

Amid Scandal, Eddie Long's Christian Academy Closes, Citing Economy

Bishop Eddie Long's New Birth Missionary Baptist Church recently announced plans to close its Christian Academy at the end of the school year, citing a poor economy and low enrollment.

The Faith Community Christian Academy, which is on the grounds of the Lithonia, Ga., church that has been plagued in the last couple of years by accusations of sexual misconduct and financial improprieties, reportedly has only 40 students enrolled.

"The closing of Faith Community Christian Academy ends an era for one of Georgia's premier Christian schools," WSB-TV Channel 2 reports school officials said in a written statement.

The statement continued, saying the closing is due to dire financial times, and is not related to previous allegations that Long sexually coerced male minors.

"We understand the impact this decision will have on the students and staff. But we are optimistic that the timing of the closing provides students, teachers and staff with sufficient time to transition to other schools."

The Christian Academy promised students and parents that it would help families find nearby schools. Founded in 1993, this is not the first time the school has faced closure. It suddenly announced in December 2011 that it would close before the school year finished, but it reopened shortly after.

Long, who started as New Birth's pastor in 1987, founded the

school. He is currently facing a lawsuit by former church members who claim that he encouraged them to invest money with a company, which he knew had a \$3 million capital deficit.

The bishop was named—along with his church and Ephren W. Taylor—in the suit filed in January by 12 former church members, who say they lost more than \$1 million in an alleged Ponzi scheme.

The lawsuit says though Long did not invest himself, he introduced Taylor as his “friend (and) brother,” and urged parishioners to invest with the self-professed “social capitalist” before Taylor’s pitch to the congregation, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reports.

Long’s 25,000-member church has seen a number of hardships in the last couple of years. Though he has denied the charges, the bishop reached a settlement with four young men who alleged sexual coercion.

His wife, Vanessa Griffin Long, filed for divorce in late 2011. Following the divorce petition, the charismatic bishop took a short leave of absence to deal with family issues and reconcile with his wife. Vanessa Long dropped the petition in February 2012.