

Update: Bob Jones University rehires firm hired to investigate sex abuse

by [Sarah Pulliam Bailey](#)

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(RNS) After firing an independent watchdog group to investigate allegations of sexual abuse on campus, Bob Jones University has rehired the same group, one month before the findings from a 13-month review were scheduled to be released.

The university had contracted with Lynchburg, Va.-based GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment) in November 2012 but suspended the contract on Jan. 27. The university met with GRACE officials Feb. 18-19 to discuss the review.

“GRACE satisfactorily addressed the University’s concerns and Bob Jones University is confident the review can be completed in a timely and professional manner,” the university said in a press release.

“To be clear, GRACE and BJU are united in their commitment to a review that is thorough, transparent and objective.”

In December, BJU President Stephen Jones announced his resignation due to health concerns, and he cited the “ongoing challenges in leadership change” in a letter that terminated the contract with GRACE. School officials had previously cited “differences” between the two sides, a charge that the watchdog group said came as a “complete surprise.”

Now that GRACE has been rehired, a spokesman for BJU said it’s unclear when the final report will be released.

The investigation is led by Boz Tchividjian, Billy Graham’s grandson, who said he has no further comment. Tchividjian, who blogs for Religion News Service, has written and spoken on why evangelicals struggle to report sex abuse claims.

“At the heart of the struggle is a fear that is rooted in the need to self-protect,” he wrote earlier this month. “All such ‘fears’ are usually masked by a rationale that the reporting of such abuse may ‘damage the reputation of Christ.’”

GRACE was fired last year by an independent Baptist missions agency shortly before it could conclude another abuse investigation of missionary children.

Bob Jones is a private Christian university in Greenville, S.C., with about 3,000 students.