

Bethany University will close

Private funding fails to materialize; no fall classes will be held

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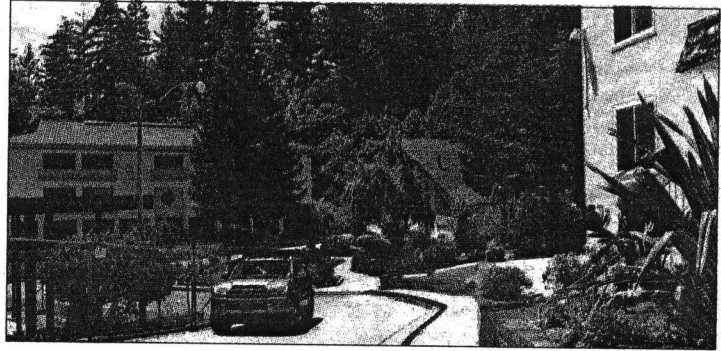
SCOTTS VALLEY — The end has come for Bethany University, the nearly 100-year-old Christian college in Scotts Valley that has seen its finances dwindle and enrollment shrink in the past couple of years.

Bethany's president, the Rev. Lew Shelton, announced the closure Monday. About 100 people attended a meeting with faculty and staff at the "chapeteria" on campus, where Shelton read aloud a letter from Rev. James Braddy, chairman of Bethany's board of trustees.

"There will be an immediate cessation of all teaching activities June 13 and we will prepare for an orderly shutdown of the university," Shelton read. "We did all we could to avoid this painful decision. We simply had no other choice. I have prayed and done all I can do."

Braddy, reached by phone after the meeting, declined to comment.

The closure of the institution, with an annual budget of \$8.5 million, comes after a deal with private investors to purchase the university



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Founded in 1919 as a training center for an urban San Francisco ministry, Bethany University in Scotts Valley was the first college founded by the Assemblies of God.

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— in the works for about six months — fell apart.

Last week, Bethany officials announced that the liberal arts college would be taken over by an unidentified group of investors, and Shelton declared he would step down as president. However, funding never materialized, Shelton said.

A message from Braddy was posted to the Bethany University alumni Facebook page Monday that said the potential buyer had "stepped away" from the deal.

"I come to you today with a very heavy heart," Braddy wrote. "The president was instructed to begin the orderly shut-down of the school and campus. This will not be a quick or easy task. Your prayers are desperately needed as we face this very difficult time of transition."

The closure will go before the university's board of trustees for final approval at a special meeting July 7.

Bethany officials are working with Western Association of Schools and Colleges, an

agency charged with evaluating the effectiveness of schools, to execute the closure.

The university, located in a hilly, wooded corner of north Scotts Valley, is owned by the Assemblies of God Northern California and Nevada District and is the Assemblies of God's oldest college in the United States. Bethany has an enrollment of about 400 students, down from 500 in recent years, and there are about 22 full-time faculty and up to 50 adjunct faculty.

Campus officials are planning to complete the summer and online courses already under way. No instruction will take place in the fall.

Letters and emails will be sent to parents and students from the university by the end of the week to inform them of the decision, Shelton said.

Details of the closure process will be posted to the Bethany website each day, he said.

Arrangements are being worked out in regard to final pay for staff, refunds for students, scholarships for athletes, transferring student credits to other universities, providing student transcripts, and settling debts to Bethany's

numerous vendors, he said. Tuition and room and board for full-time students is about \$26,000, according to the university's website.

What will happen with the property, including several university-owned houses on the campus, after the closure was unknown Monday, Shelton said.

"All those things have to be decided," he said.

Sharon Anderson, who was named Bethany's interim president last week when Shelton said he would step down, has worked for the college for 22 years, including various teaching and administrative roles.

Her family's connection with Bethany traces back several decades, including her mother-in-law serving as the founding president's secretary. Anderson's father was vice president of academics, and she, her husband and their two children graduated from Bethany.

"I'm devastated, absolutely devastated," Anderson said Monday. "It's just horrific. So many lives will be impacted. We've got a lot invested here."

Scotts Valley Mayor Dene Bustichi said Bethany's clo-

sure will be a loss to the community.

He said several small local businesses depended on hiring Bethany students for part-time work. In addition, business owners have relied on the small student body to shop and eat at local shops and restaurants, he said.

"It's sad, kind of shocking in a way," Bustichi said. "I'm definitely sad to see them go."

Bustichi said he hopes the university will provide security to the campus after it's vacated to prevent the area from becoming "an attractive nuisance."

"We don't have the manpower to police large pieces of vacant land," he said.

Shelton said he prayed and fasted to save the university from closing, but the final decision was made by God.

"Things die," he said. "Did I think it could happen to Bethany? No, I didn't. There is life beyond Bethany, maybe greater than we've known."

The university was founded in 1919 as a training school for an inner-city ministry in San Francisco; the school became a four-year institution in 1955. Graduation ceremonies were held April 30.