested the search committee should be made up of more than just current board members. She’d also like to see the board accept responsibility for the school’s leadership crisis.

“There is at least the possibility of some significant and positive change taking place,” Prior, who currently teaches at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, said. “But there’s also the possibility that it could just revert to the status quo because of the over representation of members of the same board that brought the university to this place to begin with.”

Dustin Wahl, a 2018 Liberty graduate and the co-founder of Save71, a group of former students who had lobbied the school to fire Falwell, said he was uncomfortable with the university’s decision to effectively split the top leadership into two distinct roles.

“This is essentially the board affirming that they want a businessman to lead the school and not a pastor,” he said. “They’re fine with having a pastor do the spiritual side of things, but as long as he doesn’t have any impact on what the school actually does.”

Wahl described the ideal Liberty University president as an experienced academic who has a well-rounded view of Christian education.

They are “a leader who’s making financial and business decisions. But who isn’t cutting the philosophy department just because it doesn’t make enough money, because they recognize how important something like philosophy is for students to be well rounded young Christians,” he said.

Several religious and political figures with close ties to Liberty have previously been suggested as future university presidents. The role is thought by some at the school to be an important position within the country’s larger evangelical community.

Since Falwell’s resignation, Franklin Graham, the son of famed preacher Billy Graham and a leading voice in the evangelical movement, has often been spoken of as a possible replacement.

But Graham is not interested in the position. In a statement Monday, he said he was focused on leading the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and the charity Samaritan’s Purse.

“As acting president, my friend Dr. Jerry Prevo is turning Liberty University back in the right direction,” Graham said. “I trust his leadership. He’s making sure Liberty University is focused on its mission of training champions for Christ.”

Other civic leaders, including politicians, have been considered for the position. In August, North Carolina Congressman Mark Walker, a pastor and former Liberty instructor, said he had been approached by board members about taking over the presidency.

The 51-year-old Republican legislator, who did not run for reelection this year, said at the time he was not considering taking the job. Walker was among several prominent conservatives who called for Falwell’s resignation this summer, denouncing his behavior as “appalling.”

“While the outreach is appreciated and humbling, Walker believes it is paramount that Liberty focuses on its strengths in the next step of its healing: students and faith,” a spokesperson for Walker said in an Aug. 26 statement. “Liberty University is a beacon

of hope and strength for many and this adversity will only make the Liberty family stronger.”

https://newsadvance.com/news/local/liberty-university/lynchburg-judge-unseals-documents-in-falwell-defamation-suit/article_9635a13b-d062-5fb4-84dc-e9ddb5474305.html

Lynchburg judge unseals documents in Falwell defamation suit

Richard Chumney

Nov 5, 2020



Former Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. talks to Donald Trump Jr. about Trump Jr.'s book, "Triggered," during convocation at Liberty on Nov. 13, 2019. A financial consulting firm hired by Liberty to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by Falwell has launched a website for employees to report evidence of misconduct.

The News & Advance file

Court documents detailing key provisions in Jerry Falwell Jr.'s employment contract with Liberty University have been unsealed in the defamation suit brought by the disgraced evangelical leader against his former employer.

Falwell, who resigned as president of Liberty in August amid a series of scandals, has alleged the school damaged his reputation by repeating what he claims are lies about his participation in an extramarital affair involving his wife and a former business partner.

In a lawsuit filed in Lynchburg Circuit Court last week, he accused the school of defamation and breach of contract. The complaint included some redactions related to Falwell's employment agreement.

But in a hearing held remotely Wednesday due to the coronavirus pandemic, Judge James Watson ruled the full documents should be made public.

The previously redacted portions of the complaint unsealed by Watson run just a handful of sentences and offer few new details about Falwell's employment agreement with the university he led for 13 years.

But the now-public documents make clear Falwell's attorneys believe the defamation suit hinges on provisions in the contract, which they've claimed bars university officials from making "defamatory or slanderous remarks" about Falwell and publicly discussing the reasons behind his resignation.

"Liberty breached the foregoing provision because Mr. Falwell was not terminated for cause and therefore Liberty was not allowed to discuss the circumstances surrounding the conclusion of Mr. Falwell's employment," the unredacted complaint states.

Falwell's contract, according to the complaint, also includes an indemnity provision protecting him from personal liability if a lawsuit is filed regarding his employment with Liberty. Falwell's lawyers have argued the clause requires Liberty to cover their client's attorney's fees and other costs associated with the defamation suit.

In addition to court costs, the lawsuit seeks unspecified damages and an order barring Liberty from repeating defamatory remarks about Falwell.

Falwell's attorneys had asked the court to keep the unredacted complaint temporarily sealed as lawyers for Liberty prepared to respond to the suit.

Cory Struble, an attorney for Falwell, said Falwell had no personal interest in keeping the documents sealed, but his client wanted to ensure he did not violate a confidentiality agreement with Liberty by filing a complaint with no redactions.

“Mr. Falwell does not have in his personal capacity an interest in maintaining confidentiality of these provisions, because they’re quite straightforward as I said,” Struble said. “What he does have an interest in is making sure that he abides by the terms of the agreement, and is not opening himself up to a claim by Liberty that he has breached the agreement.”

During the hearing, King Tower, an attorney for Liberty, said the school had no position on the motion to keep the complaint sealed. He made no argument supporting or opposing its unsealing.

Tower did say Liberty has an interest in maintaining the privacy of the employment agreement and stressed the school had not waived its right to enforce the contract’s confidentiality provisions.

Neither Falwell nor the university have made the full employment agreement public and court documents filed in the case only quotes from parts of the contract.

In his ruling, Watson said Falwell’s lawyers had not met the burden of overcoming the presumption of public access to court records. He ordered the unredacted complaint to be made public immediately following the conclusion of the hearing.

“There is, under Virginia law,” Watson said, “a strong presumption in favor of public access to judicial records and that would include pleadings, such as the plaintiff’s complaint in this case.”

Lawyers for Liberty have until Nov. 20 to respond to the allegations in Falwell’s lawsuit.

https://newsadvance.com/news/local/liberty-university/jerry-falwell-jr-drops-defamation-suit-against-liberty-university/article_f3cbe1f2-5be0-5da0-871c-9b3a8f82af62.html

Jerry Falwell Jr. drops defamation suit against Liberty University

Richard Chumney
Dec 10, 2020



Former Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. talks to Donald Trump Jr. about Trump Jr.'s book, "Triggered," during convocation at Liberty on Nov. 13, 2019. A financial consulting firm hired by Liberty to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by Falwell has launched a website for employees to report evidence of misconduct.

The News & Advance file

Former Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. has dropped a lawsuit alleging the evangelical Christian institution he led for 13 years defamed him after he resigned in scandal this summer.

Lawyers for Falwell notified Lynchburg Circuit Court on Wednesday their client will not pursue his claim the school damaged his reputation by repeating what he labeled as lies about his participation in an extramarital affair involving his wife and a former business partner.

Judge James Watson granted the motion, terminating the suit without prejudice. Watson's ruling leaves open the possibility of Falwell filing a similar suit at a later date. Under Virginia law, a plaintiff is allowed one nonsuit.

"I've decided to take a time out from my litigation against Liberty University, but I will continue to keep all options on the table for an appropriate resolution to the matter," Falwell said in a brief statement Thursday.

A Liberty spokesperson said in a statement that Falwell's decision to drop the suit "was not prompted by any payments, promises, or other consideration" from the university.

"The University's administration and Board of Trustees are pleased that Falwell has dropped his lawsuit and look forward to pressing onward with the work of Liberty's President and Chancellor Search Committee to find the new leadership to succeed Falwell," spokesperson Scott Lamb wrote.

Falwell stepped down as president and chancellor of Liberty in August following a string of personal scandals, including a stunning allegation he and his wife, Becki Falwell, had a yearslong affair with Giancarlo Granda, a now-estranged business partner.

In the 29-page complaint filed in late October, Falwell claimed Liberty's board pressured him into resigning before properly investigating Granda's accusation.

"By forcing Mr. Falwell's resignation from Liberty immediately following Granda's false and defamatory statements, Liberty sent the unmistakable message to the public that Granda's false statements were, in fact, true," the suit alleged.

Granda claimed Falwell participated in some of the liaisons as a voyeur — an allegation Falwell repeatedly has denied. Falwell has accused Granda of attempting to extort him, which Granda has denied.

The lawsuit had sought unspecified damages and a court order barring Liberty from repeating defamatory remarks about Falwell.

The suit claimed Liberty violated its employment agreement with Falwell because the contract included a non-disparagement clause. Falwell's attorneys have claimed the provision bars university officials from making "defamatory or slanderous remarks" about Falwell and publicly discussing the reasons behind his resignation.

Neither Falwell nor the university have made the full employment agreement public. But excerpts of the agreement detailing the non-disparagement clause were unsealed last month.

The suit alleged Liberty's actions "drastically reduced" Falwell's ability to be publicly involved in businesses and charity organizations. It also claimed Falwell has not been invited to appear on television or to other events as a result of the allegedly defamatory statements.

"In addition, the Defamatory Statements have caused Mr. Falwell immense anguish as he now is deeply concerned that third parties will hold horribly false impressions of him," the suit stated.