

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 30, 2020

United House of Prayer Reaches Agreement With Mecklenburg County to Reopen All of UHP's Churches in the County

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – The United House of Prayer for All People of the Church on the Rock of the Apostolic Faith (the “United House of Prayer”) is pleased to announce today that it has come to an agreement with the Mecklenburg County (North Carolina) Public Health Department to reopen all eleven of the United House of Prayer’s churches in Mecklenburg County. The agreement is effective immediately. The churches had previously been ordered closed through Nov. 5, 2020 through an Order of Abatement issued by the County on Oct. 23, 2020.

“This is a great result for the United House of Prayer and for religious freedom and expression throughout Mecklenburg County,” said Apostle Ronnie White, pastor of the United House of Prayer’s Church located at 2321 Beatties Ford Road in Charlotte, N.C. “Our congregants and members are looking forward to participating in daily services starting today, and we and our leader, Bishop C.M. Bailey, are thrilled to welcome them back into God’s House.”

The Oct. 23 Order of Abatement, issued by the County’s Public Health Department, had noted concerns arising from reported cases of COVID-19 from the Church’s Oct. 4-11, 2020 Convocation held at the 2321 Beatties Ford Road location. But instead of ordering the closure of that location alone or other remedial measures, the Order ordered closure of all eleven United House of Prayer churches in the County.

That was a step too far, said Joshua D. Davey of Troutman Pepper Hamilton Sanders LLP, one of the United House of Prayer’s legal counsel on the matter. Davey was joined as counsel by Mary Gately of DLA Piper LLP.

“The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, as well as Article 1, section 13 of the North Carolina Constitution, guarantee the right to free exercise of religion to all,” explained Davey. “The County can take measures to combat the spread of COVID-19, but those actions cannot be overbroad, and the County cannot substantially shut down an entire religious denomination, as the Abatement Order did here,” he stated.

The closure of the United House of Prayer’s churches in the County was especially difficult to the Church’s members. United House of Prayer members participate in religious services daily, with numerous services scheduled to accommodate members’ schedules, as well as work and family commitments. But the members could not worship for several days while churches were closed. Further, the closure took place during a week when Revival services – an especially important time for Church members – were scheduled.

“Not being able to attend services and join with the community in the worship of the Lord was distressing to our members, especially in these difficult times,” said Apostle White, who has been pastor at the 2321 Beatties Ford Road location for six years, and a pastor with the Church

for 36 years. “Daily services are fundamental to our beliefs, and this result preserves our right to worship God together as a community in the manner that is sacred and meaningful to us.”

The Church worked closely with County officials over the past week to address the County’s concerns as to conditions at Church’s eleven locations in Mecklenburg County. The two sides came to an agreement this morning, Oct. 30, as to a way forward to reopen the churches.

“We would like to thank the inspectors and staff from the County for the advice they’ve given us with regard to our churches and facilities,” said Apostle White. “We very much appreciate the efforts and cooperation of Director Harris and everyone from the Department of Public Health, and we are pleased that this situation was resolved amicably.”

White further explained that the Church would have no difficulty following the advice provided by the County because many, if not all of the recommended measures had already been in place in the United House of Prayer’s churches in Mecklenburg County and throughout the country. Since the beginning of the pandemic, through the national leadership of Bishop Bailey, the Church has implemented rigorous measures to combat and prevent the spread of COVID-19, and had conducted worship services safely prior to the Charlotte Convocation.

These measures include required wearing of masks, availability of hand sanitizer throughout the Church’s buildings, social distancing, and the regular cleaning and sanitizing of Church facilities. The churches in Mecklenburg County had also implanted occupancy limits in each church due to the pandemic. These precautions were augmented with additional steps to protect attendees at the Convocation events held earlier this month.

Apostle White emphasized that these measures that had previously been taken were in line with the United House of Prayer’s long history of being a good and responsible citizen of every community that it is a part of, including Mecklenburg County and the city of Charlotte.

“The Church’s roots in Mecklenburg County reach back 94 years,” said Apostle White. “Our members understand that they are a part of the community, and we hope the County understands the United House of Prayer’s vital role in Mecklenburg County.”

Among many other contributions to the County, Apostle White noted, the United House of Prayer offers housing, a senior living community at subsidized rents, and cafeterias that serve all members of the community. Indeed, the United House of Prayer’s cafeteria at 1019 South Mint Street near uptown Charlotte is known as an institution in the community.

White said that he had already heard from elated Church members regarding the reopening of the United House of Prayer’s churches.

“They’re just excited and thankful to be able worship the Lord and do so together as a community,” noted White. “All that the United House of Prayer ever asked is to be able to exercise those rights and serve the surrounding community according to the will of the Lord.”

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