Beat: News

Son of leading U.S. pastor Rick Warren commits suicide

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USPA News - The youngest son of evangelical pastor Rick Warren, who founded one of the largest churches in the United States, committed suicide at his home in Southern California after a lifelong battle with mental illness, his family said on Saturday. He was 27 years old.

Matthew Warren died late Friday evening at his home in Mission Viejo, a city southeast of Los Angeles, after spending Friday evening with his parents. He had struggled with mental illness and depression for much of his life, and he previously attempted suicide when he was a teenager. Rick Warren, founding pastor of the Saddleback Church and author of the multimillion-selling book "The Purpose Driven Life", announced the death of his youngest son in an e-mail sent to staff members on Saturday. "No words can express the anguished grief we feel right now," he said. The Orange County Coroner Division, in a brief statement on its website, said Matthew Warren was pronounced dead at approximately 10 p.m. local time on Friday at his house in Mission Viejo. The office said he died as a result of a self-inflicted shotgun wound, but gave no other details. Rick Warren, asking his staff members to pray for him and his family, described his youngest son as "an incredibly kind, gentle, and compassionate" man who had "a brilliant intellect and a gift" for sensing who was most in pain or uncomfortable in a room. He would then make a `bee-line` to that person to engage and encourage them. "But only those closest knew that he struggled from birth with mental illness, dark holes of depression, and even suicidal thoughts," the well-known pastor wrote in the email. "In spite of America`s best doctors, meds, counselors, and prayers for healing, the torture of mental illness never subsided." The 59-year-old megachuch pastor said his son had spent a "fun evening" with him and his wife Kay before Matthew took his life in a "momentary wave of despair" at his Mission Viejo home. "Kay and I often marveled at his courage to keep moving in spite of relentless pain," he said. Rick Warren also recounted a previous incident in which Matthew attempted suicide. "I`ll never forget how, many years ago, after another approach had failed to give relief, Matthew said `Dad, I know I`m going to heaven. Why can`t I just die and end this pain?` but he kept going for another decade." Saddleback Church, founded by Warren and his wife Kay in 1980, is located in Southern California. The main campus is in Lake Forest with nine additional campuses in the cities of Anaheim, Corona, Huntington Beach, Irvine, Laguna Woods, Orange, San Clemente and Rancho Capistrano. With an average weekly attendance of more than 20,000 across the 10 campuses, it is among the 10 largest churches in the United States.

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