

Feed the Children Sues Founder Larry Jones

Normal

0

✖ The Christian compassion ministry Feed the Children has accused its founder, Larry Jones, of taking bribes and hiding hard-core pornography, among other offenses, in a lawsuit filed last week in Oklahoma district court.

The civil action comes more than a month after the board of directors fired Jones Nov. 6 after he admitted to hiding microphones in the offices of top executives who opposed him. The ministry later accused him of taking a \$22,000 bribe from a supplier.

Photo: Larry Jones, shown with his wife Frances, has been the face of Feed the Children for 30 years.

Jones, 69, has denied all wrongdoing. He filed a wrongful termination suit Nov. 10, claiming the ministry board terminated him “for reasons of personal malice and spite and not for any authorized cause.”

Feed the Children responded with a countersuit Dec. 28 that alleges Jones misspent ministry funds, pocketed money given to pay his travel expenses and kept gifts from speaking appearances. It also says hard-core pornographic magazines were found in Jones’ office.

During a press conference last week, Jones defended himself against the board’s allegations. “What they’re trying to do is build a case up against me so that will hold up,” Jones said, according to *The Oklahoman*. “It won’t hold up. ... I didn’t do anything.”

Jones said he intended to send the pornographic magazines to a

ghostwriter helping him with a series of novels, including one about AIDS in Africa called *The Zipper Disease*. He said the magazines were meant to explain to the writer how bad pornography has become.

"I'm not a dirty, old man," Jones said, according to the newspaper. "All of this was done for research."

The lawsuits are the latest in an internal battle that culminated with Jones' termination after he admitted to hiding microphones in three executives' offices, including that of his daughter, who is the ministry's general counsel. Jones said he planted the devices to record his conversations because his comments were being misinterpreted. Oklahoma prosecutors decided not to file any charges, *The Oklahoman* reported.

The ministry said Jones also was fired because board directors believe he solicited a \$22,000 bribe from a supplier. Jones said he asked for assistance with legal expenses and the vendor misinterpreted his request, the Oklahoma City newspaper reported.

The ministry said it found further evidence of wrongdoing after Jones was terminated. In addition to the pornographic material, Feed the Children's attorneys said documents were found in Jones' office showing that he was regularly paid by Affiliated Media Group (AMG), which purchases TV time for Feed the Children's fundraising spots and for other ministries.

The ministry alleges that Jones hid the payments, and that he secretly entered into a three-year contract with AMG and persuaded the company to hire his son.

Jones said he has never taken a bribe. He told the newspaper that AMG paid him roughly \$10,000 a month in commissions because he recruited ministers to use the company to air their own broadcasts before or after Feed the Children's spot. Jones said the arrangement helped lower the cost of purchasing

airtime and that the payments stopped several years ago.

"The owner said to me, 'Hey, man, you're one of the best salesmen I've got. I don't feel right you doing this without remuneration.' I said, 'Whatever you want to do is fine with me.' ... It was the same as ... what his salesmen were getting," Jones told *The Oklahoman*.

Jones did not deny helping his son get a job with AMG. "There was nothing wrong with that," he said. "If you came to me and said you wanted your son to go work for me and your son was capable in an area we needed him, then what would be wrong with that?"

Feed the Children said in a statement that it is strong and continues to fulfill its mission. It said officials have been working for two years to end Jones' "systematic pattern of freewheeling dominance" of the organization.

"We believe that Larry started out as a man with a mission to help children and families. We will continue that mission," Feed the Children board chairman Rick England said. "Additionally, we will continue to defend this organization."

Jones has been the face of Feed the Children for 30 years and worried last fall about its year-end fundraising initiatives.

"This is crazy," Jones told *The Oklahoman* last week. "I'm not saying they can't live without me, but everywhere I go, people say, 'Feed the Children is Larry Jones and Larry Jones is Feed the Children.'"