

‘Joel Osteen Didn’t Lie’: After Breaking Story, Reporter Defends Lakewood’s Acceptance of PPP Loans

Joel Osteen’s Lakewood church, Houston, Texas, has come under massive social media attack after the *Houston Chronicle* broke a story saying the megachurch had received \$4.4 million in federal Payroll Protection Program loans, but the reporter who wrote the story is now defending the megachurch.

Social media mavens took the story and ran with it, and before long, posters were saying Osteen had lied about accepting such funds. This one from author and podcast host Travis Akers was typical of the buzz:

Joel Osteen denied accepting any money from Federal PPP loans. Turns out his Lakewood Church took \$4.4 million.

– Travis Akers (@travisakers) December 15, 2020

Activist and publisher of the *Sheero* newsletter Amee Vanderpool posted on Twitter:

Joel Osteen claimed his church took no PPP money, but his congregation was just one of many that received MILLIONS. This is just another reason why churches should be taxed if they are going to get business benefits.

– Amee Vanderpool (@girlsrealllyrule) December 15, 2020

Vanderpool’s remarks fit with the consensus of Lakewood hate. A progressive podcast noted, “Religion is quite a racket” in its tweet:

They don't pay taxes. They demand special exemptions from laws. They demand we all conform to their dogma. All the while raking in the dough and whining about perpetual "persecution".

Religion is quite a ://#TaxChurches #JoelOsteen

– CrabDiving Podcast (@CrabDiving) December 15, 2020

But *Chronicle* reporter Robert Downen, who wrote the story that incited the outcry, has come to the church's defense with a tweet of his own, pointing readers to the original story for the truth:

Yall. Joel Osteen's church didn't lie about taking a PPP loan. Please read the article.

Signed,

The person who wrote the article #Lakewood

– Robert Downen (@RobDownenChron) December 15, 2020

The Osteens and Lakewood Church responded via spokesman Donald Iloff, saying the church did not initially accept help but, as the pandemic continued, applied for the aid to support its employees while in-person service were suspended, reports. Here's the full statement from Lakewood Church:

Lakewood Church, our 368 full and part time employees and their families are grateful for the Payroll Protection Program during these uncertain economic times caused by the COVID 19 pandemic.

Lakewood suspended its in-person services for more than seven months (March 15th though October 18, 2020), impacting its ability to collect substantial donations during those services. Believing the shutdown would only last a few weeks, Lakewood did not initially accept PPP assistance during the

first half of the program. However, as the shutdown persisted month after month, given the economic uncertainty, Lakewood finally applied for the PPP loan and has been able to provide full salaries and benefits including health insurance coverage to all of its employees and their families.

It is important to note that, since 2004, Pastors Joel and Victoria Osteen have not received salaries from Lakewood Church, and the PPP funds do not provide any personal financial benefit to them, whatsoever.

Osteen did not respond other than through the Lakewood spokesman, and he continued his normal encouraging tweets. In the midst of the attacks on his church, he posted the following on Sunday:

There is a fight for your future, but what I want you to see is that it's not your battle. God is fighting for you. The enemy may send the storm, opposition that looks too big, but don't worry; God controls the winds. He overrides every negative force.

– Joel Osteen (@JoelOsteen) December 20, 2020