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Published On: Tue, Mar 31st, 2020 | Community / COVID-19 / Press Release / Religious | By Online Staff D

Christians Protest the River at Tampa Bay Church for Risking the Spread of COVID-19, Including Pastor's False Promise to Cure the Coronavirus

More than 5,000 Members of the Advocacy Organization Faithful America Have Called for all Pastors, Including Florida's Rodney Howard-Browne, to Suspend In-person Worship Services.

Boca Raton, FL – Thousands of members of the Christian advocacy organization Faithful America are raising their voices against ongoing in-person worship services during the coronavirus pandemic. This includes services held at The River at Tampa Bay Church, where Pastor Rodney Howard-Browne falsely claims to have cured Florida of Zika and now promises to do the same for COVID-19.

The Tampa megachurch's livestream showed hundreds of worshipers packed into the church on March 29, standing less than six feet apart from one another. There is nothing Christian about this behavior, which risks the spread of coronavirus throughout Florida. A local sheriff has since arrested Howard-Browne.

More than 5,500 Faithful America members have signed an open letter to America's pastors, titled "Christians ask every church to suspend in-person worship." As of this press release, 388 of the signatures are from Floridians, including 176 who signed the petition today in response to Howard-Browne's March 29 service. The open letter, first published March 16, reads,

As Christians, we call on every church, bishop, pastor, and priest to suspend in-person events until the COVID-19's exponential curve has been flattened, including worship services.

The best way to follow a savior who healed the sick is to slow the spread of this novel coronavirus, which we can accomplish only by loving our neighbors from a safe distance. Together we can find new ways of being God's church in the world, exploring innovative new approaches to worship, pastoral care, and community.

To leaders who have already taken the painful step of suspending in-person worship, we say thank you, and we support your decision.

Many Faithful America members added personal comments to their signatures, including Grace in Nokomis, who wrote, "By your reckless actions, you are endangering many vulnerable people. What's Christian about that? As a fellow Floridian, age 77, I miss church as much as anyone, but there's a time for everything."

Faithful America is the largest online community of Christians putting faith into action for social justice. Our members are sick of watching the religious right hijack Jesus' message of good news to serve a hateful political agenda. By raising our collective voices through online campaigns, Faithful America organizes the faithful to challenge such extremism and renew the church's prophetic role in building a more free and just society. Members are both clergy and lay; represent every major Christian denomination; and live in all 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. More than 6,000 members reside in Florida.

About the Author

Online Staff D -

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Displaying 3 Comments

Have Your Say

Lynn says:
April 3, 2020 at 11:06 am

If those people believe that, that pastor can heal they are believing in man and not God. God is the great healer.
Reply

C Martin says:
April 5, 2020 at 10:33 pm

I am a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, and I am not calling on the true church of Jesus Christ to close. This association seems like an agglomeration of lukewarm water individuals and churches, which they do not stand for Christ and His Word but their values have been adulterated and are compromised by the flesh. When Jesus was on this Earth, He came to show us His Father, since He only did what He saw the Father do and said what He only heard the Father say. And Jesus was our Example on Earth. How come when Jesus was walking in the midst of us, he went to the sick and let the sick touch Him?? He did not hide but He walked in their midst and fellowship with them. The fellowship was done by sharing face to face presence neither via a website nor a screen. Jesus gave His church the power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. These are the times in which the true believers shine, but it seems that we are as fearful and as lack of faith as the unbelievers. There's only one way and it has only been One way, JESUS!
Reply

Dave Burton says:
April 6, 2020 at 7:44 pm

As they say, even a stopped clock is sometimes correct. So-called "Faithful America" is a far-left fringe organization, which rejects the Christian morality defined by Scripture, and makes a habit of defaming actual faithful Christians.

But, in this case, they are right.

The River Church is a heretical "prosperity gospel" church. Their behavior puts the health and safety of the community at risk, and brings disrepute to the Name of Jesus Christ.

Hillsborough County, FL already has over 300 COVID-19 cases, and has reported three deaths. Pastor Howard-Browne's recklessness is likely to increase both of those numbers. When it does, he could be charged with negligent homicide. What he did is every bit as dangerous and irresponsible as drunk driving, if not more so.

Pastor Howard-Browne violated not only the state's law, but also God's law. The restrictions on public assembly which he and his church deliberately and brazenly violated are prudent and necessary during this emergency, and this situation is not an exception to the Biblical instruction to:

> "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. … Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."

By flouting the law, and endangering the community, Pastor Howard-Browne and The River Church also crippled their Christian witness. The church and its members and leaders are called to be a light unto the world. That very obviously precludes public lawlessness, and deliberate recklessness with other people's health and safety.

From what we know about this disease, separating family groups by a few feet indoors, distributing hand sanitizers, and filtering the air, are NOT adequate precautions to prevent the disease from spreading.

This disease is much more infectious than typical seasonal flu, and, unlike the flu, there's no vaccine for it, to slow its spread.

In a typical year, the seasonal flu infects one in nine or ten Americans, and kills about 30,000 to 40,000 Americans. (It killed my 18yo neighbor, who lived two doors down; she was a high school senior, who had already been awarded a scholarship to attend Meredith College; she wanted to be a veterinarian.) The seasonal flu's average "case fatality rate" is about 0.13%. In other words, the typical seasonal flu kills about one of every eight hundred people it infects.

The U.S. case fatality rate for COVID-19 disease is at least 2.5%, which is about 20 times more deadly than the typical fatality rate from seasonal flu.

COVID-19 is also much more infectious than the seasonal flu, and there's no vaccine. If it spreads out of control it will probably infect at least five times as many Americans as a typical seasonal flu.

Do the math: 20×5=100. I e., one hundred times as bad as a typical seasonal flu.

Do the math: 100× worse than 30,000 flu deaths is three million dead. That's the potential catastrophe, if we do not arrest the spread of this disease — which we cannot do if people behave irresponsibly, like The River Church did.

The best evidence is that for every confirmed case of this disease in the United States there are probably at least two other people who are infected and infectious, yet remain undiagnosed. Until widespread testing of both ill and healthy people enables us to identify those carriers of the disease, people simply cannot be allowed to take the kinds of risks that Pastor Howard-Browne took.
Reply

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FOUR QUICK QUESTIONS

To what extent do you personally support or oppose the way in which President Biden has handled federal COVID-19 relief efforts since taking office?

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Other / No opinion

NEXT

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