

SPORTS

Ex-Central player Chris Campbell signs to play hoops at Lindsey Wilson

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Big fourth inning paces Cards win over Dodgers in amateur game

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The Messenger

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Madisonville, KY

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Baptist minister ends bid to keep job

Thomas: Decision came after 'circumstances' evolved

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After more than a month of uncertainty about his employment status, Dr. Bill Thomas has formally resigned as music minister and associate pastor of First Baptist Church effective Aug. 8.

His resignation letter, dated

Thursday, was mailed to church members, ending a dispute over whether he had stepped down June 24 following an uproar over a newspaper column written by his wife.

Henrietta Buffington, chairwoman of the church's Staff Development Committee, read Thomas' letter out loud during a

church business meeting following morning worship Sunday.

"As I communicated in my previous letters, it was never my intention to resign," Thomas wrote. "But, circumstances have evolved over this prolonged difficult period. So, to avoid further conflict and dysfunction within our church, I tender you this

request for dissolution of our professional relationship."

A motion to accept Thomas' resignation and double his proposed severance package to eight months was made during the business meeting. The church moderator, however, ruled the motion was out of order, as was a motion to reject Thomas' resignation.

There a brief debate over whether church leaders followed

their own policies and bylaws in seeking Thomas' resignation — and ultimately termination of his job.

One clause apparently allows the church council to terminate ministers other than the head pastor, while another clause places final action in the hands of the church body.

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Officials:

Something fishy

MINISTER

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

ment Committee.

The following day, Buffington and the staff development committee sent a letter to Thomas accepting his verbal resignation as official, offering a severance package of four months' wages and benefits.

On June 27, Thomas submitted a letter to the committee saying that he had not resigned and that according to church bylaws, it was proper to take the matter to the church council and, ultimately, the congregation for action.

On July 3, the church council mailed a letter to all church members stating that the staff development committee had acted within its authority and had accepted Thomas' resignation.

"It is important to note that the staff development committee continues to maintain that Dr. Thomas resigned at their request," Buckner said.

For the past month, church officials maintained that Thomas resigned, while Thomas insisted he had not.

On July 8, the church council met to discuss the disruption in the church. It was then that council members were made aware of a threat that a fiasco would ensue at the upcoming business meeting if Thomas' demands were not met, Buckner said.

The regularly scheduled business meeting on July 17 was moved to Sunday as a result. The staff development committee then presented evidence to the church council, which described it as, "extremely disturbing," Buckner said.

In a letter addressed to Thomas last week, the council terminated Thomas' position within the church, effective July 25.

"You have stated that you are unhappy at FBC Madisonville and if you had another job you would leave," the letter said. "You have stated that you would leave this church if you could take the people with you. This implies that you are incompatible with the staff's leadership direction."

"You have been insubordinate to the pastor on several occasions," the letter continued. "... Your interpretation of the Bible is different than traditional interpretation. You approve of homosexuals being in leadership positions within the church ... You stated that you are in complete agreement with your wife's disparaging column as published on June 19 in The Messenger. ... You have rejected the Staff Develop-

development committees' request for no malicious publicity. You have allowed distribution of several letters, one of which greatly distorted tales of your departure June 24. You resigned on June 24. Since that day you have been actively involved or have allowed others to be active in promoting yourself and your agenda to the detriment of this church. You have not acknowledged any regret or remorse for these actions."

Upon opening the floor of the meeting, a motion was presented to deny Thomas' resignation.

The motion was declared out of order by church moderator John McClearn, triggering a discussion regarding the bylaws and policy of the church followed.

A motion to accept Thomas' resignation and grant him a severance package of eight months salary and benefits — double the amount initially offered to him by the church staff development committee last month — was made.

That motion was also declared out of order.

Some of the congregation argued that according to policy, the church body has the ability to approve decisions or revoke decisions made by any church committee. McClearn said that was inaccurate.

Discussion concerning the congregation's right to be involved with the termination of staff followed. McClearn maintained that according to church bylaws and policy, only the termination of the pastor, and not an associate pastor, would qualify.

When the motion was made to dismiss, McClearn asked for all in favor to say, "aye," after which point, the "nays" were noticeably louder. A visual vote was then taken with all in favor standing for a head count.

The motion passed and the meeting was dismissed.

"Although the circumstances under which I leave you are not what I would have designed, I desire only to terminate our professional relationship and hope the many friendships continue for years to come," he wrote. "Please know this decision has been bathed in prayer and Godly council from many sources, both local and abroad."

Margaret Wood

Lyn Curran.
Burke
grave
Tuesday at

Thomas' resignation and severance benefits.

Questions about Thomas' theological principals surfaced publicly after an article written by his wife, humor columnist Angela Thomas, was published June 19 in The Messenger.

In the column, Angela Thomas lampooned the Southern Baptist Convention's negative reaction to the Boy Scouts of America changing its national policy to accept homosexual members, excluding leadership roles. First Baptist Church is a member of the SBC.

The story garnered national attention when the Associated Press covered the events.

"As a result of the article, the church office and pastor's telephones started ringing very early and continued all day," Alan Buckner, president of the church council, said Sunday during the business meeting.

Buckner, reading from a statement, provided the following account of what happened:

The Staff Development Committee discussed the story during a regularly scheduled meeting on June 19.

The committee decided to question Bill Thomas on June 21 in order to better understand his involvement and position with the column.

"Bill stated that he read the article prior to publication," Buckner said. "He stated that he was in agreement with the article and that he and Angela hoped it would spark some dialogue."

The committee questioned Thomas for about two hours, and then discussed the matter for an additional three hours.

Following the meetings, the committee decided to ask for Thomas' resignation at his office on the morning of June 24.

According to the committee and Thomas, a verbal resignation was given at that time. The committee asked for a formal letter of resignation by noon.

Later that day, Thomas submitted a letter saying that upon further reflection, he did not wish to resign. Instead, he requested a meeting with the Staff Develop-

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Justice

Margaret Wood

Lyn Curran.

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