



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 3, 2020

**BETHANY SLAVIC MISSIONARY CHURCH
PRESS RELEASE**

Response to COVID-19 Media Reports

This release is provided in response to the series of articles published by the Sacramento Bee on April 2, 2020, which have subsequently been picked and disseminated by other news outlets, including on the national level. Bethany Slavic Missionary Church believes in the value of community health and human well-being. The church has complied with all federal, state, and local guidelines and regulations at the time of issuance. The following proactive measures have been taken:

- In a video address on March 14, 2020, Rev. Adam Bondaruk stated that the church “will comply with all regulations” and encouraged everyone to maintain personal hygiene, wash hands, remain home if sick, and maintain social distancing as recommended by the CDC.
- In immediate compliance to the newly issued Sacramento County shelter-in-place order, the church closed its doors on March 18, 2020, and moved all church affiliated services, meetings, home groups and fellowship gatherings of any size solely online.
- Virtual conferencing platforms were obtained and made available for all meetings and fellowships.

Response to Media Reports

- It has been reported that 71 members of this church had fallen ill. These reports are believed to be inaccurate and falsely place the emphasis on this church. The official Sac County website article “COVID-19 Update, April 1” reads as follows: “Approximately one-third of the confirmed cases in Sacramento County are linked to gatherings related to churches”. This number has been falsely linked to Bethany Slavic Missionary Church. Media repetition of such unfounded representations invite ridicule, hatred, and violence against our church community.
- The church has not been informed that any of its parishioners have died from COVID-19 as reported by the media.
- The church did not condone any church related in-person gatherings outside the church. It disputes accusations that its members widely continued to gather as reported.
- The public is dangerously misled by the media to believe and fear that church continues to gather in person. During online live stream services archival videos of choir singing are played in place of a live choir. Such archival videos have been misused by some media to imply that the church members continue to gather. Full recordings of the live services clearly show vacant choir and hall.
- The church did not rebuff or decline communications from the health officials as reported. Neither was there any written correspondence from any Sacramento County health official requesting to have a conversation with the church officials.
- The church has not, at any time respond “leave us alone” as emphasized in the title of the Sacramento Bee article.
- In light of the church’s compliance with the COVID -19 regulations, the stated objective of the Sacramento County health officials through “public disclosure to put the pressure on church members to stop their gatherings” is unwarranted and dangerous. The church has been and continues to be committed to meeting all of its legal obligations in connection with the COVID-19 crisis.

The church continues to support the community during this difficult time. Many of the church members are professionals, business owners, and otherwise productive members deeply committed to the well-being of the Sacramento community. Working closely with the medical professionals many of whom are church members, the church donated hundreds of N95 masks on March 31,2020 to a local hospital which was in critical shortage. We pray for the well-being of healthcare professionals on the front lines along with the rest of the community.

No portion of this press release may be used without citing the original source on the Bethany Slavic Missionary Church website.