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Bethel burgeons under pastor's visions of prosperity

By [Amanda Winters](#)

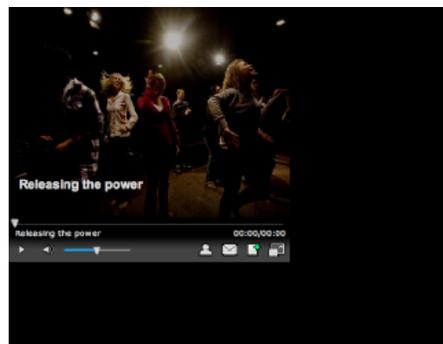
Posted January 16, 2010 at 9:15 p.m.

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PHOTO BY GREG BARNETTE

Bethel students and church members worship while "Dance in the River" is performed by musicians at a young adults service on Nov. 19 at Bethel Church.



Growing up the son of a fourth-generation pastor, Bill Johnson never imagined he'd someday be the driving force behind a north state megachurch and economic powerhouse.

But somewhere along the way, things changed.

Established as a small Assemblies of God Church in Redding 50 years ago,



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Bethel Church has become a household name in this north state community in a little more than a decade since Johnson became

Bethel Church: Unleashing the power



pastor. The church, much more than a house of worship, reaches out to an estimated 3,000 congregants, brings in millions in revenue to the community with its conferences and schools, and has more than 30,000 people tuning in to its new online media business venture.

Bethel has fed off a sometimes controversial national movement of Christian Pentecostals from the mid-'90s whose central messages focus on miraculous healings, bringing heaven to earth, speaking in tongues, prophecy and learning to release the supernatural powers of God. Bethel now has several successful businesses, large local land holdings and its own multimedia production center.

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Bethel Church's Bill Johnson

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Bethel Church leadership

"We have not succeeded fully yet," Johnson said of the church's prosperity in an e-mail sent shortly before departing for a conference in South Korea. "But what has been accomplished has been done by living a life of, and teaching on, generosity. Prosperity is often the result of doing things right."

Johnson, 58, describes himself as a simple man and a simple pastor. His signature look is dressy casual: Button-up collared shirts - untucked - paired with fashionable blue jeans and shiny shoes with black rectangular-framed glasses and slicked-back gray hair.

He talks soft and low, very conversational, yet authoritative. He moves fluidly and sits comfortably in his church office, decorated regally with shades of gold, black and deep red.

Johnson is the senior pastor of Bethel Church and oversees a team of nine senior leaders along with Kris Vallotton and Danny Silk. Though Bethel has undeniable reach and influence in the community, Johnson is quick to deflect the attention.

"We don't ever want to project the idea that Bethel is the answer, especially as compared to some other great churches in town," he said. "This city has some amazing churches and I'm good friends with a lot of pastors around here. What he (God) is doing in Bethel he's doing in similar churches around town and that's fascinating to us. That's wonderful."

It's also an understatement.

The business of Bethel



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Currently 43° Fog/Mist Wind: Calm

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Calendar

Calendar grid showing dates JAN 24 (SUNDAY), JAN 25 (MONDAY), and JAN 26 (TUESDAY). Includes event listings: Annual Antique Show and Sale (11 a.m.), "Achieving Sustainable Living Now" lecture (2 p.m.), Public pancake breakfast (7 a.m.), Palo Cedro public breakfast (7 a.m.), and Happy Valley Lions Club breakfast (7 a.m.).

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Search form with input fields for Business (e.g. salon, dentist) and Location (e.g. Redding, CA, redding, ca). Includes a GO button and Powered by MojoPages logo.

Atop a hill off Highway 299 just east of Interstate 5 at the end of a drive flanked by colorful national flags, abides a sanctuary at the heart of 70 acres - and a worldwide mission.

With close to 360 employees, Bethel is one of Shasta County's largest private employers. It draws thousands to Redding each year, hoping to see miracles, have a supernatural experience or learn to unleash the power of God through conferences or visits to the Healing Rooms Ministry. A successful online media venture has also garnered followers around the globe looking for spiritual guidance on how to bring heaven to Earth. The Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (BSSM) pulls in more than a thousand students a year seeking faith-healing techniques.

Bethel is more than a church - it is a conglomeration of various businesses, varying from a coffee shop to an online multimedia production and distribution company.

As "the Avenue of Nations" continues to wind up to the main building, some are lucky enough to find parking outside the lobby of HeBrews Coffee. The shop is reminiscent of Starbucks, a favorite of Johnson's, and is filled with young people sitting around the tables and standing in the corners talking between BSSM classes. The church runs this coffee shop inside the main building as well as a bookstore called Eagles Nest, which features books written by the church leaders. "The Supernatural Ways of Royalty: Discovering Your Rights and Privileges of Being a Son or Daughter of God" by Johnson and Vallotton, along with "Release the Power of Jesus" by Johnson grace the shelves.

One of the newest business ventures is iBethel.TV, which streams conferences, sermons and interviews on the Web. Each week, a free downloadable sermon is offered, usually generating 24,000 downloads, administrator Charlie Harper said. To get unlimited views of the videos and audio posted on iBethel.TV, users must subscribe, which costs from \$5 to \$19 a month. Harper said about 4,000 people subscribe but about 30,000 people log in to view the free broadcasts.

The TV studio is housed in Bethel's polished new high-tech Communication Center on Caterpillar Lane, purchased over the summer for \$900,000. The building underwent extensive renovation from July to November to make it functional as an office building and broadcasting hub. The total investment was \$1.6 million.

The Communication Center also serves as headquarters for Jesus Culture, Bethel's youth outreach ministry that hosts three conferences in Redding every year, as well as conferences in Atlanta, Las Vegas, Dallas, Cleveland and several abroad in Australia and England. The conferences bring thousands of young people from around the world to the host cities.

Conferences boost local economy

When Johnson became pastor of Bethel, it was already a megachurch. But under his leadership, outreach through schools and conferences has spread Bethel's message of bringing heaven to earth and unleashing the supernatural power of God, causing the church to grow substantially.

"The conferences are a way that we can train people that either don't have the ability, time, or money to come to our school," he said. "We love to train and equip people to do what Jesus did and commanded us to do."

Jesus Culture's mission is to raise up a new generation of revivalists, Jerry

Niswander, managing director, said.

The ministry is supported by registration fees, which run from \$35 to \$50, and product sales, including T-shirts and CDs from the Jesus Culture record label. Artists include Kim Walker, whose hit "Where you go I go" expresses a heart-wrenching desire to do God's will, and Chris Quilala, best known for his driving ballad "Your love never fails."

Niswander said more than 3,000 people attended the two-day February 2009 Jesus Culture Conference in Redding and the three-day July conference saw about 2,000 attendees. Both conferences were held at the Redding Convention Center. The third, specifically for youth pastors, was held in September at Bethel and had 250 in attendance.

"We've almost doubled (attendance) since 2007," he said.

Frank Strazzarino Jr., president and CEO of the Greater Redding Chamber of Commerce, said visitors spend an estimated \$75 to \$125 per day when they come to Redding. Using those figures, the Jesus Culture Conferences alone could generate more than \$1 million in local economic activity collectively.

"In many cases, they (convention attendees) consider a return to our community for a vacation trip after they have attended a conference," Strazzarino said in an e-mail, adding that some people eventually end up moving to the area.

Chris Gonzalez, general manager of the Redding Convention Center, said Bethel Church is a huge asset, renting the center for five events each year.

This year, Bethel will host at least 10 conferences, including the three Jesus Culture conferences, a conference on healing and laying on of hands, and a conference on prophecy.

The Bethel School of Impartation and Healing conference was held last week at the Redding Convention Center and heavy traffic clogged the area as people swarmed to Auditorium Drive.

Bethel's Web page steers out-of-towners to local hotels, including the Comfort Inn, which offers a 20 percent discount for Bethel conference attendees.

In his father's footsteps

Johnson moved to Redding with his family in 1968 when his father, Earl Johnson, became pastor of Bethel Church, which at the time had a congregation of fewer than 200.

As a child, he loved sports, especially baseball, and was a good athlete. Though he didn't like school, he earned decent grades. Music had a huge place in his life, thanks to the influence of his parents, he said.

"My parents were very musical," he said.

Johnson's son, Brian Johnson, has continued the family's musical legacy by becoming the worship director at Bethel.

After attending the Genesis Bible Training Center in Santa Rosa and spending five years on the Bethel staff, Bill Johnson became pastor of Mountain Chapel in

Weaverville from 1978 to 1996.

Johnson returned to Bethel in 1996 as pastor, taking over the position his father held from 1968 to 1982. Ray Larson was the pastor of the church from 1984 to 1996, and under his leadership, the church grew from 200 congregants to more than 2,000.

Now, with another 1,000 members and a decade of healthy growth under its belt, Bethel Church receives between \$3 million and \$4 million a year in tithes and offerings, Johnson said.

Johnson's vision for creating a culture through a church has made Bethel an economic force in its hometown and its expansion over the past decade has been continuous.

"We're in a process right now with an architect that has designed a building," Johnson said of the latest plans for the church's \$10 million main campus on College View Drive.

In an iBethel.TV interview, Johnson said church leadership had been given the prophetic word to create what he called an apostolic resource center. The new center would include a larger sanctuary, 900 parking spaces and more buildings to house the church's ministries. The new center will cost an estimated \$7 million and be completed sometime in 2012.

Drawing students to Redding

Aside from the restaurant and hotel revenue gained from Bethel Church's conference, Bethel's schools also draw people to the community - most notably the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry.

"I had a vision for a school of this type for many years before coming to Redding, intending to start one in Weaverville," Johnson said in an e-mail. "I brought the vision for BSSM to Redding when I came. It was my job to set the priorities and ministry direction as well as hire the staff that could help get it done."

Founded in 1998 with just 36 students, the September-through-May school now enrolls about 1,200 students, 370 of whom are from foreign countries, Johnson said.

Nathan Grammar, 31, moved to Redding from Mississippi during the summer to attend the school, which he heard about in Kansas City, Mo., through the International House of Prayer ministry.

"Some of the things that really drew me to it were the fact that we believe in miracles and there's a lot of testimonies that come on podcasts and really cool things happening (at Bethel)," he said while sitting outside HeBrews Coffee on a sunny fall afternoon.

The curriculum focuses largely on learning about life, learning to unleash God's supernatural spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues and healing, and being a person of honor, respect, integrity and purity, he said.

"People need practical training, not just theories," Johnson said,

Tuition at the school is \$3,600, not including living costs. Grammar laughed when he said someone anonymously paid his tuition in full because he didn't have enough

money.

"It was pretty wild," he said.

Grammar is one of many students who rent apartments in Redding. Amanda Coats, property manager of Hilltop Garden Apartments, said there's a "Bethel market" in the rental sector.

Coats said in September 70 percent of her traffic was from Bethel students looking for a place to live for the school year. Many of them are from Norway, Switzerland and South Africa, she said.

"Some of them have actually found permanent residency here and have lived here for a year or two now," she said, adding that about 15 percent will stay for the full three-year program.

God's favor for Redding

Johnson said he thinks God's favor is on Redding and compares the ministries of Bethel to those of John the Baptist.

"In the Bible, there's a character named John the Baptist who came to Israel and preached before Jesus did," he said. "He's the one who prepared the way but he was out in the wilderness, he wasn't in the big city. People had to leave the city to go out there."

Johnson said people hear about the wonderful things happening at Bethel - the healing, the anointing, the prosperity, the closeness with God - and they come.

Johnson's vision for Bethel is also largely a vision for Redding and beyond.

"Bethel is part of a bigger (picture)," he said. "I want Redding to be a safe place. I want it to be a place where families work, where marriages work, where kids don't get abused, where businesses can thrive, where there aren't unemployment problems. We have a role that we play."

His vision was echoed in a congregational prayer led by Kris Vallotton at a Sunday service in early December, lasting more than five minutes and asking God to bring healing to Redding. Prayers to eradicate abortion, divorce, cancer and poverty were spoken aloud as people joined hands across the aisles. In the closing prayer of the service, Johnson again appealed to God to use Bethel as a tool of transformation in Redding.

"We pray right now for the peace, the soundness of mind, the prosperity to help this city and this region," he prayed. "We confess Lord, we know that you've tucked a blessing for us in the blessing you've given to this city. We pray for this in Jesus' name."

Reporter Amanda Winters can be reached at 225-8372 or awinters@redding.com.

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January 16, 2010
9:39 p.m.

Treehugger writes:

Bethel is a demonic church that exists only to rip off believers.

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

January 16, 2010
9:58 p.m.

Pilkington writes:

Bethel is no different than all other forms of religion - all about brain-washing...and money. From the beginning of organized religion they have all been corrupt. Bethel is worse than Mormans at your door though as they approach you in public and "pray" for you...crazy crazy crazy crazy...oh well, as long as it doesn't impact me, I don't care...just don't "pray" for me!

[Suggest removal](#)

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January 16, 2010
10:13 p.m.

Northstar83 writes:

I have fond memories of Bethel back when Ray Larson was the pastor there. I attended the old Bethel that use to be on Bechelli, and I was a little girl when it switched to its new location. It's sad what happened to Ray and his family. Larson's wife, Becky, was a very on fire for God Christian; she is with the Lord now. Anyhow, I will always hold a special spot for the old Bethel in my heart.

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

January 16, 2010
10:16 p.m.

buddy writes:

Religion is an archaic concept. It has always done more harm than good. Quit acting like you know something, You cant possibly know something that requires faith. Faith is bad, it asks you to go in the opposite direction of reason.

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

January 16, 2010
10:31 p.m.

Northstar83 writes:

Buddy, and I suspect you suppose evolution falls into the category of reason? Evolution requires faith and it is not proven, however, you should know that I am not talking about the small variations in the various life forms (microevolution). The following five major events of the general theory of evolution say this takes place without God; HOWEVER, they were and still are not proven:

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- 1)Time, space, and matter came into existence by themselves.
 - 2)Planets and stars formed from space dust.
 - 3)Matter created life by itself.
 - 4)Early life-forms learned to reproduce themselves.
 - 5)Major changes occurred between these diverse life forms (i.e., fish changed to amphibians, amphibians changed to reptiles, and reptiles changed to birds or mammals).
- Evolution is not reason, and it requires faith to believe in that theory.

January 16, 2010
11:03 p.m.

BkPkers2 writes:

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

It absolutely amazes me that the Record Searchlight can spend this much space lauding the accolades of Bethel Church, yet we see little to nothing about state and national political issues. This article reads like a paid recruiting advertisement for Bethel Church. I wonder if St. Joseph's, Our Lady of Mercy, Little Country Church and ALL the other local churches were to demand equal coverage - would they get this much attention.

This article is WAAAAAY overboard - and makes me wonder if the reporter or the editor(s) at RS are church members. I guarantee you that spouting religious commentary - like the "prayer for Redding" at the end of the article - is going to turn off LOTS of readers - and this paper can ill afford that to happen.

Religion and undying faith (not to mention donations) in some self-proclaimed leader is for the weak willed - ever wonder why church leaders are called "shepherds" and their congregations "flocks" - like sheep, these people are susceptible to mind manipulative suggestion, and will follow along and do anything their leader does or tells them to do.

RS - Please keep your religious opinions to yourself or dump articles like this onto some "Sunday Church Page" - but do not presume to spout prayers at your readers on the front page!

January 16, 2010
11:08 p.m.

Ricky writes:

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

in response to [Treehugger](#):

Bethel is a demonic church that exists only to rip off believers.

Kind of slandering the church. Where are your facts? Got a link to prove what you said? Do you know someone with authority who can back you up.

Kind of sleazy of you to just make a statement without posting facts.

January 16, 2010
11:10 p.m.

Ricky writes:

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

in response to [Pilkington](#):

Bethel is no different than all other forms of religion - all about brain-washing....and money. From the beginning of organized religion they have all been corrupt. Bethel is worse than Mormans at your door though as they approach you in public and "pray" for you...crazy crazy crazy...oh well, as long as it doesn't impact me, I don't care...just don't "pray" for me!

Mr. Pukeington, I pray for the world. Including you. No, I don't attend Bethel or any other church.

January 16, 2010
11:13 p.m.

Ricky writes:

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

in response to [Keeponrollin](#):

This comment may be inappropriate. [Reveal this comment.](#)

I guess that you don't watch the news about Haiti very much. There are than a few religions down there helping out and the Catholic church has more than any.

January 16, 2010
11:34 p.m.

buddy writes:

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

Nice "spreadsheet" of nonsense. Are you trying to impress me? Never go "scientific" when attempting to prove God. Did God come into existence by himself? Did God make himself out of space dust? etc... etc.. Scientific proof of the transmutation of species caused scientists (many had religious beliefs) to define evolution. (how hard that must have been for them)Evolution is ALL reason.If you really care about your religion...Look into the history of it for yourself..Im sure you would feel different than you do now. May I suggest the book "god is not Great" by Christopher Hitchens.

January 16, 2010
11:40 p.m.

JB writes:

[Suggest removal](#)

in response to [Ricky](#):

Kind of slandering the church. Where are your facts? Got a link to prove what you said? Do you know someone with authority who can

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back you up.

Kind of sleazy of you to just make a statement without posting facts.

Here ya go Rick, it's basic Christian history 101. <http://www.bible.ca/tongues-neo-monta...>

In a nutshell, there are forces in this world, and not all of them are good; beware the ones that work up the emotional heart(with music and feeling) as opposed to the intellectual mind with history and language studies.

Sorry if anyone is offended, but the road is narrow, and most of us (myself included) misstep from time to time.

January 16, 2010
11:49 p.m.

considerthis writes:

There's no question that people are coming from all over the world to attend BSSM. There's no question that seeing many of the young people around town, they are filled with the fire of God, and passionate about doing what they believe God would have them doing. I for one cannot find fault with that, and pray that God uses all of them to bring change to Redding, and help influence our youth etc.

[Suggest removal](#)[Reply to this post](#)

January 16, 2010
11:59 p.m.

raideragent writes:

Ever wonder if just because someones says, "God told me" or "I feel that God told me" that it's really from God? Well, let the Scriptures speak for themselves. Check out this blog by John MacArthur: <http://www.gty.org/Blog/B100111>

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January 17, 2010
12:01 a.m.

awinters writes:in response to **BkPkrs2:**

It absolutely amazes me that the Record Searchlight can spend this much space lauding the accolades of Bethel Church, yet we see little to nothing about state and national political issues. This article reads like a paid recruiting advertisement for Bethel Church. I wonder if St. Joseph's, Our Lady of Mercy, Little Country Church and ALL the other local churches were to demand equal coverage - would they get this much attention.

This article is WAAAAAY overboard - and makes me wonder if the reporter or the editor(s)at RS are church members. I guarantee you that spouting religious commentary - like the "prayer for Redding" at the end of the article - is going to turn off LOTS of readers - and this paper can ill afford that to happen.

Religion and undying faith (not to mention donations) in some self-proclaimed leader is for the weak willed - ever wonder why church leaders are called "shepherds" and their congregations "flocks" - like sheep, these people are susceptible to mind manipulative suggestion, and will follow along and do anything their leader does or tells them to do.

RS - Please keep your religious opinions to yourself or dump articles like this onto some "Sunday Church Page" - but do not presume to spout prayers at your readers on the front page!

Hello BkPkrs2,

I'm Amanda Winters, the writer of this article.

I wanted to respond and let you know this is the first in a three part series examining Bethel Church. For a closer, more critical look at the church please check back on Monday and Tuesday for the second and third installments.

Have a nice weekend,

-Amanda Winters

January 17, 2010
12:14 a.m.

debbydebbydebby writes:

"In the Bible, there's a character named John the Baptist who came to Israel and preached before Jesus did," he said. "He's the one who prepared the way but he was out in the wilderness, he wasn't in the big city. People had to leave the city to go out there."

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Ummm, John the Baptist was poor. He wore camel skins and ate locusts and wild honey. The message he preached was repentance. It was not, "repent and

make a profit".
 Hoping to lay my treasures up in Heaven.
 Hope to see you all there.

January 17, 2010
 12:45 a.m.

planstation writes:

If you want to know how true ministers of Christ lived and dressed, you need look no further than 1 Corinthians 4:11 where Paul, speaking of himself and the other apostles (v. 9) wrote -

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"To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless."

Paul wrote this about 20 years after the crucifixion of our Lord. The apostles chose to live their lives like this.

And in the New Testament churches, when they took up collections from the believers (as they were able), it was for the poor. It wasn't to build bigger, fancier buildings and fatten certain people's bank accounts.

January 17, 2010
 3:26 a.m.

veph writes:

What the heck is going on? Are there any journalists left at the RS?

[Suggest removal](#)

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January 17, 2010
 5:21 a.m.

jwolf6589 writes:

Its sad that churches like Bethel can be so big in a area of the country where Biblical illiteracy is very high and this is the reason why. I lived in Redding for many years but currently reside in the Bible Belt where churches like Bethel do not exist or exist with few members. People here know their Bibles MUCH BETTER!

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I CHALLENGE Conservative Evangelical, Fundamentalist (if there are any in Redding), and other evangelical to take the stand against the false teachers and to engage in open air street preaching (a common practice here in the south).

I have a sample sermon on my website check it out!

<http://cerm.info/sermons/audio/street...>

January 17, 2010
 5:43 a.m.

fair writes:

Thank you for recognizing the positive accomplishments of Bethel. Although I am not a member, I recognize its spiritual force in the community. In many of these blogs, the anti-Christ exists. Thank God there is this positive counter-force to deal with these people.

[Suggest removal](#)

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January 17, 2010
 5:59 a.m.

JustBob writes:

I could not attend Bethel because of their fundamentalistic emotionalism. However, they too have a place for many folks (obviously).

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I do know that smaller local congregations are also doing wonderful things, but given their smaller size their good works are proportionally smaller as well and less obvious, yet no less meaningful and important. -- But the Record Searchlight will never give those churches this sort of positive spin.

January 17, 2010
 6:32 a.m.

happy_in_humboldt writes:

why does this story NOT surprise me? Redding, the mecca for conservative christian based thought, where churches become big economic non-profits and where people join because it is good for their image around town, you know, better to 'belong'

[Suggest removal](#)

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January 17, 2010
 6:33 a.m.

rodneyfarva writes:

God spoke to me last night after I read this article, he said: "not all churches are my idea, sometimes I look down and slap my head, Saint Peter laughs and states, you gave them free will."

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[Reply to this post](#)

Take that (god spoke to me) Chris, that's why you got a busy signal last night.

Time to use church funds and go back to Americas 50th state and re-tune you headset. God also told me that he did not think it funny, clever or even amusing that you tell church attendees that you read you bible while sitting on the CAN!!!

Yes this actually takes place, I could not believe it either when I first heard it.

January 17, 2010
6:39 a.m.

Treebones writes:

in response to **awinters:**

Hello BkPkers2,
I'm Amanda Winters, the writer of this article.
I wanted to respond and let you know this is the first in a three part series examining Bethel Church. For a closer, more critical look at the church please check back on Monday and Tuesday for the second and third installments.
Have a nice weekend,
-Amanda Winters

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[Reply to this post](#)

I'm looking forward to them.

January 17, 2010
6:41 a.m.

JonesValleyResident writes:

Amanda do you attend Bethel Church in any manner?

I noticed you also wrote articles regarding the medical marijuana issues.

Why are you so thorough with Bethel Church's every detail, yet you had not even mentioned the facts about AB390 or the voters initiative.

Are you uninformed regarding these matters or is it policy for Record Searchlight to not publish things that they do not support, even if it is news?

Just seems wrong that I have to have 3 part series on a church for profit outfit, when I am really looking for news across the state and locally.

I have met many of the students coming to Bethel from all parts of the country. I must say they are very nice and are very upstanding in their daily life.

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

January 17, 2010
6:44 a.m.

Treebones writes:

in response to **fair:**

Thank you for recognizing the positive accomplishments of Bethel. Although I am not a member, I recognize its spiritual force in the community. In many of these blogs, the anti-Christ exists. Thank God there is this positive counter-force to deal with these people.

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

In many of these blogs the anti-Christ exists?

Don't you feel compelled to point out which ones?

January 17, 2010
6:58 a.m.

rodneyfarva writes:

in response to **Treebones:**

I'm looking forward to them.

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God spoke to me this morning after I read this posting...He said: "and you think I got mad when Moses struck the rock three times?"

Perhaps Chris can talk again about the "spirit of Stupid" or chase off more good deeply religions people by telling them things like "God wants me to tell you that you are a bad person, wrong in your faith, wrong in you heart."

Well God spoke to me clearly and said that anyone who invokes his name one minute, and then shows such overincredulous judgment to say things like "the guy is screwing him mother in the corner in a church class with kids in attendance, prides himself in passing judgment on other churches (aka wrecking other churches) or uses church funds to travel the globe, is totally oblivious to me and lost himself in himself his ego and pride."

January 17, 2010
7:14 a.m.

rodneyfarva writes:

in response to **Treebones:**

In many of these blogs the anti-Christ exists?

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

Don't you feel compelled to point out which ones?

Don't take it personally, this is a common sanctimonious response. "your with the devil" "you have evil in your heart" "Your spirit is under evil torment and influence"

When your position cannot stand in the light of day, or withstand a legitimate debate, invoke satin in you opponent. This will immediately get the church behind you as anything you say, is now of satin!!!"

Politicians do it all the time by calling each other "liberal," "conservative," "pro-life," "pro-choice," "right and left wing." It is an old practice and usually only effective with people who have no interest in facts, but instead prefer to defend a position without deep thought. If being critical of this church makes you a elf of satin, then I think these people have made my case for me with their own arrogance. If we are not the elf of satin, than we must surely belong to a church in need of wrecking by Chris (aka God spoke to me). In other words, if you are critical of this church, then you most certainly are in need of prayer, as you, your own church, your pastors, family, friends, fellow (non-bethal) Christians are not the right kind of Christians. You are in need of prayer, as the devil is a wolf in sheep's clothing, of your beliefs, and you are too non-Christian to see it yet, because your eyes are closed to God.

January 17, 2010
7:18 a.m.

rodneyfarva writes:

Let thee who is completely without satin, cast the first trident (aka pitchfork).

[Suggest removal](#)[Reply to this post](#)

January 17, 2010
7:24 a.m.

Treebones writes:

From the article...

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"Bethel is part of a bigger (picture)," he said. "I want Redding to be a safe place. I want it to be a place where families work, where marriages work, where kids don't get abused, where businesses can thrive, where there aren't unemployment problems. We have a role that we play."

Can we put a time-frame on that?

Johnson has been here a decade already. We can expect to see results, when?

January 17, 2010
7:35 a.m.

veph writes:

in response to **awinters:**

[Suggest removal](#)[Reply to this post](#)

Hello BkPkers2,
I'm Amanda Winters, the writer of this article.
I wanted to respond and let you know this is the first in a three part series examining Bethel Church. For a closer, more critical look at the church please check back on Monday and Tuesday for the second and third installments.
Have a nice weekend,
-Amanda Winters

OK, you got my attention. Please, please, please, do not misuse the power and purpose of the 4th estate.

January 17, 2010
8:09 a.m.

considerthis writes:[Suggest removal](#)[Reply to this post](#)

I personally KNOW God speaks to me sometimes. I also am sure that the leadership at Bethel Church love God and want to do right by him. However; money does corrupt good men everyday. JESUS came to earth as a humble carpenter, NOT A KING with earthly wealth. If all the Johnsons, Vallotons, Leibscher, etc. are profiting so incredibly and keeping most of it to themselves, that isn't Jesus. God calls us to be good stewards of our money, and asking people to pay for what they believe God is showing them and prostitute the word of God is wrong. NEVER is there an example of Jesus charging to hear him or heal anyone. Though I will say the recent healing service at the Civic was FREE, it could be said it was a good marketing ploy - though done with sincerity. Reaping such huge rewards under the guise of "non profit" though legal is IMMORAL AND UNETHICAL, when the hardworking tax payers are daily being burdened to subsidize the country because "non profits" find a way around paying their share, and thus are stealing from the most vulnerable. A living wage

is acceptable, what they are taking is NOT. I ASK BETHEL TO SET AN EXAMPLE.. BE GOOD STEWARDS OF "OTHERS" MONEY AND STOP USING THEIR TAX EXEMPTION FOR PERSONAL GAIN.

January 17, 2010
8:10 a.m.

Patrecia_Barrett writes:

I spoke to a minister at Bethel Church once about the homeless issue.

[Suggest removal](#)

He stayed on the phone just long enough to determine that I wasn't likely to become one of Bethel's slavish devotees or financial contributors, at which point he couldn't hang up fast enough.

[Reply to this post](#)

January 17, 2010
8:11 a.m.

stevenpaule#217892 writes:

in response to [rodneymarva](#):

Let thee who is completely without satin, cast the first trident (aka pitchfork).

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

I have no satin. But I do have denim, cotton, and silk.

January 17, 2010
8:12 a.m.

joeblow writes:

I always wondered why a friend of mine calls Bethel people "the children of the corn". Now I get it. I have met a few and they seem to have the 1000 yard stare and a somewhat blank expression.

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

January 17, 2010
8:27 a.m.

happyhoneybee writes:

I moved here from another country just to be a part of Bethel Church because I felt after visiting the area about 6 times over a year that it was a place where dreams come true. Where anything is possible. I continually would and do feel God's presence, angels, and favor. I am so thankful to be in this City in this time in history, to be a part of reaching the poor, the sick, those in need in the city and in other countries. To have a part in making a difference that will forever be remembered in history. TO be challenged in living a life of character and integrity, to live a life of generosity, and compassion and to do everything out of love. This is the best life could and has been. I am so grateful for those that pay the price at Bethel so we can understand how God is in a good mood and anything is possible. ONLY BELIEVE. Enjoy your life! :)

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

January 17, 2010
8:38 a.m.

nomeg15 writes:

I cannot and will not form an opinion of Bethel because I have never attended any service or other activity there.

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

I can say that I know Bethel is heading to Haiti right now to help and you can't say anything bad about that. It makes me proud that our community has a presence there.

I will say that I do not beleive that churches should be allowed to operate businesses and not pay federal and state taxes. If they had to pay taxes on the business earnings it would be a great revenue generator for the Federal and state governments.

At the very minimum, they should have to prove what they do with the money....meaning show it is used for the betterment of the community and its people.

January 17, 2010
8:42 a.m.

3Gs writes:

in response to [Northstar83](#):

Buddy, and I suspect you suppose evolution falls into the category of reason? Evolution requires faith and it is not proven, however, you should know that I am not talking about the small variations in the various life forms (microevolution). The following five major events of the general theory of evolution say this takes place without God; HOWEVER, they were and still are not proven:

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1)Time, space, and matter came into existence by themselves.

2)Planets and stars formed from space dust.

- 3)Matter created life by itself.
- 4)Early life-forms learned to reproduce themselves.
- 5)Major changes occurred between these diverse life forms (i.e., fish changed to amphibians, amphibians changed to reptiles, and reptiles changed to birds or mammals).
- Evolution is not reason, and it requires faith to believe in that theory.

Lots and lots of highly educated, smart people, all over the world, think you're wrong...and ignorant.

January 17, 2010
8:52 a.m.

BkPkers2 writes:

Thank you for your clarification Amanda - I still take issue with articles like this being afforded "front page" status, when 97% of the people in Shasta County are not members of this church, nor have any reason for "getting to know" its background, founders, current leadership and religious philosophies in such detail.

In more than 30 years of reading this newspaper, I have never seen an article so seemingly recruitment directed - is there a specific reason that the majority of people in this community needed to hear about Mr. Johnson's upbringing, let alone his religious and financial philosophies?

I would be interested to see the balance of the "report", but I ask you, as a reporter, and the RS as the provider of information for its readers, where was all the in-depth business and biographical data on ALL the candidates who not only ran for various political positions last November, but once elected would make decisions affecting our daily lives? Where are the daily reports about the inner workings of the City Council and BOS meetings - too much secrecy there.

Again, I do not question your reporting, only the venue in which this article was presented.

I am, however, also concerned about the comment regarding Bethel being one of the "largest employers" in Shasta County - from an HR and diversity perspective, it would be interesting to see a breakdown of employees - how many are current church members or may be required to become such once hired - are these "full-time" employees with benefits, local area residents or recruits from other states, and does the church pay business and property taxes like any other business would be required to do. A fair question, in light of the multi-million dollar donations reported, and given recent articles concerning financial misuse by "mega-church" organizations like Oral Roberts University, and of course, you remember the Jim and Tammy Baker debacle, Sun Yung Moon and the Rajinishis in Oregon.

Perhaps, since everything else seems to have been bared, you might share what sort of annual income and perks this congregation affords this tenured church leader and has for his family over the past 4 decades.

I am confident that other people are probably wondering these same things, but since religious discussion or the inner workings of a particular church are generally taboo, many won't ask. But, I will ask, and I look forward to your continuing detailed report.

You show photos of Bethel Church leaders and members "unleashing the power of the church" - how about truly unleashing the "Power of the Press". You have a good weekend as well.

January 17, 2010
9 a.m.

leftcoastguy writes:

in response to **BkPkers2:**

It absolutely amazes me that the Record Searchlight can spend this much space lauding the accolades of Bethel Church, yet we see little to nothing about state and national political issues. This article reads like a paid recruiting advertisement for Bethel Church. I wonder if St. Joseph's, Our Lady of Mercy, Little Country Church and ALL the other local churches were to demand equal coverage - would they get this much attention.

This article is WAAAAAY overboard - and makes me wonder if the reporter or the editor(s)at RS are church members. I guarantee you that spouting religious commentary - like the "prayer for Redding" at the end of the article - is going to turn off LOTS of readers - and this paper can ill afford that to happen.

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

Religion and undying faith (not to mention donations) in some self-proclaimed leader is for the weak willed - ever wonder why church leaders are called "shepherds" and their congregations "flocks" - like sheep, these people are susceptible to mind manipulative suggestion, and will follow along and do anything their leader does or tells them to do.

RS - Please keep your religious opinions to yourself or dump articles like this onto some "Sunday Church Page" - but do not presume to spout prayers at your readers on the front page!

You stated perfectly, point for point, the reaction I had when I opened this morning's paper--the "paid advertisement" image, wondering whether RS staffers attend the church, the excess, that THIS was the big news of the day (What else would get SIX color photos in Section A, let alone all those column inches?), and that this belonged in the religion section. I'd like to add that the huge, bold headline was complete overkill and not at all appropriate in a time when Haitians are dying in the streets and our nation's future is being determined by the arm wrestling over Obama's health care bill.

I realize that Christianity is a significant force in the north state. But this article and its treatment--and the prospect of a multi-day series on the topic, with multiple stories each day--flies in the face of everything I was taught while earning a journalism degree in college. I'm left wondering, as you were, about the rationale for publishing this series.

I'll be spending the day trying to decide whether to cancel my subscription to the RS. If this is their idea of "news," I think it may be time to start looking for mine elsewhere. Oh, for a credible news source, since the joke that is KRCR is our only other real option...

January 17, 2010
9:03 a.m.

planstation writes:

Hasn't the scripture taught us that it is the Holy Spirit that gives the various gifts (1 Corinthians 12)? And, "To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all" (1 Cor. 12:7). To some, one gift is given; to another, a different gift. SOME are given the gift of healing - BY THE HOLY SPIRIT! And, it is the Spirit that teaches us when and how to use the anointing that He has given - "The anointing you received from Him (the Spirit) remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit" (1 John 2:27).

Now, it bothers me that BSSM claims it will teach folks how to use the gift of healing (specifically), or any other gift for that matter - AND for only \$3600! What a bargain, huh? Now longer do we need to wait on the Spirit to adorn us with the gift, or gifts, of His choosing when we can now purchase the gift of our own choosing from BSSM! And, they will show us how and when to use it. It is the Spirit that gives the gifts, not BSSM nor anyone else. The Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry has planted itself in the place of the Holy Spirit of God! It is a cheap imitation.

Finally, remember Simon the sorcerer who, after having believed and was baptized, coveted the power of the Spirit (Acts 8:9-24). Attempting to purchase this ability, he was sharply rebuked by Peter, who said, "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin" (Acts 8:20-23).

January 17, 2010
9:09 a.m.

lol_pwnies writes:

Wow...just wow. How many of you posters go to a church of some kind? Here you are bashing another church for the way they run. It's not your way to worship and, heavens forbid, they have made a profit. Sure it might be like the TV Evangelist style, but it brings happiness to those who are apart of it. Just like you in your church. It's a church and school similar to Simpson, who ask you to be of thier type of religion. Anyone here bashing Simpson? Didn't see any, although I could have missed it.

They speak in tongues or do prayer healing. How many of you post here stating, "I'm praying for your recovery" when someone is reported hurt. Sure they are 'trying' to actually 'heal' but it's up the the reciever to believe in the healing or not (aside from actual medical help).

I am amazed at the hateful words here. It's like you all are going after a child molester or something.

Patricia, there are a lot of churches that won't talk to someone who doesn't belong or believe the same or have no wish to join their group. They can do that. You can feel offended if you like. Maybe you just didn't represent yourself correctly in the situation. Were you talking to him like the homeless advocate barracuda (ment complimentary) you are or as a casual Hi. Just my thought. Now before ya all get up on me. I'm not for or against Bethel or any other church/religion. It just astonished me there was soo much negativity and hatred towards a church and school in these posts.

January 17, 2010
9:20 a.m.

planstation writes:

Beware of "men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain." (1 timothy 6:5).

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

January 17, 2010
9:22 a.m.

parentsoftwo writes:

Just imagine where our state and federal deficit would be if all churches paid their fair share of taxes.

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

January 17, 2010
9:36 a.m.

Ken writes:

in response to [Northstar83](#):

Buddy, and I suspect you suppose evolution falls into the category of reason? Evolution requires faith and it is not proven, however, you should know that I am not talking about the small variations in the various life forms (microevolution). The following five major events of the general theory of evolution say this takes place without God; HOWEVER, they were and still are not proven:

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- 5)Major changes occurred between these diverse life forms (i.e., fish changed to amphibians, amphibians changed to reptiles, and reptiles changed to birds or mammals).

Evolution is not reason, and it requires faith to believe in that theory.

Evolution, to deal with just one of the concepts in your post, is not just the dominant paradigm in biology, it is widely considered to be one of the most powerful ideas in the history of our understanding of our world.

The only "faith" required to accept it is belief in the observable facts displayed by existing and fossil organisms and in the power of logic and reason to unravel puzzles and expand knowledge.

January 17, 2010
9:39 a.m.

Ken writes:

The RS talks about an "alleged" underwear bomber with due regard for the standards of reporting, since he is unconvicted, yet reports on speaking in tongues, faith healing, and classes in wielding supernatural power as if they are facts.

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

They aren't.

January 17, 2010
9:42 a.m.

Ken writes:

in response to [awinters](#):

Hello BkPkers2,
I'm Amanda Winters, the writer of this article.

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

I wanted to respond and let you know this is the first in a three part series examining Bethel Church. For a closer, more critical look at the

church please check back on Monday and Tuesday for the second and third installments.
Have a nice weekend,
-Amanda Winters

Are you a member of Bethel Church?

January 17, 2010
9:46 a.m.

Ken writes:

in response to [considerthis](#):

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

I personally KNOW God speaks to me sometimes. I also am sure that the leadership at Bethel Church love God and want to do right by him. However; money does corrupt good men everyday. JESUS came to earth as a humble carpenter, NOT A KING with earthly wealth. If all the Johnsons, Vallotons, Leibscher, etc. are profiting so incredibly and keeping most of it to themselves, that isn't Jesus. God calls us to be good stewards of our money, and asking people to pay for what they believe God is showing them and prostitute the word of God is wrong. NEVER is there an example of Jesus charging to hear him or heal anyone. Though I will say the recent healing service at the Civic was FREE, it could be said it was a good marketing ploy - though done with sincerity. Reaping such huge rewards under the guise of "non profit" though legal is IMMORAL AND UNETHICAL, when the hardworking tax payers are daily being burdened to subsidize the country because "non profits" find a way around paying their share, and thus are stealing from the most vulnerable. A living wage is acceptable, what they are taking is NOT. I ASK BETHEL TO SET AN EXAMPLE.. BE GOOD STEWARDS OF "OTHERS" MONEY AND STOP USING THEIR TAX EXEMPTION FOR PERSONAL GAIN.

Rick Warren said an interesting thing about wealth:

"It's not a sin to be rich, but it is a sin to die rich."

January 17, 2010
9:47 a.m.

rodneyfarva writes:

in response to [stevenpaule#217892](#):

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

I have no satin. But I do have denim, cotton, and silk.

obviously you have missed the facetiousness of my comment.

January 17, 2010
9:47 a.m.

fjm writes:

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

I also attended Bethel when it was on N. Bechelli and after it moved "up on the hill." I attended a few times after The Johnson's came but pretty much left when The Larson's left. I would like to know if Bethel pays taxes on the Caterpillar Rd property or if it falls under the welfare exemption rules. I also take issue with the "simple man and simple pastor" statement. As I mentioned in my comment in the Bethel Leadership story, his home is anything but simple and I would like to know how he justifies it. My son used to work at a business not too far from Bethel (near the mall) and would always say that you could tell when Bethel was having a conference - they would get the rudest customers ever! Obviously Bethel cannot be responsible for the behavior of the attendees, but my son also included the pastor's wives of Bethel as the rudest customers of all time.

January 17, 2010
9:52 a.m.

ginkgo#265998 writes:

[Suggest removal](#)

[Reply to this post](#)

This guy makes 375K as head of his "non-profit"? Plus his undisclosed additional salary as head of the church itself?

Comments of 159

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