

Pastor Rodney Howard-Browne Says He's Praying for Sheriff Who Arrested Him

Tampa megachurch pastor Rodney Howard-Browne says he's praying for the sheriff who arrested him Monday afternoon.

In a tweet Howard-Browne posted Monday night, he said: "Praying for Chad Chronister our [Hillsborough County] sheriff. He is doing his best in a very difficult situation. Please pray for him tonight."

Howard-Browne has made his Twitter account and his Instagram account private because he says he has received death threats since his arrest, he says in a live webcast.

"We've been inundated with every threat known to man," he says.

Sheriff Chronister announced his intent to arrest Howard-Browne Monday afternoon after the megachurch pastor held two large services of hundreds of people despite a "Safer-at-Home Order" in Hillsborough County, Florida.

Howard-Browne pastors The River at Tampa Bay Church in Tampa, Florida. He faces two misdemeanor charges of unlawful assembly and violation of public health emergency rules, according to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office. The megachurch pastor insists, though, that he was arrested for the First Amendment.

In his live webcast, Howard-Browne says he was "thrown under the bus" regarding his arrest, but that Chronister was just "doing the best he can." He encouraged people to pray for governing officials, including President Donald Trump and Chronister, to make the right decisions.

During his services, according to the *Orlando Sentinel*, Howard-Browne said congregants were safe from the coronavirus even if they came to church in-person. He allegedly mocked those who said he shouldn't hold a sermon. He also insisted that his services were protected by the First Amendment.

"We received an anonymous tip that Dr. Rodney Howard-Browne refused a request to temporarily stop holding large gatherings at his church," Sheriff Chronister said, according to WTSP. "And instead, he was encouraging his large congregation to meet at his church. ...

"His reckless disregard for human life put hundreds of people in his congregation at risk, and thousands of residents who may interact with them this week, in danger."

Howard-Browne surrendered to the authorities and paid the \$500 bail.

Liberty Counsel released a statement last night saying they would represent Howard-Browne. The Christian organization said the governmental order was not clear about church services and that The River was taking thorough precautions to ensure the safety and health of the attendees.

Watch Howard-Browne's full video statement in this article.