



Sexual abuse victim sues Love Church

Convicted Warrenton man released from prison Tuesday

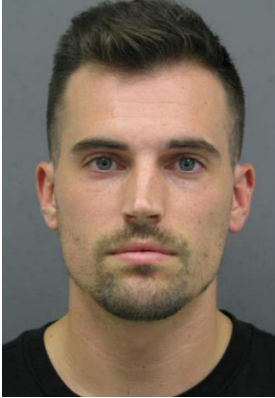
By Liam Bowman

PIEDMONT JOURNALISM FOUNDATION

On the afternoon of Nov. 25, 2014, a 16-year-old girl arrived at Life Church in Manassas for a private singing lesson with the church's youth pastor, Jordan Baird. A regular attendee of Baird's group lessons since she was 13, the girl had recently started one-on-one sessions with him.

Baird, 23 at the time, was a prominent figure at the evangelical church, where the girl had attended with her family since childhood. The son of David Baird, Life Church's founder and senior pastor, Jordan Baird directed the church band, led youth worship services and taught music at the church's Life Music Academy.

As Baird and his teenage pupil started the lesson that day, Baird's wife, Michelle Baird, who served as the music academy's director, was present in the room but left shortly after. Jordan Baird, according



Jordan Baird

sexual abuse. She broke her silence only after Baird was convicted of child sex abuse in 2018 for another offense and was sentenced to eight months in jail. (Another underage girl had come forward with allegations against Baird – as did three other women alleging misconduct.)

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to later court testimony, then took the girl into a dark room, locked the door and began kissing her. While kissing, he moved her hand onto his exposed penis and repeatedly asked her to perform oral sex. When she refused, he masturbated in front of her.

Shaken, the girl stopped attending the church and, for years, stayed quiet about her

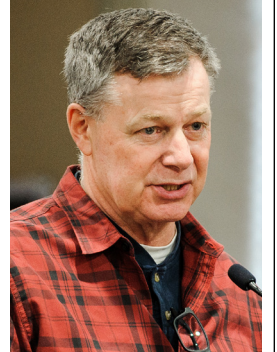
Anticipating role in Youngkin's administration, Mosier resigns as sheriff

By Coy Ferrell and Robin Earl

FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITERS

Fauquier County has a new (interim) sheriff. On the morning of Tuesday, Jan. 18, Lt. Col. Jeremy Falls was sworn in and Bob Mosier, first elected in 2015, resigned. Mosier (R) has been nominated by Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R) to be Virginia's next secretary of public safety and homeland defense. The state senate must confirm Mosier before he can take up the cabinet position.

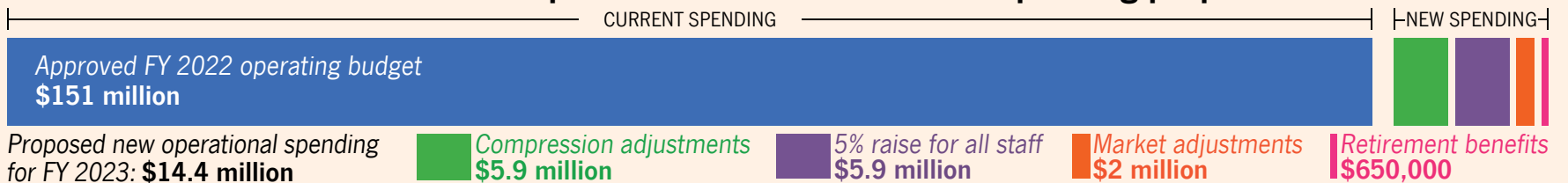
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FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF PHOTO/COY FERRELL

Fauquier County Sheriff Bob Mosier (R) delivers a farewell address to county supervisors Jan. 13.

School division superintendent's draft FY 2023 spending proposal



Proposed school budget 'aggressively' addresses teacher salaries

By Robin Earl

FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

For years, the Fauquier County School Board has been trying to increase teacher salaries in general and address pay scale compression issues in particular. Superintendent of Schools David Jeck said at the Jan. 12 School Board Summit that getting all staff compensation to between 90% and 100% of market averages has been the goal.

Some progress was made in the 2019-2020 budget, and the school

"This is the year to do it. We have a real opportunity to once and for all fix the compression issue."

DAVID JECK

Superintendent of Fauquier County schools

board was ready to continue the effort with the 2020-2021 budget. But then the pandemic hit. Uncertain about incoming revenue from local taxes and the state government, county supervisors hit the brakes on any new spending, leaving the

school division salary issue unresolved. County employees, including in the school division, didn't get a raise in the 2020-2021 budget.

Eventually, the school division managed to give all employees a 5% raise in June 2021, but only after many

teachers had already left the Fauquier school division, according to Jeck.

Now, though, he feels the time is ripe to address the issue. "I would like to make a very aggressive attempt for our employees. ... This is the year to do it," he said at the summit. "We have a real opportunity to once and for all fix the compression issue."

Jeck even suggested a newspaper headline to capture the plan: "School board supports 13% raise for teachers."

See **BUDGET**, page 9

Warrenton Restaurant Week begins Jan. 24. See Page 7



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Sexual abuse victim sues Love Church

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“I tried to forget, but I couldn’t forget, and I was hurting really bad,” the girl said in court. “So, I started to spiral. ... Most of high school I was either in the hospital or I just didn’t want to be alive.” In 2019, Baird ultimately pleaded guilty and was convicted of abusing the girl at the church and was sentenced to three years in prison. He was released Jan. 18.

Now, the girl is suing Baird’s church, alleging that its leaders showed “gross negligence” in failing to recognize Baird’s predatory behavior and protect young women in the church from abuse.

The ongoing \$21 million lawsuit, first filed in 2018 and refiled last October with revisions, claims that in 2014, Life Church (recently renamed Love Church) “did not have in place a process or policy for reporting suspected childhood sexual abuse at the church. ... Child Protective Services was not called by anyone in The Life Church regarding [Baird’s] sexual abuse of [the girl] or another child he sexually abused at The Life Church.”

Church leaders “had a duty of supervising and ensuring that plaintiff had a music education in an atmosphere conducive to learning, free of disruption and threat to her person. The church defendants breached their duty to plaintiff by ... failing to monitor, prevent and stop the inappropriate and unsupervised contact” between Baird and the girl, the suit, filed in Prince William County Circuit Court, contends.

The victim is also seeking damages from Baird and his wife, who are named as separate defendants. The lawsuit argues that Michelle Baird, as the director of Life Music Academy, failed in her duty to “supervise and care” for the girl when she left her alone with Jordan Baird.

In her refiled complaint, the plaintiff, now 23, states that she has “needed professional care and counseling to help her deal with the severe emotional pain caused by the sexual abuse.”

“I’ll never [be] the same person I was and that’s what hurts the most,” she said during Baird’s July 2019 sentencing hearing. “I can’t love. I can’t trust. I can’t bond. I can’t work. I can’t get the feeling of being scared to go away.”

Representatives of Love Church, however, have objected to any allegations that the church is civilly liable for Baird’s actions and in a recent motion asked that the lawsuit be dismissed on the grounds of “charitable immunity.”

Additionally, according to the church’s November 2021 filing, the plaintiff has failed to provide sufficient evidence to support her claims that church leaders acted negligently, that she suffered “emotional distress” as a result of abuse, or that “the church had a duty to protect her from the alleged criminal acts of Jordan Baird.”

Baird, through a lawyer, has objected to the victim’s claims. Michelle Baird has not filed any response.

When contacted by the *Fauquier Times*, a lawyer for Baird did not wish to comment on the lawsuit. Representatives of Love Church did not respond to requests for comment. Michelle Baird could not be reached for comment.

The plaintiff’s attorney, when asked for comments replied that the lawsuit stands for itself.

Background

A native of Gainesville, Baird began working at Life Church as a 17-year-old in 2008. According to court documents, he was employed in various roles, including as a “worship director” and “Elevation Youth Pastor.” His father, David Baird, having founded the church in 1999, eventually brought much of his family—including his wife, three sons and their spouses—onto the church’s staff. David Baird died in 2021 and Joshua Baird, Jordan’s eldest brother, succeeded him as senior pastor.

Jordan and Michelle Baird had married in 2013 and the couple subsequently moved to Warrenton, court records show.

At least as early as 2012, court documents show, Baird was teaching music through the church’s Life Music Academy. And while his rise as a Christian pop singer brought him celebrity status, some began to see signs of inappropriate behavior. “While taking singing group classes taught by Jordan Baird in 2012, I witnessed how Jordan would show special attention to certain people like [the 2014 victim],” a church member recalled in a letter submitted to court in 2019 during the second criminal trial. “He seemed to have more one-on-one time with [her] ... and through time I noticed she would be more uncomfortable with the one-on-one conversations.”

Remembering Baird’s behavior prior to the abuse incident, the victim said at the 2019 sentencing hearing that he would frequently whisper in her ear and act “very touchy.” “Just like back rubs,” she added, “just things that I would never expect a man to do to a girl who was from the ages of 13 to 16.”

Kevin Gross, the special prosecutor for both of Baird’s criminal trials, noted that Baird’s behavior was a “specific technique of manipulation aimed at seduction.” This involved sending flirtatious messages, either via text, social media or gaming apps like Trivia Crack and Words with Friends and then pushing escalating sexual contact, Gross stated in court filings.

Church leaders have categorically denied having any knowledge of Baird’s criminal behavior before a girl (the victim in the first criminal trial) brought forward allegations in June 2016. According to a now-deleted post on the church’s Facebook page, “On June 10, 2016, The Life



The Love Church is planning to build a 50,000 sq. ft building on U.S. 29 in Gainesville. This rendering was on the church’s website.

Love Church plans new building in Gainesville

Life Church (now known as Love Church) was founded by David Baird in 1999. Initially named Washington Christian Life Center, it was renamed Life Church in 2007, according to a June 2020 video on the church’s YouTube page.

David Baird served as the church’s senior pastor along with his wife, Jo Ann Baird. David Baird’s sons, Joshua, Jordan and Justin, as well as a number of extended family members, eventually came to work at the church.

According to State Corporation Commission documents, the church officially incorporated as The Life Church DC in July 2015.

By 2016, Life Church operated campuses in Manassas, Warrenton, Bristow and Winchester.

According to a 2017 annual report, Life Church’s campuses had a combined average weekly

attendance of 3,442 people.

In January 2019, David and Jo Ann Baird retired as senior pastors and passed leadership of the church to Joshua Baird and his wife, Brittney Baird, according to an internal email.

In October 2020, Life Church was officially renamed Love Church.

Currently, Love Church is active in Gainesville and Winchester. According to the church’s website, church leaders are planning to construct a 50,000 sq. ft. building along U.S. 29 in Gainesville (near the Wegman’s grocery store) as a venue for services.

Church leaders have so far raised \$645,803 for the project from church members, according to an announcement on their website. The Gainesville-area congregation currently meets at Patriot High School in Nokesville.

Church became aware of an allegation against Jordan Baird, an employee of the church, brought by a church volunteer who stated the alleged conduct occurred over a year ago. Church leaders immediately placed Jordan on a leave of absence pending outcome of the church’s internal investigation. The church’s investigation revealed no criminal activity.”

The following month, detectives with the Prince William County Police notified church leaders of a criminal investigation into Baird’s activity. On Aug. 18, 2016, Baird was arrested for the first time on sexual abuse charges.

Church denies responsibility

Since the plaintiff first filed her lawsuit in 2018, attorneys representing Love Church have pushed back vigorously at attempts to hold the church civilly liable for Baird’s criminal actions.

In their initial response to the civil suit, on Nov. 8, 2018, church representatives argued that the church couldn’t be sued for Baird’s actions because it “had no legal existence at the time of the alleged incident.” In 2015, a year after Baird’s abuse during the lesson, Life Church officially incorporated as the Life Church DC. And because the incorporated church “had no legal existence in 2014,” the motion states, “The Life Church DC did not employ the co-defendant Jordan Baird at any time or in any capacity in 2014” and “has no legal liability ... for the al-

leged actions or conduct” of Baird.

In subsequent filings, church attorneys repeatedly denied requests from the plaintiff for documents and depositions from Baird’s father, brother and other church leaders, citing “priest-penitent privilege.”

Another motion filed May 3, 2019, states that “vicarious liability may be imposed on an employer” only if the employee’s misconduct occurred while “performing a normal function of his assigned job.” Because the plaintiff “alleges no facts that the alleged sexual acts by Jordan Baird were arguably part of his service of providing vocal lessons as a tutor,” the church’s representative claims, the church cannot be held vicariously liable for Baird’s actions.

The filing goes on to say that the plaintiff’s “claimed injuries were not sustained during private vocal lessons, but instead after ‘the defendant’s wife left’ and when Jordan Baird and [the girl] stopped the vocal lesson. ... Once the vocal lesson was suspended, so too was any employment relationship.”

After contending with the church’s arguments for more than a year, the plaintiff’s attorney, Michael Sherman, decided to temporarily withdraw the lawsuit in January 2020. In October 2021, he filed a revised version of the lawsuit, reopening the proceedings.

A hearing date for the refiled lawsuit has not yet been scheduled.

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