

# Documentary explores faith of televangelists' son

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**By Shona Crabtree**

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—After a year of being closely shadowed by a camera crew, Jay Bakker—the tattooed and body-pierced son of televangelists [Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker](#)—finally is getting his private life back.

But viewers across the country have a chance to watch his year in review on the [Sundance Channel](#) in [One Punk Under God](#), a six-part documentary that began airing in December and ends Jan. 17.

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Jay Bakker,  
son of  
televangelists  
Jim and  
Tammy Faye  
Bakker, is  
the subject of  
a Sundance  
Channel  
documentary  
series, *One  
Punk Under  
God*.

*One Punk Under God* takes a close look at Bakker's life and his unconventional ministry, Revolution Church, almost 20 years after the implosion of his parents' PTL ministry and television network. Although born to parents who helped create the definition of televangelist, the younger Bakker, 31, took some convincing before agreeing to participate in the documentary.

Bakker, with his arms and torso covered in tattoos, a hipster beard and multiple piercings, said his motivation was giving more people a chance to hear his message.

"Not many people see, for lack of a better term, more liberal Christians," he explained.

Randy Barbato, executive producer of *One Punk Under God*, said the younger Bakker has embraced his mother's vision of nonjudgmental, inclusive Christianity. He first met Jay Bakker when making the documentary, [\*The Eyes of Tammy Faye\*](#), six years ago and knew he wanted to delve deeper.

“This is a series about quiet moments,” Barbato said. “It was meant to follow Jay’s church, and it turned into a series that tracks him becoming a man.”

Initially, Bakker tried to hide from the crew. Over time, he became more comfortable, enough for the cameras to capture what turned out to be an unexpectedly eventful year, including a long-awaited reconciliation with his estranged father, emotional conversations with his mother as she battles cancer, his decision to support same-sex marriage and his move from Atlanta to Brooklyn so his wife, Amanda, can go to medical school.

Although close to his mother, Bakker’s relationship with his father was rocky. The elder Bakker now lives in Branson, Mo., and is remarried with five adopted children. Jay Bakker said their estrangement was a gradual process of losing touch and lacking common ground.

When they did talk about religion, his father focused on the Book of Revelation and the end times, while the son wanted to discuss the meaning of grace and restoration. Their awkwardness eventually caused conversation to cease. That distance ended, however, when his mother’s cancer returned this year. Now remarried as Tammy Faye Bakker Messner, she has battled lung and colon cancer for several years and recently started hospice care.

Jay Bakker reached out to his father, eventually visiting him and appearing on [The New Jim Bakker Show](#).

“This was a really healing time. We really respect each other as men, as individuals,” the younger Bakker said, adding that when he had a hard day recently, the first person he called was his dad.

When Jay Bakker decided to support same-sex marriage, his father expressed concern about his future as a preacher.

“He was worried that the church was going to destroy me,” Bakker said. “Finally I had to say, I don’t want the same things. ... I minister to different people.”

While his mother has long been an icon in the gay community as one of the first to reach out to people with HIV, Jay Bakker said his childhood was defined by traditional evangelical beliefs. At times, he even felt like God hated him for sinning; smoking a cigarette once earned him a seven-day suspension from school. Eventually, conversations with a close friend led him to embrace a more expansive view of grace, salvation and God’s love.

The last thing Bakker said he wants to be is a “TV preacher.” But just as his parents pioneered television, Bakker has embraced online technology for his Revolution ministry. His website, [www.revolutionchurch.com](http://www.revolutionchurch.com), started as a “side thing,” but now Revolution gets most of its funding from online donations and sales of his sermons on CD. Sermons also can be downloaded for free.

Revolution, which meets in bars in Brooklyn, Atlanta and Charlotte, N.C., reaches more people online than in person. The website gets 250,000 hits a month. Since the documentary started airing, attendance at his Brooklyn gathering has jumped to 50 people, compared to the usual 15 to 30 attendees.

Revolution is “just a church for people who are looking for Christ. It’s a place to come and be loved, and we’re not going to judge you. We’re not about promotion; we’re about attraction,” Bakker said.