

daily nebraskan

Falwell faces rain, TV cameras at church rally

By Charles Flowerday

During rain and sleet, the Rev. Jerry Falwell led a "freedom of religion" rally in Louisville, Neb., Saturday to protest the closing of the town's Faith Baptist Church school. He said no government has the right to padlock a church or synagogue.

Falwell hammered home fundamentalist rallying cries such as "freedom is everybody's business," and "it's not the state's business what those teachers teach the children - nor who teaches them."

He also orchestrated the taping of a Thanksgiving special to be aired on his "Old Time Gospel Hour" television show Nov. 22.

Falwell, leader of the Moral Majority, said earlier he was coming to Louisville at the request of fundamentalist pastors across the nation, not as a representative of his conservative religious group.

Telling a crowd estimated at 1,000 that the issue is not breaking the law, but obeying the law of God, Falwell said he planned the rally to dramatize the harassment of religious schools across the country.

"I'm saying this to Jewish, Mormon and Catholic schools," he said. "Who will stand by you when they padlock your school? We'll stand together or fall together."

The rally was punctuated by hymns and folk songs such as "My Country Tis of Thee" and "This Land is Your Land," sung by the "Look Up America" Singers, a gospel group from Liberty Baptist College in Lynchburg, Va.

Technical difficulties with the taping caused four delays while Falwell waited for the cameras to capture him reading from the First Amendment to open the Thanksgiving special.

Chains closing the church door, removed earlier by the county sheriff after an agreement with church officials were placed back on the door for Falwell's show.

"Their (the congregation) crime is they have a little church school and the state

Department of Education has decided no church has the right to operate a school without certified teachers," Falwell said.

"We believe in freedom - that's what America is all about. Freedom is everybody's business," Falwell said.

While members of the crowd shouted, "Amen," or "Praise God," Falwell reiterated the central theme of his press conference two weeks ago announcing the rally.

"The issue is not quality of education, but control of education.

"They (the state) want to decide who teaches children. Who owns children? What the secular humanists say is that the state owns children. The bureaucrats say, 'We own children.'

"I am a supporter of public education. I also support the right of Christian people to have an alternative school. Religious people - Christians, Jews - believe God has entrusted children to their parents," Falwell said.

He said one of the main issues was the constitutional problem of licensing a church school. The other issues, he said, was that school officials want no advice from the state on how to run their school because they receive no state funds for its operation.

"If the state has a right to license a Monday through Friday school, how long till they license Sunday schools?" he said.

Introducing the Rev. Everett Sileven, pastor of Faith Baptist church, Falwell said, "Pastor Sileven has been crucified as an arrogant troublemaker, but he's just the pastor of a small rural church school."

On a stage backed by fifteen American flags, Falwell asked Sileven if, at any time during the 4-year controversy, he had refused to submit to standardized academic testing to verify the academic progress of his students, Sileven answered no.

When asked about the results of those tests, Sileven explained that his students scored substantially ahead of those from public schools, 200 percent ahead of the



Photo by Mark Billingsley

The Rev. Jerry Falwell, leader of the Moral Majority, prepares to address a Louisville, Neb., audience Saturday afternoon in front of the Faith Baptist Church there. Falwell came to Louisville to speak against the closing of the church's school because it isn't accredited with the Nebraska Department of Education.

average for Omaha public schools.

Falwell then asked him if he had ever refused to submit the school's attendance records to authorities, or if he had refused to have his school examined for health, hygiene or fire safety standards.

Sileven said he had sent a notarized affidavit certifying attendance to the state Board of Education. He had not refused any inspection guaranteeing the physical safety of his students, he said.

"We'd just love to be left alone," Sileven said. "We just want our children to serve the Lord, to love the Lord. We don't think that's too much to ask."

Falwell urged those in attendance to write Gov. Charles Thone to express their support of his statement favoring a differ-

ent system of certification for religious schools.

Lester Roloff, a fundamentalist pastor from Corpus Christi, Texas, whose church school has been the subject of similar controversy for eight years, said Christian schools are needed because the public education system has failed.

"Communists are waiting for us to close the church schools," Roloff said. "The Church doesn't need meddling humanistic standards. Let the state run the state, and the church run the church."

Falwell said, "There's a war going on between the secular humanists, the abortionists, the liberals and the pornographers and the God-fearing people of this country."

Immoral Minority lights up to reveal foolishness

By Casey McCabe

A group of UNL students calling themselves the Immoral Minority burned Christian pamphlets in a small outdoor grill in Oak Lake Park Saturday night. They said they hope their actions will offset recent burnings by fundamentalists and the Nebraska appearance earlier that day of Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell.

Less than a dozen people attended the burning, some trying to avoid the spotlights of television cameras covering the event.

Although lacking the numbers of Falwell's Louisville, Neb., rally, organizer Scott Persson said the media attention received will give the Immoral Minority a chance to get its point across.

"We're not trying to compete (with Falwell)," Persson said. "And I agree that what we're doing here is foolish... two wrongs don't make a right, but we've got to make a point."

"It's a small minority of fundamentalists we're targeting," he said. "Hopefully, they can look at us using their tactics and see that it's wrong."

Persson attributed the sparse turnout to the celebration of Nebraska's football win over Missouri, the brisk weather and the fear people may have about being seen at such an event.

"I think we have a lot of supporters," Persson said. "We just believe in it the strongest. The rest apparently don't have the energy to come out."

Persson said the Immoral Minority is a very loose organization, emphasizing that the burning was a "one-shot deal" and that they have no plans for any other activity in the future.

The group was organized in response to a recent rock album burning in Grand Island by a fundamentalist Christian group and the publicity the bonfire received.

"Most of us are Christians too. We're not trying to offend anyone," said Vicki Lansman. "It's just that they (fundamentalists) feel our forms of entertainment are wicked, and we think their tactics are just as harmful."

Most of the literature burned was from local campus ministries. There was no material from fundamentalist organizations observed. One couple brought a record by a religious group, "The Crusaders," and a book that had been left at their door by Seventh Day Adventists.

Persson said media representatives, who outnumbered participants at the burning have been good in covering the Immoral Minority indifferently, although press attention may be giving the recent bonfires more credibility than they deserve.

Persson said press releases were sent out for the event so the media could pick up their side of the story and spread it to those they otherwise couldn't reach.

"If anyone else from the other burnings gets the message, we've accomplished our goal," he said. "The ultimate response would be if we didn't have to see anymore burnings of any kind in the future."

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Daily Nebraskan photo

Immoral Minority leader Scott Persson adds more fuel to the fire in Oak Lake Park Saturday, which he said was meant to show the stupidity of other fundamentalist religious burnings.