

Falwell celebrates 50 years behind the pulpit at Thomas Road

LYNCHBURG, Va. (AP) — The Rev. Jerry Falwell's conservative politics have earned him both friends and enemies in a long, public career — but there's no denying he's been a successful pastor.

Joined by thousands of supporters, Falwell will mark the half-century anniversary of Thomas Road Baptist Church on Sunday with a daylong celebration that begins with a service in a new, 6,000-seat sanctuary.

The sanctuary is just a small part of a 1 million-square-foot complex for the Falwell empire's administrative offices, Liberty University recreational facilities and classrooms and Liberty Christian Academy, which has students from preschool through high school.

Days before the opening ceremony, workmen hustled to install the raised choir loft, lay carpet around the dark gray upholstered seats, and put wall coverings over insulation.

Even unfinished, the setting bore no reminder of the church's beginnings.

Fresh out of Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Mo., a 22-year-old Falwell returned to his hometown and started his church with 35 members in an old Donald Duck soda bottling plant.

"We scraped syrup off the floors and walls," he said during a recent interview.

Falwell, whose countenance is jovial even when talking about serious subjects, built his congregation with knuckles and shoe leather. "I began knocking on 100 doors a day, six days a week," he said. He would invite people to church, and leave them with his phone number in case they needed his help.

One year later, Thomas Road Church had 864 members; it has continued to grow dramatically. Today, the rolls number 24,000, with several hundred evangelists going door-to-door in central Virginia.

Falwell still believes in recycling

old buildings, however. Everything but the church sanctuary has been converted from an 888,000-square-foot facility formerly used by Ericsson, a Swedish-based supplier of cellular phone network equipment. Parts of it are still being renovated.

Within a few weeks of starting the church, Falwell found a way to expand his reach quickly — first with a radio program, then a live Sunday night television show — the "Old Time Gospel Hour" — on the Lynchburg ABC affiliate. In 1956, the move was bold.

"Nobody else was doing it," Falwell said. Today, the preacher has his own Liberty Channel as well as shows on other cable networks.

Falwell's influence moved from strictly religious matters to politics in the 1970s, with the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade ruling that established a woman's right to an abortion. "Believing life begins at conception, I became very exercised over this," he said.

The result was the founding of the Moral Majority in 1979, which Falwell used to mold the religious right into a political power. "He is the face of the so-called religious right in America," said the Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and a sharp Falwell critic.

Falwell hit the road, traveling some 300,000 miles a year to campaign, a schedule that he kept for 10 years and now says he realizes was costly to the church and the university.

The congregation was behind him, though.

"They believed that his voice was an important voice, and if that meant sharing him with other people they were willing to do it," said Mark DeMoss, his executive assistant from 1984 to '91.

Falwell was able to travel extensively and still lead a congregation, DeMoss said, because he never stopped being a pastor.

"I began knocking on 100 doors a day, six days a week."

Rev. Jerry Falwell,
Thomas Road Baptist Church

"Even as busy as his schedule was, he still was visiting people in Lynchburg's two hospitals several times a week," he said, as well as performing weddings and conducting funerals for everyone who asked.

These days, slowed by health problems and a desire to focus on his ministry, Falwell has pulled back from politics somewhat.

While possible presidential contender Sen. John McCain was Liberty's commencement speaker in May, and another potential GOP contender, Virginia Sen. George Allen, has been invited to speak at Sunday's festivities, Falwell carries the weight of being a polarizing figure.

Even among evangelicals who share his views, he is sometimes considered tactless in his public comments.

After the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, Falwell partly blamed the tragedy on groups that "tried to secularize America," singling out pagans, abortionists, feminists, gays and the American Civil Liberties Union. "God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve," Falwell said. He later apologized.

Falwell has taken steps to ensure the future stability of both the church and the university, DeMoss said. One son, Jerry Jr., is a lawyer

who manages the finances, while Jonathan preaches at several of the five regular Sunday services.

Falwell said he views his church as the fulcrum of his ministry, but Liberty University will be his legacy.

"The university produces thousands of young men and women trained as Christian leaders," he said.

Founded in 1971, Liberty now has 9,600 students on campus and another 15,000 in its distance learning program. A law school opened in 2004, and Falwell's goal is to have 25,000 on the campus in 13 years.

"At 72, I have to make all my ticks count," he said.

The university began as an offshoot of Thomas Road but once it began to grow, the old church was too small to accommodate the students. The new church is on campus.

"This new church really represents bringing everything full circle," DeMoss said.

On the Net:
Thomas Road Baptist Church:
www.home.trbc.org
Liberty University:
www.liberty.edu
Falwell's television channel:
www.libertychannel.com

Reception for Gallery opening for Jake and Julie (Woofter) Bond of Archival Design Kansas City, Missouri.
Time: 1 to 3 P.M. MT.
Sunday, July 2
Carnegie Arts Center
Goodland, Kansas.

SHARE the FAITH

Worship in the church of your choice this weekend.



COLBY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, Rev. James Mardock, pastor, 950 S. Franklin, 462-6521, Sunday Worship Services at 8:30 and 11:00 a.m., 6:30 p.m., Fellowship coffee 9:30 a.m., Sunday School, 9:45 a.m., KXXX broadcasts 11:00 worship. <http://www.gbmg-umc.org/colby-umc/>

Schedule of church services

ASCENSION-ON-THE-PRAIRIE EPISCOPAL, Rev. Don Martin, College Drive & Wheatridge Rd., 462-3041, Holy Eucharist, 9:00 a.m. every Sunday, Evening Prayer, 5:15 p.m. Wednesday, September through May. Christian Education for Youth, 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, September through May

COLLEGE DRIVE ASSEMBLY OF GOD, Pastor, Jeremy Gundling, 245 W. College Dr. - 462-8234, Early Service - 8:00 a.m.; Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Morning Worship - 10:45 a.m.

BEREAN CHURCH, 1000 S. Franklin, 460-2763, www.colbyborean.com; Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:45 a.m. Awana Clubs, Wednesday, 7 p.m., Middle & High School, Wednesday, 7 p.m. @ the Heartland Christian School Gym

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, Pastor Bradley L. Herndon, Grant & Webster Street, 462-2867, Morning Worship 10:30 a.m., Sunday School 9:15 a.m., Evening Worship 6:30 p.m., Wednesday Bible 7:30 p.m.

COLLEGE VIEW BAPTIST CHURCH, (SBC), Pastor Tom Huffman, 1185 Wheatridge Rd. at College Drive, 460-7144, Sunday Bible Study 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship services, 10:45 a.m.

MINGO BIBLE CHURCH, 420 Main Mingo, 785-462-2992: An independent community church served by Village Missions Pastor Chris Shubert. Sunday School: 9:30AM - all ages. Sunday Services: 10:45AM. Sunday Nights: 1st Sunday of the month: potluck following morning service - no evening service; 2nd Sunday: services at 6:30 PM; 3rd Sunday: informal fellowship - bring a snack to share!; 4th and 5th Sunday: services at 6:30 p.m.

SACRED HEART CATHOLIC, 462-2179, Father Dana Clark, Pastor, Saturday Eve. Mass 5:30 p.m., Sunday Masses 8:00 & 10:00 a.m., Confessions will be heard Saturday 4:30-5:05

p.m. and from 7:30-7:45 a.m. and 9:25-9:40 a.m. on Sunday.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Rev. Carol Rahn, 515 W. 4th, 462-6342, Worship, 9:00 a.m.

WESLEYAN CHURCH, 320 W. Pine - 462-8391, Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:40 a.m., Sunday Evening Cell groups at 6:00 p.m., Wednesday Youth Ministries, Kids Clubhouse 7 p.m.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, 1145 S. Franklin - 460-6605, President Gary Slavens, 460-2656; Rocky Robbins, 1st counselor, 460-1101; Tim Wilson, 2nd counselor, 785-846-7796. Sacrament meeting 10 a.m., Sunday School and Primary 11:20 a.m., Priesthood, Relief Society, YM/YW, 12:10 p.m.; Family History Center open to public, 7-9 p.m. Thursdays or by appointment. Call 462-3571.

COLBY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, Rev. James Mardock, pastor, 950 S. Franklin, 462-6521, Sunday Worship Services at 8:30 and 11:00 a.m., 6:30 p.m., Fellowship coffee 9:30 a.m., Sunday School, 9:45 a.m., KXXX broadcasts 11:00 worship. <http://www.gbmg-umc.org/colby-umc/>

REDEEMING LOVE MINISTRIES, INC., 345 N. Franklin, Apostle W.G. and Rev. Orvella Romine, Equipping Class, Sunday, 10 a.m., Sunday worship, 11 a.m., Wednesday, R.L.M Training Center (Bible School), 7 p.m.

CHURCH OF CHRIST, 510 E. 4th, Jay Kelley, minister, Sunday Bible Study 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:30 a.m., Sunday Eve. Worship 6:00 p.m., Wednesday, Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

COLBY EVANGELISM CENTER, Rev. Robert Cooper, 815 West 3rd - 462-2062, Sunday School 9:45; Sunday service 10:00 and 6:30 p.m.; Wednesday Bible Study 6:30 p.m.; Friday Youth Power Hour at 7:00 p.m.

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, (Disciples of Christ), Pastor Bradley L. Herndon, 385 W. 3rd - 460-2718, Sunday Morning Worship at 9:00 a.m.; Sunday School at 10:30 a.m. E-mail: fccolby@st-tel.net

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, Rev. John L. Schmidt, East 5th & Country Club, 462-3497, Services, Sat., 5:30 p.m., Sunday; Sunday School and Adult Bible Class 9:15 a.m.; Services, 10:30 a.m.

OUR SAVIORS LUTHERAN CHURCH, Brewster, Sunday worship 9:00 a.m.; 2nd Sunday of the month at 8:00 a.m.

PLEASANT HOME CHURCH, Pastor, Charlie Busch, 694-2242, 3190 Road 70, Edson, Worship, 9:00 a.m., Sunday School 10:00 a.m., Evening service, 6:00 p.m.

LEVANT COMMUNITY CHURCH, 205 1st St., Pastor Jerry Vincent, 586-2376, Sunday School (classes for 3 years & up and 3 adult classes) 9:30 a.m., Morning worship 10:30 a.m.

WINONA METHODIST CHURCH, Rev. Michael Eurit, Sunday School, 10:30 a.m., Morning Worship 9:30 a.m. (CDT)

BREWSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, PO Box 250, Brewster. Pastor Dorine Chambers, 785-462-6044, Sunday School, 9:45 a.m., Morning Worship, 10:45 a.m.

THE SHEPHERD'S STAFF, REXFORD, Joan Dingwerth, Director, 687-2565

REXFORD COMMUNITY CHURCH, Rexford, Pastor Lane Purcell, 687-3305, Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

BREWSTER COMMUNITY CHURCH, Mike Pinkelman, Pastor, Brewster - 694-2720, Sunday School (all ages) 9:30 a.m., Worship Service 10:30 a.m., Bible Study 7:00 p.m., Wed. mornings 6:30 a.m. - Men's Bible Study, Wed. 7:00 p.m. - Children's Ministries (Royal Rangers/Missionettes), Wed. 7:15 p.m. - Intercessory & Prayer, Thurs. 4:00 p.m. - Women's Bible Study

Congregation to leave Episcopal church

PLANO, Texas (AP) — Christ Church Episcopal says it will leave the denomination because it opposes the national direction of the church.

The conservative Plano parish announced its plan Monday, a week after the Episcopal General Convention rejected demands from fellow Anglicans overseas and conservatives at home that they stop consecrating gay bishops for now. Delegates instead voted to call for "restraint" in future elections.

The convention also chose a new presiding bishop, Nevada Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, who voted in 2003 to confirm V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire, the first openly gay bishop, and supports creating prayer services to bless same-gender couples.

"The mission of Christ Church is to make disciples and teach them to obey the commands of Christ," Christ Church leaders said in a statement. "The direction of the leadership of the Episcopal Church is different and we regret their departure from biblical truth and the historic faith of the Anglican Communion. ... We declare our intention to disassociate from ECUSA as soon as possible."

A spokesman for the Episcopal Church did not respond to a request for comment. The denomination is the U.S. branch of the global Anglican Communion.

The Plano church is one of the largest Episcopal churches in the nation, drawing about 2,200 worshippers each weekend to the Dallas suburb.

Under Episcopal rules, parishes cannot take their property when they leave. But Dallas Bishop James Stanton, who also opposed Robinson's consecration, said he intends to allow the congregation to continue using the building.

The Rev. David Roseberry, Christ Church pastor, said specifics of how the parish will leave the denomination will be decided in the

"The direction of the leadership of the Episcopal Church is different and we regret their departure from biblical truth and the historic faith of the Anglican Communion"

Statement from
Plano, Texax Christ
Church Episcopal

coming weeks. Christ Church said it still regards the Dallas bishop as its "apostolic leader."

www.christchurchplano.org/

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