

EC, LifeWay named in Glorieta lessees' suit

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NASHVILLE (BP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention, its Executive Committee, LifeWay Christian Resources and a long list of trustees and staff members have been named in a lawsuit over the sale of the Glorieta Conference Center to a Christian ministry, Glorieta 2.0.

The lawsuit, filed by Kirk and Susie Tompkins of Little Rock, Ark., claims the Glorieta property located east of Santa Fe, N.M., was not properly transferred from the Executive Committee to LifeWay after the Executive Committee received it from the Baptist Convention of New Mexico in 1950.

The Tompkins, who lease property at Glorieta, contend that the original 1950 warranty deed from the New Mexico convention remains the only deed on record in Santa Fe County, and no transfer of deed is recorded.

The lawsuit appears to assert that LifeWay Christian Resources erred in approving the sale of the property to the Christian camping ministry Glorieta 2.0 in June because, the Tompkins contend, an affirmative vote by messengers to the SBC annual meeting is required for two consecutive years in order for a sale to commence.

D. August Boto, executive vice president and general counsel for the Executive Committee, said LifeWay owns Glorieta and explained that the only sale of property by an SBC entity which would require convention approval -- in one meeting, not two -- would be if the entity proposed to sell all or substantially all of its property.

"This sale does not rise to that level," Boto said.

In a statement released to Baptist Press Sept. 5, Boto said, "We see no legal basis for the proposition that Executive Committee or convention permission is required before LifeWay may dispose of the Glorieta property. We believe, therefore, that the case filed is without any legal merit, and that the court will concur."

Marty King, director of corporate communications for LifeWay, said in a statement that "we have proper deeds for all of Glorieta and are confident Southern Baptist Convention approval is not required for this transaction."

"LifeWay's bylaws do require approval for such action by our SBC-elected board of trustees, and, LifeWay's trustees approved disposition of the Glorieta property two years ago and the sale to Glorieta 2.0 for a Christian camping ministry earlier this year," King said.

The Tompkins want the sale of Glorieta, which is set to be finalized this month, to be put on hold until the SBC can vote on it in 2014 and 2015.

Sixty-five churches, institutions and individuals own structures on lots at Glorieta but do not own the land -- a practice started in 1952 with 25-year non-renewable leases. Most of the current leases expire this fall and, if not renewed, require leaseholders to vacate the properties.

Glorieta 2.0 has given leaseholders several options:

- compensation based on the size of each structure, ranging from a minimum of \$40,000 to a maximum of \$100,000;
- a new 12-year lease;
- those who have been involved in ministry, including pastors and missionaries, can become permanent residents of Glorieta and stay on campus as long as they are physically able; or
- donation of their homes to Glorieta 2.0 as a charitable contribution.

Leaseholders had until Sept. 1 to choose one of the options, and the vast majority of them did, according to Glorieta 2.0's executive director, Anthony Scott.

When LifeWay announced its trustees' approval to sell Glorieta, it emphasized that one of the most important requirements of the sale was "that the new owners provide options that are fair, reasonable and prudent for individuals and churches that lease land at Glorieta."

The lawsuit contends that the options available to leaseholders are not fair or reasonable and would cause irreparable harm.

Kirk Tompkins told the Albuquerque Journal that language referring to many of the private Glorieta residences as "cabins" is misleading to LifeWay trustees and others who aren't familiar with the area. He said he pays insurance on his home setting its value at \$382,000.

LifeWay trustees, at their August meeting, voted to add 140 acres to the previously announced sale of Glorieta "to provide additional incentive for Glorieta 2.0 to increase compensation to those who have built cabins and made other improvements on leased property on the campus." Those acres are not contiguous to the main property and LifeWay had planned to market them separately.

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