

# LifeWay reverses course and seeks resolution with Rainer

October 1, 2020

NASHVILLE (BP)—LifeWay Christian Resources has decided not to proceed with a breach of contract lawsuit against the SBC entity's former president Thom Rainer, but will instead seek to resolve the dispute without litigation.

Trustee Chairman Todd Fannin announced the decision in an email to the board. An emergency meeting of the full board had been scheduled for Sept. 30 to discuss the lawsuit but was canceled by the executive committee.

"In lieu of moving forward with litigation, both parties are currently exploring the possibility of an agreed upon resolution of the differences," Fannin wrote. "Our continued prayer is that this will be resolved quickly and amicably."

Fannin, an Oklahoma businessman, asked "all Southern Baptists to join us in a season of prayer" and said trustees will receive additional information within a week. He expressed concern over "numerous public misstatements and inaccuracies surrounding this matter."

LifeWay filed a lawsuit Sept. 28 in Williamson County, Tenn., chancery court, alleging Rainer had violated his transition agreement with LifeWay by publishing with a competitor.

The agreement between Rainer and LifeWay upon his 2019 retirement precluded him from having any business association with LifeWay competitors until Oct. 31, 2021. The agreement specifically listed Tyndale House Publishers as a LifeWay competitor.

In August 2020, Tyndale announced a multibook publishing partnership with Rainer, which also includes video curriculum.



Thom Rainer

In a statement Sept. 29, Rainer said he had received “a written and amicable release from publishing” with LifeWay, he had discussed the matter with LifeWay’s attorney and he “assumed all was well” until receiving notice of the lawsuit.

Under his transition agreement, Rainer, 65, was to remain a paid LifeWay employee through Oct. 31, 2020, as chief advisory officer. The end of his employment would then be followed by a 12-month noncompete agreement.

However, Rainer told Baptist Press that Ben Mandrell, LifeWay’s current president, asked him either to stop receiving payments from LifeWay or return them to the SBC entity. He said he has been returning the payments since late spring.

The lawsuit apparently raised concern among some trustees. Multiple trustees told Baptist Press they did not learn of the lawsuit until the day after it was filed, and former board chair Jimmy Scroggins wrote an email to Fannin and his fellow board members asking that the lawsuit be withdrawn “until other options can be more fully explored or until the full board has an opportunity” to “discuss appropriate next steps for LifeWay’s relationship with Thom” Rainer.