

Up to 30 COGIC Bishops, Leaders Die From COVID-19

The Church of God in Christ (COGIC) has suffered heavy losses as at least 12, and up to 30, of the Pentecostal denomination's bishops and leaders have died from COVID-19.

The Washington Post reports that bishops who have allegedly died of the coronavirus include First Assistant Presiding Bishop Phillip A. Brooks, senior pastor of New St. Paul Tabernacle Church of God in Christ in Detroit and Bishop Timothy Scott, who served the denomination in Mississippi for 50 years and was leader of the Northern Mississippi Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction.

Also among those who died are Bishop Robert E. Smith Sr., Bishop Robert L. Harris, Bishop Timothy T. Scott and Bishop Phillip A. Brook as well as Superintendents John D. Beverly, Paul E. Hester Sr., Kevelin B. Jones, Myron E. Lett and Leon R. McPherson Sr., reports the Los Angeles Sentinel.

On March 26, WREG reported that Bishop Scott may have unwittingly exposed 300 people to the coronavirus by attending a funeral. A week after the March 14 funeral, Scott and his wife both tested positive for COVID-19.

The Church of God in Christ, headquartered in Mason Temple in Memphis, is considered the largest black Christian denomination in the United States, with members amounting to an estimated 6.5 million.

Some of COGIC's leadership meetings, which are typically held in February and March, are believed to be connected to some of the COVID-19 cases. After the Historic Louisiana First Jurisdiction in Shreveport, Louisiana, in March, several leaders who attended tested positive for the coronavirus. The denomination encouraged everyone who attended to be tested by

their health care provider.

Another March conference at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ in Kansas City, Kansas, reportedly led to dozens of infections and at least five deaths.

Church of God in Christ congregations are smaller than the average U.S. church, the Washington Post reports. They also are seemingly more susceptible to the fast-spreading virus, which appears to disproportionately affect African Americans. The CDC reported that 30% of those who have contracted COVID-19 are black, while African Americans make up 13.4% of the entire U.S. population.

Since March, COGIC has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by canceling all its international events and many of its 2020 conferences, including its April Call Meeting, Men Perfecting Men Conference, Women's International Convention and Auxiliaries in Ministry Conference. They also implemented a "shut down" plan for their Memphis headquarters, leaving only a skeleton crew to operate the headquarters in agreement with Tennessee's orders.

Presiding Bishop Charles E. Blake Sr. posted a video update on April 16, addressing the gravity of the crisis.

"In every communication with the church, I have stressed the country's 'social distancing' and 'stay-at-home' mandates," he says. "I would like to take this opportunity to, once again, unequivocally state that all Church of God in Christ local, district, state, national, international gatherings should absolutely cease. ... Saints of God, let us continue to do all we can to contribute to the flattening of this curve."

Previously, Charisma News reported that Bishop Blake called for an international day of prayer and fasting to combat the spread of COVID-19.

"It is our unhappy duty to report that we have now experienced

losses of both leaders and laity within our denominational body due to coronavirus or other illnesses,” he wrote in his call to prayer. “Numerous saints are critically ill and in dire need of spiritual and medical interventions.

“Fervent prayer is our biblical response to any and all societal challenges. For this reason, your Presiding Bishop and General Board are calling all saints to observe a day of ‘GLOBAL FASTING AND INTERCESSORY PRAYER.’ This coming Friday, MARCH 27, 2020, we will intercede on behalf of all nations and people for Heaven’s help in mitigating this dreaded disease – and for healing the bodies, minds and spirits of a fallen and fearful humanity. Please observe fasting from midnight, Thursday, March 26th until 4:00 p.m. on Friday, March 27th – and continue in fervent prayer throughout the day.

“Ultimately, we trust in the great physician, Jesus Christ.”