

Bethany College

Education

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Bethany College may move to Sacramento

Housing prices, isolation create problems for school

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SCOTTS VALLEY — If the trustees of Bethany Bible College have their way, the small, private campus will forsake Scotts Valley in the next three years and relocate in Sacramento.

"The pragmatics of the dollar are a significant driving force," said Bethany's President Richard Foth. Soaring housing costs here, he said, are undermining the school's ability to attract and keep qualified instructors.

"It's just gone absolutely bonkers," said Foth. "We have to do something to keep our people — it isn't our buildings that are important, our people are."

The college is in the midst of constructing a \$1.5-million administration building and opened a \$500,000 pre-school and day-care center in September.

But it is becoming increasingly clear, Foth said, that Scotts Valley is too remote from the "population base" of the Assembly of God church in California.

"Our population base is in the South Bay and greater Sacramento area," he said. "In this day of spiraling costs for private colleges we have to tap into that base."

Bethany is the oldest college affiliated with the Assembly of God church. The school opened in 1919

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as the Glad Tidings Bible Institute in San Francisco and moved to Scotts Valley in 1950.

Today Bethany is an accredited four-year college and offers majors in English, psychology, music, and social sciences in addition to religious studies.

Bethany's future will depend on Assembly of God church's College Corporation, a body of some 800 pastors and church delegates. The corporation meets on April 26 to respond to the trustees' recommendation that the college relocate in Sacramento.

Sacramento's growing population and undeveloped land could solve Bethany's crisis, according to the trustees. In a Jan. 16 letter to the corporation, they said students would find more job openings and students, faculty and staff would find cheaper housing in Sacramento. In addition, construction would be less expensive than on the 109 acres of steep, rocky slopes the school owns in Scotts Valley.

The trustees first considered leaving the area in 1983 because of

dwindling enrollment and questions about the school's geographical distance from the church population. Foth said that the situation is "more serious" this time.

The number of student enrolled at Bethany dropped from more than 600 in the 1960's to around 500 since 1969, according to Foth. "We're at the lowest place we've been in a number of years," he said of this year's enrollment. "That helped to precipitate the recommendation to move."

If Bethany moves, selling the land here could net the school a big profit. Most of Bethany's acreage could be developed for housing, according to Foth. The campus itself is zoned for conference or school use.

"The value of the property here compared to 10 years ago is significantly greater," he said. "Our goal is to build a quality campus (in Sacramento) and move in debt free," he said.

"It's a good thing we believe in God, because we're going to need him."



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

College President Richard Foth says housing costs here are keeping qualified faculty away.