

Haggard confesses to 'lifelong' sexual problem

- NEW:** Haggard confesses "lifelong" sexual problem
- Church fires pastor over "sexually immoral conduct"
- National Association of Evangelicals names interim replacement
- Evangelist admits he called male escort to buy drugs and get a massage

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colorado (CNN) -- Less than 24 hours after being fired from the mega-church he founded, evangelical Pastor Ted Haggard confessed to a "lifelong" sexual problem.

In a letter read to members of his New Life Church Sunday, Haggard said he is "a deceiver and a liar." Haggard apologized to his congregation in the letter and asked for their forgiveness.

"There is part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I've been warring against it all of my adult life," Haggard said in the letter read by Pastor Larry Stockstill, a member of the board of overseers of New Life Church.

On Saturday, members of the board ousted Haggard from the 14,000-member church, citing his "sexually immoral conduct." ([Watch what led to Haggard's firing -- 2:40](#))

Mike Jones claims the prominent pastor paid him for sex over a three-year period. Haggard only admitted to receiving a massage from the Denver man, in an interview Friday with CNN affiliate KUSA.

The pastor also admitted that he had bought methamphetamine, but said he did not use the drug and threw it away.

In his apology letter, Haggard made no mention of drug use, but said "I am guilty of sexual immorality." He also noted that "the things I did opened the door for additional allegations."

Haggard asked the congregation to forgive his accuser, who Haggard said revealed "the deception ... that was in my life."

In a separate letter from Haggard's wife to the women of the congregation, also read by Stockstill, Gayle Haggard said while her heart is broken, she remains "committed to him until death do us part."

The couple has five children.

After the letters were read, an overflow congregation, many of them wiping away tears, responded with a standing ovation.

Interim pastor Ross Parsley then called upon congregants to forgive Haggard.

"It is OK to be angry, it is OK to grieve," Parsley said. But, the "fall of one man" will not destroy the congregation, he said.

"Today our church family and Pastor Ted is more obedient, more repentant, more transparent than we've been in a long time," Parsley said. "You're watching the Gospel at work. You're watching healing and restoration start to occur as we go through this process."

After the service, 10-year church member Michelle Richmond predicted Haggard and the church will recover.

"I probably cried all morning," Richmond said. "He knows he's hurt us and it hurts when your brother has done something, but like Pastor Ross said, he's in a good place -- he's better off this week than he was last week -- and he will receive the healing he needs"

and he did a good thing for our church so that we can heal."

Jones told CNN he went public with his allegations because of Haggard's support for a state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage that is on the ballot this Tuesday in Colorado.

"For someone who is up there preaching that marriage should only be between a man and a woman, and he's going behind his wife's back and seeing a gay man for sex -- I felt like I owed it to the gay community to expose the hypocrisy," Jones said.

Jones has said he met Haggard three years ago when the pastor answered his escort ad, pretending to be a man from Kansas City named "Art." He said their sexual encounters continued monthly until August.

Haggard's middle name is Arthur.

Haggard started the New Life church 26 years ago in his basement and attained a nationwide identity among evangelicals as his church grew. He was one of a group of religious leaders who regularly participated in conference calls with White House aides, Time magazine reported.

On Friday, White House spokesman Tony Fratto sought to downplay Haggard's influence within the administration, saying he was only an occasional participant in weekly conference calls between West Wing staff and leading evangelicals.

Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, one of three pastors named Sunday to counsel Haggard and his family, issued a statement Friday saying he was "heartsick" upon learning of Haggard's admissions.

CNN's Eric Marropodi contributed to this report.

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