

Bethany still planning to reopen in fall

Bethany
School officials raise \$600,000 in pledges

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Graduation ceremonies will be held as scheduled, and classes will start again in the fall at Bethany University. But the long-term fate of the university remains undecided, even as school officials announced \$600,000 in pledges after returning from a recent

conference in Sacramento.

Earlier this week, the Rev. Lew Shelton, the university's president, traveled with other university officials to the state capital for the annual meeting of the Northern California and Nevada District of the Assemblies of God, which owns and manages the school.

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Bethany University students walk past the campus chapel after their Introduction to Missions class on Thursday. After funding concerns earlier this spring, Bethany says it intends to carry on with its graduation ceremony later this month and open for fall.

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BETHANY

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Among the issues discussed were how to keep afloat the private, Christian college that's had a presence in Scotts Valley for nearly a century. That's despite previous moves to cut costs by eliminating some sports teams and either consolidating or eliminating majors.

University officials issued a news release Thursday announcing the district and Bethany University Corp. have raised approximately \$600,000 in pledges and "are negotiating with several major donors to ensure the future of the university."

The university declined further comment, other than to say administrators will meet again in 90 days for more talks.

Graduation ceremonies will be held April 30, the release continued, and the university will reopen in the fall.

"The administration invites all prospective students to apply," it said. "Going forward, the university is launching an effort to restructure the operations and governance to ensure the ongoing financial stability of the university,

while still maintaining its primary mission and purpose, which is to prepare leaders for church and society."

In an interview earlier this month, Shelton, the university's president, confirmed the university is struggling and that several possibilities would be discussed at the conference, including possibly merging with an affiliated school or closing altogether.

Asked how the latter scenario would affect Scotts Valley, Mayor Dene Bustichi said it would have only a minor impact from an economic standpoint, since fewer people would be shopping, dining, buying gas and making other investments in the community.

"But the larger picture, it's going to be tough for students who wanted to go there and tough for faculty that would then need to find new jobs," he said.

The biggest toll would be intangible.

"There's obviously an emotional or psychological effect," he said. "Another institution leaving Scotts Valley that's been here for many, many years, psychologically that's tough to see something like that happen."

Asked how the city might

benefit from the closure from a property-tax perspective, Bustichi explained the land likely would be sold and redeveloped, meaning its value would increase. In that case, the city could collect property taxes that Bethany does not pay — or pays very little — under its tax-exempt status. For example, one parcel is assessed at \$657,284 by the county Assessor's Office, but Bethany paid just \$127.20 in taxes on it in 2010-2011, according to property records.

Bethany was founded in 1919 as a training school for an inner-city ministry in San Francisco, according to the university's website. The school has been at its present site on Bethany Drive since 1950 and, in 1955, became a four-year institution. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing recognized Bethany's teacher education program in 1968, according to the site.

It now has an enrollment of 534 students — 92 percent of whom receive some form of scholarship or financial aid, according to the school's website — and offers associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees, with 18 majors and 22 minors.