

Megachurch Pastor Commits Suicide After Long Battle With Mental Illness

A megachurch campus pastor based in California took his life last week after a long battle with mental illness.

Jim Howard was the Valencia Campus pastor of Real Life Church.

"It is with a heavy heart that I can confirm we suffered a tragic loss on our church staff this week. On Wednesday, Jan. 23, Jim Howard—a beloved pastor here at RLC—took his own life," lead Pastor Rusty George says in a statement.

"As all of us who knew Jim can attest, he was a wonderful man with a deep love for Jesus and a passion for sharing the grace of God with anyone he met. He was also a tornado of energy, always looking for new challenges and opportunities to minister to others.

"Sadly, Jim suffered in private with mental health challenges—some of which he bravely discussed in public—and was wrestling with some personal issues in recent months. This week, he made the tragic decision to end his pain. He will be deeply missed by his family, friends, the RLC family and all those who were blessed to know him," George said.

The church arranged for professional counselors to support staff and volunteers who were grieving the loss of Howard.

Real Life also opened its doors Jan. 28-30 so that anyone struggling with suicidal thoughts could sit down with a professional and receive prayer.

The church is hosting a Celebration of Life service Feb. 9 at 10 a.m. PST.

Hundreds of people commented on the Facebook announcement of Howard's death.

"My heart aches this morning. He was a joy to be around when he interned at Woodford Church. Such an awesome young man who loved the Lord. Prayers for the church and family," writes one person.

Another says: "Rest in peace Jim <3 You are wrapped in Jesus's loving arms prayers for his family <3 Thank you Pastor Rusty & RLC for being here for all of us <3."

Someone else posts: "Jim was a dear friend of our family. We loved him. He loved the Lord. We are sad and sorry. Our thoughts and prayers to his family and pastor Rusty and all at Real Life. And if you are struggling please tell someone. There is hope."

Others shared memories:

"I saw this picture and can hardly believe the storyline accompanying it. Jim was the children's minister to our three sons when we moved back to town, and became a personal friend. He was full of energy and loved what he did. Just heartbroken to hear that he struggled to this point. May God comfort his family and friends," one person writes.

Another says: "I'm new to church. I was nervous about coming, and I felt like I would be judged because I wasn't a Christian. I found out that "Helping People Find and Follow Jesus" doesn't mean that I have to do it perfectly, or that I have to understand everything, or that there's a right/wrong way to find God. I didn't know Pastor Jim well, but he was one of the first people I met at RLC. He went out of his way to make me feel welcome, and his has been one of the faces that I always look for on Sunday. He was one of the people I felt like I could be honest with – he helped me feel safe even in my imperfection. I'm still not comfortable. I still sit by myself and don't talk to many people. But I keep coming back,

and Jim is one of the reasons for that. I will truly mourn his death, and with my best beginner's luck prayers I pray that he is at peace. I wish I could tell him how much good he did for me. He was a light in the world."