

Hearing held in Glorieta lawsuit

November 27, 2013

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (ABP)—At the plaintiff's request, a federal judge in New Mexico removed 113 individual trustees and employees of [LifeWay Christian Resources](#) and the [Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee](#) from a lawsuit challenging the recent sale of [Glorieta Conference Center](#). The number named in the suit dropped from 128 to 15.

Case recessed

U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert Hayes Scott also agreed Nov. 21 to recess the case pending outcome of a claim by convention lawyers that the U.S. District Court in Albuquerque lacks standing to hear the dispute, because it concerns internal matters of a religious body protected by the religion clauses of the First Amendment.

Scott's orders came during a hearing of a lawsuit filed by homeowners who claim LifeWay Christian Resources acted improperly in selling leased property on which their homes are located out from under them without offering them fair market value.

Kirk and Susie Tompkins of Little Rock, Ark., allege LifeWay trustees lacked authority to sell the property without approval by messengers at two SBC annual meetings. They seek damages totaling \$12.4 million for themselves and others affected by the sale of Glorieta to a new corporation called Glorieta 2.0.

The homeowners claim LifeWay and the Southern Baptist Convention did not follow their own internal processes and bylaws in deciding to sell the property that convention leaders say has been losing money for years.

'Breached fiduciary duties'

They claim LifeWay's officers and directors breached their fiduciary duties and committed corporate waste by selling 2,400 acres of mountain property near Santa Fe, N.M., for \$1. They also say they were treated unfairly when LifeWay canceled leases homeowners believed were recurring.

Lawyers representing LifeWay and the SBC Executive Committee say the couple has no right to challenge the agency's internal business decisions, because they are not duly elected trustees. They also cite a Supreme Court ruling last year barring the government from interfering "with an internal church decision that affects the faith and mission of the church itself."

"In addition, civil courts are incompetent to pronounce on matters involving the proper interpretation of religious doctrine, such as whether LifeWay's decision to sell the Glorieta Conference Center was in accord with LifeWay's religious beliefs," attorneys argued in a court document filed Oct. 2.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The first two paragraphs of the article were edited after originally posted.