

# Florida pastor arrested after holding packed church service amid COVID-19 stay-at-home order

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TAMPA, Florida -- Despite stay-at-home orders and warnings from deputies, a Florida church held Sunday services anyway.

People across the country voiced outrage online after seeing streaming video from inside The River at Tampa Bay Church Sunday morning.

The stream showed dozens of people packed inside the church, standing shoulder-to-shoulder.

Before evening services, the sheriff's office sent deputies to the church, and even put up a sign asking people to follow social distancing guidelines.

A legal analyst says the sheriff could arrest the church's pastor.

"He holds a service and he has a meeting of any kind where people are listening to him, then he is responsible for them being there. They absolutely can arrest him," the analyst said.

On Monday, Hillsborough County Sheriff Chad Chronister announced the arrest of Dr. Ronald Howard-Browne, the church's pastor.

Announcing the arrest of Dr. Ronald Howard-Browne, Pastor of The River at Tampa Bay Church, who intentionally and repeatedly disregarded state and local public health orders, which put his congregation and our community in danger. [pic.twitter.com/1gERVdzyIp](https://pic.twitter.com/1gERVdzyIp)

— Chad Chronister (@ChadChronister) [March 30, 2020](#)

"I made a decision to seek an arrest warrant for the pastor of a local church who intentionally and repeatedly chose to disregard the orders set in place by our president, the governor, the CDC and the Hillsborough County Emergency Policy Group. 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," said Sheriff Chronister.

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