

Ted Haggard to Begin Home Prayer Group

✖ Ted Haggard, who in 2006 resigned from the Colorado megachurch he founded in the wake of a sex and drug scandal, announced Wednesday that he plans to host a prayer meeting in his living room.

The first meeting will be held Nov. 12. at Haggard's Colorado Springs home and could evolve into a church, though Haggard said that is not his aim. He said he and his wife, Gayle, have been traveling almost weekly since the HBO documentary *The Trials of Ted Haggard* debuted in January, and they thought they needed prayer support.

"This is a Thursday night prayer meeting in our home," Haggard said. "What we want to do is be able to tell our schedule and our story and know that we're covered in prayer. And we want to hear their stories and give them the assurance that they're covered in prayer as well."

Haggard announced the prayer meeting roughly three years to the day he resigned as pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs. He said he was not aware of the timing, but acknowledges the prayer group is starting much like his former church. He founded New Life Church in his basement in 1985, and saw it grow from 25 members to 14,000.

Haggard told the *Colorado Springs Gazette* on Wednesday that the prayer meeting could be described as a church. He made a similar comment to the *Denver Post*, calling the prayer gathering "an exploratory meeting."

But Haggard told *Charisma* Thursday that he wouldn't call the prayer group a church.

"Any time you have two or more believers together, you have

the church ... but it's not a church like a church with a Sunday school and a children's department and a board of elders," he said.

He expects only a handful of people to show up, but said if the group grows and wants to become incorporated, he would be open to that.

"It may never go that way," he said. "I'm so blessed with my service at New Life. That church is healthy and vibrant and continues to grow in Colorado Springs, and that's a wonderful blessing. I'd be content if that were the extent of my service in that capacity in Colorado Springs."

Haggard's ties to the New Life ended abruptly in November 2006 after a male prostitute told media Haggard had been a client for three years and that the pastor sought his help procuring meth. After denying the allegations, Haggard confessed to sexual immorality in an apology read to the New Life congregation Nov. 5, 2006.

Haggard, former president of the 30 million-member National Association of Evangelicals, had resigned from the church a day before. New Life agreed to pay his \$138,000 salary through December 2007, provided he would move away from Colorado and participate in a restoration process. Haggard was also prohibited him from opening a church within a 100-mile radius of Colorado Springs.

Haggard said he was released from those requirements in February 2008 when he broke ties with New Life Church.

At that time, New Life leaders released a statement saying Haggard's restoration process was "incomplete." And former Foursquare President Jack Hayford, who was part of Haggard's original restoration team, said it was unfortunate that Haggard was going his own way.

"Having joined with the many leaders who earnestly and

patiently sought to graciously serve Ted amid the crisis born of his own admitted struggle and failure, it is both incredible and regrettable to hear ... of his choice for such a self-distancing pathway," Hayford said last year.

Brady Boyd, who became pastor of New Life Church in 2007, did not comment on Haggard's plans directly, but told the *Gazette*: "New Life Church will always be grateful for the many years of dedicated leadership from Ted Haggard, and we wish him and his family only the best."

Ministers who have worked with Haggard say it is premature for him to launch into ministry.

C. Peter Wagner, who co-founded the World Prayer Center with Haggard, told the *Gazette* that Haggard should receive approval from apostolic overseers before leading people in prayer and worship.

"My reservation is that he has not followed through completely on apostolic protocol," Wagner told the *Gazette*.

Other leaders question whether Haggard has been restored after falling into sexuality immorality. Gary Black, whose Rock the Nation youth ministry was once affiliated with New Life, told the *Gazette* he was taken aback by the news of the prayer group. "I would be shocked to think he's ready to lead a church," he said.

Haggard said he continues to see a counselor and holds himself accountable to an informal group of pastors. He said he gives their names and numbers to ministers who invite him and Gayle to speak, but he did not identify the ministers for *Charisma*. He said publicizing the identities of the leaders previously involved in his restoration process compromised their effectiveness.

When he told his current accountability team of his plans to launch the prayer group, Haggard says they told him to follow

the Holy Spirit's leading.

"If any of them would have raised a red flag, I certainly would have responded to that," Haggard said. "I have never been, nor am I now, a man out from under authority."

At the prayer gathering Haggard said there will be music, and he will talk about prayer. He will also set out a basket for offerings, which will be given to New Life Church and the Triangle Cross Ranch, a Colorado ministry that cares for developmentally delayed individuals. Haggard's son Jonathan is a rancher there.

"We don't have expenses ... but the reason we'll have [the basket] there is because, typically, or very often, when people worship and pray or read the Bible together they like to give," he said. "So we want to give them that opportunity."

Haggard said he doesn't view himself as a pastor or Christian leader. "I see myself as a brother in the Lord that loves the Scriptures and loves God and loves His faithfulness and is super excited about being a blessing to people as a brother in the Lord," he said. "But I don't sign my letters as Pastor Ted or exercise spiritual authority over anybody or claim to do that or anything like that."