

FOUR QUARTERS INTERFAITH
SANCTUARY OF EARTH RELIGION, A
PENNSYLVANIA NON-PROFIT
CORPORATION; AND ORREN P.
WHIDDON

No. 887 WDA 2025

FILED: August 20, 2026

On May 19, 2019, Appellants filed a complaint against Four Quarters Interfaith Sanctuary of Earth Religion, a Pennsylvania Non-Profit Corporation and Orren P. Whiddon (collectively, Four Quarters). Four Quarters owns 200

acres of real estate (Property) in Bedford County, where it operates as a tax-exempt church. Answer and New Matter, 6/24/19, at ¶¶ 16-17. This Court previously described Four Quarters as “a non-profit organization that operates a licensed winery. Four Quarters holds ‘gatherings of people for a variety of activities’ including religious ceremonies, music festivals, and other festivals at which they ‘market and sell mead products,’ which accounts for the majority of their income.” **Whiddon v. Northcraft**, No. 356 WDA 2019, 2019 WL 5095786, at *1 (Pa. Super. filed Oct. 11, 2019) (unpublished memorandum) (citation omitted).

Four Quarters ... is comprised of its monastic community members that share a common treasury and take the vows of poverty. The Four Quarters monastic community members reside on the property, serve as primary caretakers of the land and handle the day to day operations of the Church....

Id. Orren P. Whiddon “is a founder and member of Four Quarters.” **Id.**

Appellants claim they were “Camp” and “Church” members of Four Quarters for more than a decade, and had purchased “Camping Memberships” which entitled them to use the “same campsites year after year.” Complaint, 5/19/19, at ¶¶ 18-20. According to Appellants, Patricia purchased “a special type of Camping Membership called a ‘Lifetime Sustaining Membership,’” William purchased “a special type of Camping Membership called a ‘Lifetime Promoting Membership,’” and Coriander purchased “a special type of Camping Membership called a ‘Life Sustaining Member[ship].’” **Id.** at ¶¶ 22-25, 28-29. Appellants assert that the memberships entitled them to “camp on the

Property on a regular basis” and “camp at a specific campsite located on the Property, with ... exclusive possession of that campsite year after year.” ***Id.*** at ¶¶ 26-27.

The parties’ dispute arose in 2018, when Appellants claim that Four Quarters “issued a letter of censure” to Patricia and “barred William and Coriander from accessing the Property.” ***Id.*** at ¶ 35-36. In their complaint, Appellants raised three claims: breach of contract (Count I); declaratory judgment (Count II); and defamation (Count III).¹

At Count I, Appellants averred “that Patricia, William and Coriander have the right to reside on the Property for their respective lives pursuant to the specified terms” of “oral agreements” with Four Quarters. ***Id.*** at ¶¶ 48-49. At Count III, Appellants averred that Four Quarters published defamatory remarks about them in the March 2019 edition of Four Quarters’ newsletter, “The Members Muse.” ***Id.*** at ¶¶ 40-43. For example, Appellants claimed the newsletter stated that Patricia and Coriander engaged in a “gossip narrative” and an “active gossip influence campaign.” ***Id.*** at ¶ 43(c).

Four Quarters filed an answer and new matter denying Appellants’ claims on June 24, 2019. Four Quarters stated there was “no such thing as a ‘camping membership.’” Answer and New Matter, 6/24/19, at ¶¶ 18-21. They stated that “Four Quarters members are permitted to create seasonal camps,

¹ Appellants discontinued the “entirety of Count II” for declaratory judgment. **See** Order, 5/22/25.

but a tent permit must be purchased for same ... and be paid and renewed each year.” **Id.** at ¶ 19. Four Quarters “specifically den[ied] that they breached any agreements with [Appellants] at any time.” **Id.** at ¶¶ 50-52. Four Quarters sought dismissal of Appellants’ complaint, averring that they “breached no duty, contractual or otherwise,” and Appellants’ defamation claim “fail[ed] to set forth a cause of action upon which relief can be granted.” **Id.** at ¶¶ 78, 83.

On March 17, 2025, Four Quarters filed a motion for summary judgment on Appellants’ defamation claim; Four Quarters also filed a motion *in limine* to limit damages in Appellants’ breach of contract claim. The trial court held a pre-trial conference on May 19, 2025.

The trial court and counsel discussed the defamation claim as follows:

[APPELLANTS’ COUNSEL]: Your Honor, we would now be formally withdrawing the aspects of the defamation claim that deal with any matters other than those that were published inside The Members Muse. Specifically, that would be the claim that [William] was a secret alcoholic for years and also that Coriander was a bald-faced liar. So, we would be withdrawing those aspects of the defamation claim.

THE COURT: What’s your only claim for defamation then?

[APPELLANTS’ COUNSEL]: The remaining claims for defamation, as written in The Members Muse, would include, I believe, three specific references, and I can get my notes and identify them by individual parts of the complaint. But there were repeated references to my clients being gossips and spreading misinformation around the camp. We would maintain those. ...

Therefore, the only claims left inside the defamation count would be the references inside The Members Muse and I can identify them by paragraph in the complaint if I can get my copy of it, that

Coriander Woodruff and Patricia Woodruff were gossips in spreading misinformation around camp.

THE COURT: Okay. And [Four Quarters' counsel,] your position on those, then?

[FOUR QUARTERS' COUNSEL]: Judge, ... I [have] in my letter and memo to the [c]ourt, identified specifically what [Appellants are] referencing. It's paragraph 43 B, C, D. Those are all the gossip [references]. ...

THE COURT: What's [Four Quarters'] position?

[FOUR QUARTERS' COUNSEL]: Our position is that ... they do not meet the standards for defamation.

N.T., 5/19/25, at 3-5.

The trial court agreed with Four Quarters. Accordingly, the trial court advised:

I think [the alleged defamatory remarks are] opinion[s]. [They are] not based on any factual averment, because gossip to one person can be – what's gossip to one person could be different to another person. So, again, any statement to misinformation, again, I think that's based purely on opinion[s] then as well. So, I'll grant the motion for summary judgment on those claims.

Id. at 6.

Next, the trial court addressed Four Quarters' motion *in limine* pertaining to damages in Appellants' breach of contract claim. Appellants sought an "award to Patricia, William and Coriander [of] a money judgment equal to the value of the cost to rent a similar camp site and attend similar events for the remainder of their respective lives." Complaint at ¶ 52(b). Four Quarters argued that Appellants had "not during the course of discovery provided any testimony, documentation, and/or evidence concerning the alternative costs and expense of renting a similar camp site." Motion *in*

Limine, 5/19/25, at ¶ 5. Therefore, Four Quarters requested “preclusion of any such monetary claims and damages, including the introduction of evidence, and testimony concerning the same under the circumstances at the time of jury trial.” ***Id.*** at ¶ 6.

Appellants’ counsel maintained that Appellants “were entitled to consequential damages in the amount of money necessary to allow [Appellants] to camp in a similar situation, on a similar campground for the rest of their life.” N.T. at 7. Appellants’ counsel stated that the consequential damages of finding another place to camp would be “hundreds of thousands of dollars.” ***Id.*** at 8. After further discussion, the trial court remarked that it did not “follow that argument.” ***Id.*** at 9. The court stated, “if there was a breach of contract, to be put back in the same place [Appellants] would have been, had the contract not been breached [is appropriate]. I am going to say that evidence [of Appellants’ alleged consequential damages] would never go back to the jury.” ***Id.*** at 10-11.

Notably, the trial court had the following exchange with counsel:

THE COURT: So, at this point, counsel, do you – are you asking to pick the jury today on just that limited issue or do we want to continue to this and see about your ability to take an interlocutory appeal then?

[APPELLANTS’ COUNSEL]: I think at this time, Your Honor, we are all in agreement that it would not be a good use of the [c]ourt’s time, judicial resources to have a jury trial based upon damages of that number. Like we also talked about, candidly, it probably should go to an arbitration board before then.

THE COURT: Okay.

[APPELLANTS' COUNSEL]: So, I do think though that in order to conclude this case, given it is six years old, it would be wise for us to explore and see, is there a process by which we have the Superior Court review your decision. That's ultimately the crux of the case. So, that -- I would ask for at least, you know, again, within the same 30-day window that I asked for before, regarding supplementing the record on your decision on the motion for summary judgment and within that period of time, we could take a look at the books, then suggest to the [c]ourt the manner in which procedurally we could hopefully move forward to have the [c]ourt's decision reviewed. Because if the Superior Court does uphold your decision, Your Honor, I think that basically ends the case. [Appellants] or [Four Quarters] are going to write us a check and we all move on with life. That's a key part of this case that I think needs to be decided and again, in the name of judicial economy and efficiency, I think it's just the right way to handle this.

Id. at 11-12.

After the trial court asked if Four Quarters' counsel had "any objection," and counsel said, "No." ***Id.*** at 12. The court then stated:

I will reduce everything I just said to an order. I won't formally enter judgment at this point until you guys ask me to. And when you are ready to take the interlocutory appeal, [if] you believe you need another hearing to do that correctly, I'll leave that up to you. However you guys think you can get it up correctly to the Superior Court then.

Id. at 14.

On May 22, 2025, the trial court entered an order granting summary judgment on the defamation claim because the "averments of 'gossip'" were "opinion in nature and not actionable as defamation under on the 42 Pa.C.S. § 8343." Order, 5/22/25, at 2. The order also granted Four Quarters' motion *in limine* as to damages on the breach of contract claim, and provided that

jury selection was “continued generally to permit [Appellants] opportunity to seek an interlocutory appeal.” ***Id.***

On June 11, 2025, Appellants filed motions for reconsideration and appellate certification. Appellants asked the trial court to reconsider and reverse the rulings in the May 22, 2025 order, or, in the alternative, to “enter an order stating that its decision to grant summary judgment and dismiss [Appellants’] defamation claims ... is a decision where, pursuant to Pa.R.A.P. 341(c), an immediate appeal would facilitate resolution of the entire case.” Motion for Appellate Certification, 6/11/25, at ¶ 15.

On June 25, 2025, the trial court entered an order granting relief. The order stated:

(a) In regards to paragraph 5 of the May [22], 2025, order [pertaining to defamation], this [c]ourt amends its May [22], 2025, order to expressly state that an immediate appeal would facilitate resolution of the entire case; ...

Order, 6/25/25.²

² The order also provided:

(b) In regards to paragraph 2 of the May [22], 2025, order [pertaining to breach of contract], this [c]ourt amends its May [22], 2025, order to provide that it involves a controlling question of law as to which there is substantial ground for difference of opinion and that an immediate appeal from the order may materially advance the ultimate termination of the matter.

On July 18, 2025—after Appellants filed their motion for appellate certification and before the trial court granted the motion—Appellants filed a petition for permission to appeal with this Court at 37 WDM 2025. This Court granted the petition by *per curiam* order. Order, 10/3/25 (stating the “matter shall
(Footnote Continued Next Page)

Appellants filed a notice of appeal on July 21, 2025. On August 28, 2025, Appellants filed a court-ordered Pa.R.A.P. 1925(b) concise statement challenging the trial court's grant of summary judgment on their defamation claim. The trial court did not issue an opinion. In lieu of an opinion, the trial court entered an order stating: "Inasmuch as we believe our discussion on the record addresses the issue [Appellants] raise on appeal, we respectfully direct the appellate court to the relevant transcript." Order, 10/2/25.³

Appellants present the following question for review:

Did the trial court err when, in paragraph 5 of its order of court [enter]ed May [22], 2025, it granted [Four Quarters'] motion for summary judgment and dismissed Count III - defamation - of [Appellants'] complaint as set forth in paragraphs 42, 43 (b), 43 (c), and 43 (d) upon a finding that [Appellants'] statements were not capable of a defamatory meaning because those statements were opinion statements that are not actionable as defamation under 42 Pa.C.S. § 8343.

Appellants' Brief at 6 (some formatting altered).

DISCUSSION

Before we address the merits of Appellants' question, we examine whether the appeal is properly before us. This Court is obligated to "first ascertain whether [an order] is properly appealable, because the question of appealability implicates the jurisdiction of this [C]ourt." ***Commonwealth v.***

proceed before this Court as an appeal from the order entered May 22, 2025). Consequently, a separate appeal pertaining to the motion *in limine* is before this Court at 1227 WDA 2025, which we address in a separate disposition.

³ The same order, as well as the transcript, is docketed in lieu of a trial court opinion at the appeal pertaining to the motion *in limine* at 1227 WDA 2025.

Borrero, 692 A.2d 158, 159 (Pa. Super. 1997). “Accordingly, this Court has the power to inquire at any time, *sua sponte*, whether an order is appealable.” **Knopick v. Boyle**, 189 A.3d 432, 436 (Pa. Super. 2018) (citations omitted). “Jurisdiction is purely a question of law; the appellate standard of review is *de novo*, and the scope of review plenary.” **Henry v. Colangelo**, 348 A.3d 1181, 1184 (Pa. Super. 2025).

This Court’s jurisdiction “extends to ‘final orders of the courts of common pleas.’” **Id.** (citing 42 Pa.C.S. § 742). However, we may exercise jurisdiction over an interlocutory order “entered as a final order pursuant to [Pa.R.A.P. 341](c).” Pa.R.A.P. 341(b)(3). Rule 341(c) states:

When more than one claim for relief is presented in an action, ... the trial court ... may enter a final order as to one or more but fewer than all of the claims and parties only upon an express determination that an immediate appeal would facilitate resolution of the entire case. Such an order becomes appealable when entered. In the absence of such a determination and entry of a final order, any order or other form of decision that adjudicates fewer than all the claims and parties shall not constitute a final order.

Pa.R.A.P. 341(c).

On September 11, 2025, this Court issued a rule to show cause upon Appellants as to why this appeal should not be quashed. We observed that the language in the June 25, 2025 order “tracks the requirements of Rule 341(c).” Rule to Show Cause, 9/11/25, at 2. However, we were unconvinced that the order was proper under Rule 341(c). **Id.** (citing **Bailey v. RAS Auto Body, Inc.**, 85 A.3d 1064, 1069–70 (Pa. Super. 2014) (quashing appeal from

orders certified under Rule 341(c) where trial court failed to consider certification factors and the record did not indicate that extraordinary circumstances merited review)). We stated:

Here, it is not apparent on the face of the May 22, 2025 order or June 25, 2025 order whether this case involves any “extraordinary circumstances” and the trial court considered the relevant Rule 341(c) certification factors.

Id.⁴

Appellants acknowledged “an absence of anything in the record showing that the trial court considered the relevant factors,” but argued that “a review of the appropriate factors show that this matter does meet the finality requirements, and this Court should not quash this appeal.” Reply to Rule to Show Cause Order, 9/25/25, at 12. Specifically, Appellants stated:

Initially, it is correct that neither the trial court nor [Appellants], in the applicable orders or larger record of the case, have set forth any express statement, analysis or arguments regarding the substantive factors that determine whether a certification of finality under Pa.R.A.P. 341(c) is appropriate in this situation. But this Court should not hold that against the trial court or consider that, in and of itself, as a basis to quash this appeal. That is so because there is no “rule or judicial authority requiring trial courts and appellants to defend the certification decision on appeal.”

⁴ We also expressed concern with the trial court’s authority “to do what it did here (*i.e.*, certify only part of the May 22, 2025 order).” ***Id.*** Because the trial court “certified a question for this Court’s review, as opposed to certifying the order itself,” we posited that the order was a nullity because the trial court lacked authority to grant partial certification. ***Id.*** (citing ***Fastuca v. L.W. Molnar & Assocs.***, 950 A.2d 980, 988–89 (Pa. Super. 2008) (explaining if a court acts beyond its authority, the action is a nullity)). We decline to address this concern further as our analysis of the Rule 341(c) certification factors is dispositive.

Sawyers v. Davis, 222 A.3d 1 n.1 ([Pa. Super.] 2019), holding that an order did meet the requirements for a certification of finality and finding as “unwarranted” arguments that “focus[] on the fact that the trial court did not set forth its analysis of the **Pullman [Power Products of Canada Ltd. v. Basic Engineers, Inc.]**, 713 A.2d 1169 (Pa. Super. 1998)] factors in its order or opinion” and an according assumption that the trial court “did not weigh the factors.” In fact, it appears that many trial courts, when making a finality determination under Pa.R.A.P. 341(c), do not provide an analysis of the relevant factors, with appellate courts then conducting an independent review of these factors to determine if quashing the appeal is appropriate. So this Court should not quash this matter due to a dearth of on-the-record analysis on this point by the trial court, and it should instead conduct an independent review of the applicable factors and determine for itself if 341(c) certification is appropriate.

Id. at 12-13 (citation omitted). Appellants asserted that “this matter does present the required extraordinary circumstances.” **Id.** at 20.

On October 9, 2025, this Court entered a *per curiam* order discharging the rule to show cause and permitting the appeal to proceed. However, we cautioned that the ruling was “not binding upon this Court as a final determination as to the propriety of the appeal,” and advised “the issues may be revisited by the panel assigned to decide the merits of this appeal.” Order, 10/9/25.

After careful review, we conclude that we lack jurisdiction to address Appellants’ claim. We reiterate that a trial court “may enter a final order as to one or more but fewer than all of the claims ... only [when] an immediate appeal would facilitate resolution of the **entire** case.” Pa.R.A.P. 341(c) (emphasis added); N.T. at 11 (reflecting that trial court asked counsel: “are you asking to pick the jury today on just that limited issue?”). The certification

of finality “should be made only in the most extraordinary circumstances, because such action would frustrate the purpose of the amendments to the Rule and lead to piecemeal appeals.” **Bailey**, 85 A.3d at 1069.

This Court has explained:

[Rule 341](c) permits an immediate appeal from an order dismissing less than all claims or parties from a case only upon an express determination that an immediate appeal would facilitate resolution of the entire case. Factors to be considered under Subdivision (c) include, but are not limited to:

- (1) whether there is a significant relationship between adjudicated and unadjudicated claims;
- (2) whether there is a possibility that an appeal would be mooted by further developments;
- (3) whether there is a possibility that the court or administrative agency will consider issues a second time;
- (4) whether an immediate appeal will enhance prospects of settlement.

Trial courts must consider all four factors when making a determination of finality. **See Pullman Power Products of Canada Ltd. v. Basic Engineers, Inc.**, 713 A.2d 1169, 1173–74 (Pa. Super. 1998). After considering at least these four factors, trial courts must then make an express determination that an immediate appeal will facilitate resolution of the entire case.

A determination that an immediate appeal of a nonfinal order is appropriate should be made only in the most extraordinary circumstances because such action would frustrate the purpose of the amendments to the Rule. The revisions to the Rule were designed to eliminate the confusion created by the prior case law and to prevent piecemeal appeals which necessarily result in delay.... While the comment to Rule 341 suggests areas where certification may be appropriate, courts are cautioned to refuse to classify orders as final except where the failure to do so would result in an injustice which a later appeal cannot correct.

Robert H. McKinney, Jr., Associates, Inc. v. Albright, 429 Pa. Super. 440, 632 A.2d 937, 939 (1993). Thus, absent more, “[T]he mere fact that some of the parties have been dismissed from a case, or that some of the counts of a multi-count complaint have been dismissed is insufficient reason to classify an order as final.” **Id.**

Id. at 1068–69 (some citations omitted).

Here, there is nothing in the record to indicate that the trial court considered the four factors relevant to Rule 341(c) certification. Moreover, our review reveals “no ‘extraordinary circumstances’ to circumvent the ordinary process of awaiting final judgment to hear the issues.” **Henry**, 348 A.3d at 1185-86 (citing **Bailey, supra**).

The first factor concerns whether there is a significant relationship between the adjudicated and unadjudicated claims. Defamation and breach of contract are discrete legal actions. Appellants’ defamation claim is based on their averments that Four Quarters published defamatory remarks about them in their newsletter, “The Members Muse,” where it was stated that Patricia and Coriander engaged in a “gossip narrative” and an “active gossip influence campaign.” Complaint at ¶¶ 40-43. Conversely, Appellants’ breach of contract claim is based on their averments regarding their right to camp on the Property under the “specified terms” of their “oral agreements” with Four Quarters. **Id.** at ¶¶ 48-49. When the adjudicated defamation claim is distinct from the unadjudicated breach of contract claim, “this factor does not disfavor the certification.” **Sawyers**, 222 A.3d at 14 (Olson, J., dissenting).

The second factor concerns whether there is a possibility that an appeal would be mooted by further developments. This factor does not disfavor the certification because this appeal will be “unaffected by the progression or outcome” of Appellants’ remaining breach of contract claim. **See id.**

With respect to the third factor, regarding whether there is a possibility that the court will consider the issue a second time, the trial court’s grant of summary judgment disposed of the defamation issue. Thus, there is no chance that the court will reconsider the issue or that our resolution of the issue will aid the court in ruling on the same issue in the future. **See id.** This factor does not favor certification.

Finally, regarding the fourth factor as to whether an immediate appeal will enhance prospects of settlement, there is nothing in the record to indicate how this appeal may or may not impact settlement. This factor does not favor certification.

After “considering at least these four factors,” **Bailey, supra**, as well as our decisions in **Bailey, Henry, Pullman**, and **Sawyers**, we are unpersuaded that extraordinary circumstances “justif[y] an immediate appeal in this case” or that “refusal to classify the ... order as final would result in an injustice which a later appeal cannot correct.” **Pullman**, 713 A.2d at 1173-1174. While we understand Appellants’ desire for review, “the standard to obtain appellate review of an otherwise unappealable interlocutory order is not mere[ly to] ‘facilitate resolution’, as that is the objective of all interlocutory orders.” **Bailey**, 85 A.3d at 1070. Here, like in **Bailey**, “nothing on the face

of this record indicates the kind of extraordinary circumstances meriting immediate appellate review.” ***Id.*** The trial court’s grant of summary judgment on the Appellants’ defamation claim “can await a future day, if we ultimately ever need to consider” the issue. ***Henry***, 348 A.3d at 1186. As we previously observed:

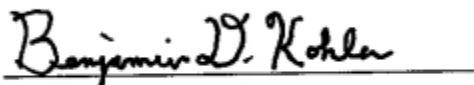
Pennsylvania appellate courts seek to avoid piecemeal review, not only out of concern for judicial economy, but out of concern for judicial *accuracy* – because, as a general rule, an appellate court is more likely to decide a question correctly after judgment, where it may consider the claim in the context of a complete adjudication and a fully developed record. Hence, we endeavor to avoid piecemeal determinations and the consequent protraction of litigation.

Id. (emphasis in original, citations and quotation marks omitted).

For the above reasons, we lack jurisdiction to consider this appeal.

Order reversed. Case remanded. Jurisdiction relinquished.

Judgment Entered.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Benjamin D. Kohler", is written over a horizontal line.

Benjamin D. Kohler, Esq.
Prothonotary

8/20/2026