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THE silentlambs ARCHIVE - Every News Article Ever

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(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped) 11 years ago

THE SILENTLAMBS NEWS ARCHIVE

Below is EVERY silentlambs News Article EVER (Including Television Program Transcripts, Radio Program Transcripts, Newspapers, Magazines, and More) starting from the NEWEST Article, going all the way back to 1996 (and even one Article from 1977).

If I have missed any silentlambs News Articles, please add them to this Thread.

I made this Thread to help the Media and everyone else to have one Web Page where they go and see a TIMELINE of all the silentlambs News Articles.

For all of you who want to give Links of this Thread to your Friends, Family, Media, or anyone else, here is this Thread's Website Address:
<http://www.jehovahs-witness.com/forum/thread.aspx?id=39165&site=3>
(/forum/thread.aspx?id=39165&site=3)

I hope this Thread helps everyone!

I welcome any and all comments and questions.

For more information on the "Pedophile Paradise" in the Jehovah's Witnesses, go to <http://www.silentlambs.org>
(<http://www.silentlambs.org>)

I got most of these Articles from <http://silentlambs.org>
(<http://silentlambs.org>) and <http://watchtower.observer.org>
(<http://watchtower.observer.org>) and
<http://www.watchtowernews.org/pedophilenews.htm>
(<http://www.watchtowernews.org/pedophilenews.htm>)

Also, I want to give a BIG Thank You to GRITS for helping me find some of these Articles.

And, Now, Here are the NEWS ARTICLES:

**SUGAR Magazine (Britain's Best-Selling Magazine for Teenage Girls) -
November 2002 Issue, Pages 20-21:**

**Here are the Web Pages where you can see this Magazine Article,
which is called "I Put My Sex Abuse Dad in Prison":**

Topic Stats

Started 11 years ago

by **UnDisfellowshipped** (original)

(<http://www.jehovahs-witness.net/39165/1>)

21 posts by 1 participants

Last post was 11 years ago

Page 20:

Page 21:

e-watchman.com Essay - October 15th 2002:

Justice for the Silent Lambs

In recent months, the news media has brought to the public's attention shocking stories of child sexual abuse within the families and congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses. As horrendous and heart breaking as child abuse is, the most disturbing aspect of such revelations is the apparent failure on the part of local elders and the Watchtower Society's leadership to deal appropriately with the accused and especially their victims.

In all fairness, if such cases of mishandled child abuse were isolated, we might be justified in coming to the conclusion that a few elders simply lacked proper judgment--certainly that would be bad enough. But, apparently there are literally thousands of cases of abuse on file at the Watchtower headquarters and a pattern has definitely been established as to how such cases are handled--or mishandled, as the case may be.

Given the secretive nature of the judicial process in the congregations, most of Jehovah's Witnesses have been kept in the dark as to the extent of the problem. But now that the victims of sexual abuse have been given a voice through the public media, and courageous abuse advocates have also stepped forward from within Jehovah's Witnesses to speak for them and verify their stories; they all tell a very similar tale. It goes something like this: A trusted brother in the congregation, sometimes a family member, abuses the victims over a period of time. The victim finally musters the courage to go to the elders and report the crime. The Watchtower's Legal department is contacted. A committee of elders is formed to handle the case. Typically, the accused denies the charges and the elders tell the victim that their hands are tied because there are not two witnesses to the crime. Sometimes the police are notified and other times they are not--depending upon local legal requirements.

One would think that such cases could be handled straightforwardly, especially by elders who presumably have Christ's mind on matters and who appreciate their responsibility to plead the legal case of the afflicted one. We might call to mind the apostle Paul's clear-headed judgment of a moral offense in the first century Corinthian congregation, which involved a scandalous case of immorality between a man and his father's wife. At 1st Corinthians 5:3-4, Paul told the brothers that even though he was personally absent in the flesh, he was present in the spirit and had judged the case already. His judgment was that the immoral man should be put out of the congregation. It was an open and shut case as far as the apostle was concerned. Paul told the Corinthian congregation that their cause for boasting was not proper. His words apply to us with equal force: "And are you puffed up, and did you not rather mourn, in order that the man that committed this deed should be taken away from your midst?"

How might Paul judge those men today who abuse or rape children? We cannot imagine Christ or Paul turning away an abused child who came to them for justice. How must Jehovah view the shepherds who fail to render justice to the disadvantaged and afflicted ones? Really, what must the God of righteousness think when his dear sheep are skinned and abused and they go to the appointed shepherds for protection and justice and the shepherds turn them away? How must God judge his shepherds? If the shepherds shove aside the legal claim of the abused, such elders have unquestionably abused their power and reproached their Creator.

To the shame of all of Jehovah's Witnesses, and a reproach to Jehovah God himself, the pattern that has emerged indicates that sexual abuse has not been the only form of abuse that has taken place in the organization. In addition to the scourge of sexual abuse, we must add abuse of power to the charge against the Watchtower and the congregations' appointed shepherds. Most sobering is that this accusation is not from those who might be described as opposers of the truth, but from God himself.

According to the Watchtower's official policy (http://www.jw-media.org/releases/bg_molestation.htm), in the absence of an outright confession of guilt on the part of the accused, no judicial action can be taken against any accused molester unless there happen to be at least two witnesses to the crime.

Ancient Biblical law expressly forbade the judges from acting upon the accusations of a single accuser, so, according to the Watchtower, the very law of God prevents our elders from rendering justice to the afflicted one! But how can that be? Doesn't God's law specifically caution his judges that under no

circumstances are they to shove aside the legal claims of fatherless boys and widows? Yet isn't that exactly what we have done, even using God's own law as a pretext for doing so? If there were some doubt as to how God's law should be applied today, wouldn't it be better for God-fearing elders to err on the side of the abused rather than the accused?

When Christ instructed his disciples to be quick about settling matters of dispute by taking "along one or two witnesses, so that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter may be established," surely we are mistaken in applying that legal precept to cases of child abuse. After all, the first step in the process that Jesus outlined instructs the offended party to "go lay bare his fault between you and him alone." Surely, though, it is absurd and outrageous to expect an abused child to confront their adult abuser in private. No sane or reasonable person would suggest such a course of action be taken. Would Jesus Christ advise one of his battered lambs to go in private to confront the wolf that had just devoured them? Of course not!

But the question arises; if we do not require the victim to observe the first part of Christ's mandate, why then do we insist that the second aspect of that directive, in regard to the need for two witnesses, must be scrupulously observed? Are we so unreasonable as to imagine Christ demands that abused children produce another witness before they can obtain some sort of justice from the elders?

Even human law recognizes that children are vulnerable and therefore warrant special legal protection. That's why there are child protection agencies and laws that protect the rights of infants and minors. Jehovah himself is the primary advocate of the defenseless and afflicted. Yet, the Watchtower's policy makes no distinction between the judicial claim of an abused child and that of an adult. By so doing, the Watchtower's legal department has made it unscriptural for elders to advocate the lawful and God-given rights of abused children!

Jesus Christ condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy because they scrupulously observed relatively minor aspects of the Law, but disregarded the weightier matters having to do with justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Likewise, we have devoted ourselves to faithfully engaging in field service and regularly attending meetings, we have even proclaimed that we abhor child abuse, yet by our organizational policies we are denying justice and mercy to thousands of sexually abused children in our congregations! And do we imagine that Jehovah God shall be an accomplice to such atrocities? How could God possibly condone what is taking place among Jehovah's Witnesses?

Does not the prophecy of Isaiah accuse the leaders of God's people of the very thing that has taken place in the Watchtower Society? Isaiah 10:1-2 pronounces God's judicial decision in this regard, saying: "Woe to those who are enacting harmful regulations and those who, constantly writing, have written out sheer trouble, in order to push away the lowly ones from a legal case and to wrest away justice from the afflicted ones of my people, for the widows to become their spoil, and that they may plunder even the fatherless boys!"

It seems that the Watchtower has provided a timely example of what God is talking about of "those who, constantly writing, have written out sheer trouble," in that the above-linked press release admits that the Watchtower's legal experts are continually tinkering with their organizational policy. Here is a direct quote: "Our procedures have been refined over time. Over the years, as we have noted areas where our policies could be strengthened, we have followed through. We are continuing to refine them." This is mere double-speak and legalese, because even as the press release notes, it remains the Watchtower's official policy to disallow the uncollaborated legitimate claim of an abused child. Indeed, the lawyers continue writing out sheer trouble for themselves and have brought the entire congregation under Jehovah's adverse judgment by their wicked reasonings! Is it not clear that it is wrong for the Watchtower to use biblical law in order to disregard the legal claim of sexually abused children? Surely the devising of such organizational policies is exactly what the prophecy foretold as to "enacting harmful regulations."

Jehovah's rhetorical question directed to the corrupt judges of his people in the next verse of Isaiah should give all God-fearing people a reason to shudder: "And what will you men do at the day of being given attention and at the ruin, when it comes from far away? Toward whom will you men flee for assistance, and where will you leave your glory?"

Jeremiah explains how this horrible miscarriage of justice has come about. He writes: "For among my people there have been found wicked men. They keep peering, as when birdcatchers crouch down. They have set a ruinous trap. It is men that they catch. As a cage is full of flying creatures, so their houses are full of deception. That is why they have become great and gained riches." (Jeremiah 5:26-27)

Typically, the Watchtower interprets God's unflattering and adverse judgments as applying to Christendom. Notice, though, that God locates such wicked men as being among his own people. Because wicked men use deception to set a trap for innocent, trusting ones, it makes it hard to detect such treacherous trappers. But, in view of the unrighteous and ruinous policies promoted by some

among the Watchtower's leading men, and if we truly believe we are God's people, then we must accept the hard fact that God is speaking about his own organization as being victimized from within by wicked men.

In the next verses of Jeremiah, Jehovah accuses these wicked men of not pleading the legal case of the afflicted ones. It reads: "No legal case have they pleaded, even the legal case of the fatherless boy, that they may gain success; and the judgment of the poor ones they have not taken up...An astonishing situation, even a horrible thing, has been brought to be in the land." Surely, the Watchtower's unwillingness to plead the legal case of our own abused children is perfectly described in Scripture as "an astonishing situation, even a horrible thing."

"They Have Gone Down Deep in Bringing Ruin"

The reason that Jehovah's ancient judicial rulings are relevant for our modern world is because, even though cultures have changed since Bible times, human nature has remained the same. That's why the apostle could say that all the things that were recorded aforetime were actually written for those who would be living at a much later date, during the period of the judgment. One of the things written aforetime that is especially relevant to the present situation has to do with a shocking sex crime that took place during the period when Israel was ruled by the judges. The account takes up three whole chapters in the book of Judges.

Briefly, what took place was that a man and his concubine were traveling and stopped over in the town of Gibeah for the night. Sex perverts surrounded the house where the couple were staying as guests and demanded that the male visitor be brought out that they might rape him. Instead, the men settled for the female concubine, whom they raped to death. News of the rape and murder was sent out to all the tribes. The 11 tribes gathered an army and came to the tribesmen of Benjamin and demanded that they hand over the guilty men so that they could be put to death, which is what the Law stipulated must be done in that case. However, the Benjaminites refused to hand the perpetrators over. War erupted and tens of thousands needlessly lost their lives. Gibeah and numerous other cities in Benjamin's territory were burned to the ground, and the tribe of Benjamin was almost entirely annihilated as a result of their foolish refusal to do justice.

What makes this historical account particularly relevant is that Jehovah referred to it years later through his prophet Hosea. Hosea 9:9 says: "They have gone down deep in bringing ruin, as in the days of Gibeah. He will remember their error; he will give attention to their sins."

In the case of Gibeah, the account probably wouldn't even be recorded in the Bible had the men of Benjamin done the right thing. It was the fact that Benjamin tried to shield the guilty men from justice that caused such widespread ruination. Their refusal to do justice compounded the original sin many times over. That is no doubt why God said through Hosea that they had "gone down deep in bringing ruin."

Keeping in mind that the book of Judges is an historical account that may or may not have an exact parallel for our day, on the other hand, Hosea is a prophecy that does have application to the Christian congregation during the time of judgment. How do we know that? Because at 1 Corinthians 15:55, Paul quoted directly from Hosea, when he asked: "Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?" Indeed, up to this very moment death continues to be victorious over us. As Paul noted, it is not until the last trumpet sounds during Christ's presence that "death is swallowed up forever." That being the case, Hosea's prophecy has relevance for spiritual Israel up until the last members of that spiritual nation are granted immortality. The very last verse of Hosea challenges us to discern what Jehovah's judgments actually mean. It says: "Who is wise, that he may understand these things? Discreet that he may know them?"

Virtually every Hebrew prophet foretells of Jehovah's judgments against his spiritual nation that are to be accomplished during the period immediately preceding the final war of Armageddon. The prophets have also foretold that God's otherwise-discreet men would be blind to such judgments. As just one example of our blindness in this regard, consider the oft-referred-to attack of Gog of Magog in Ezekiel. What is important to keep in mind is that the attack of Gog is entirely prophetic. In other words, the prophecy of Gog had no application to any ancient nation such as Babylon .

What we have understood up to this point is that when the symbolic Gog and his crowd are annihilated, that that is the end of the world as it presently exists. What we have so far failed to grasp is that Jehovah sanctions the attack of Gog as a means of punishing his people for their sins. That's why Ezekiel 39:23 says: "And the nations will have to know that it was because of their error that they, the house of Israel, went into exile, on account of the fact that they behaved unfaithfully toward me, so that I concealed my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they kept falling, all of them, by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I did with them, and I kept concealing my face from them."

According to prophecy, Jehovah is going to judge and severely discipline his people for their unfaithfulness and transgressions. Clearly, Jehovah's judgment against his people for their transgressions was not fulfilled back in 1918-19 as we now suppose. Just what transgressions might we be punished for? Returning to the prophecy of Hosea, God's comparing the sin of his spiritual nation to the ruination brought about "in the days of Gibeah" must have reference to the present ruinous policies of the Watchtower that have shielded sexual predators and child molesters. Hosea 10:9 confirms that the sin of Gibeah was not merely the original sex crime, but the refusal of the older men of Benjamin to hand over the criminals. At Hosea 10:2, God indicts his people for becoming hypocrites. It reads: "Their heart has become hypocritical; now they will be found guilty."

Interestingly, Hosea makes mention of the fact that God's prophets will behave foolishly in the face of the coming judgment, and that as Jeremiah also described, birdcatchers will seek to lay traps among God's people. Hosea 9:7-8 reads as follows: "The days of being given attention must come; the days of the due payment must come. Those of Israel will know it. The prophet will be foolish, the man of inspired expression will be maddened on account of the abundance of your error, even animosity being abundant. The watchman of Ephraim was with my God. As regards a prophet, there is a trap of a birdcatcher on all his ways; there is animosity in the house of his God."

Certainly there is a growing animosity today among God's household due to the reproach that the organization has brought upon the sacred name of Jehovah, not to mention the many thousands who have already been stumbled in their faith due to such things as the Watchtower's NGO membership (http://www.e-watchman.com/essays/watchtower_as_ngo.html), false prophetic interpretations (http://www.e-watchman.com/essays/1914_gentile_times.html), and ruinous child abuse policies. The watchman, though, calls attention to Jehovah's coming judgment upon his house.

One aspect of Jehovah's coming judgment will be the settling accounts with his shepherds. James cautioned Christian men that teachers would receive a heavier judgment. Paul also verified that overseers are "those who will render an account" to God. The 34th chapter of Ezekiel is the legal basis for God's judgment of his shepherds. Ezekiel 34:4 says: "The sickened ones you have not strengthened, and the ailing one you have not healed, and the broken one you have not bandaged, and the dispersed one you have not brought back, and the lost one you have not sought to find, but with harshness you have had them in subjection, even with tyranny."

Encouragingly, Ezekiel goes on to foretell that after God feeds his self-serving negligent shepherds with judgment, and relieves them from serving as shepherds of his people, that he will personally bring his lost sheep back to the fold and bind up their wounds and heal them. Jehovah's coming judgment means justice for the silent lambs who have been made to suffer, not only at the hands of their wicked abusers, but also by the shepherds who have so far failed to care for them properly.

Although no human, no matter how caring, can remove the emotional scars that victims of child abuse bear deep in their souls, Jehovah can and will provide complete healing. Although no counselor, no matter how skillful, can give back the lost innocence to those robbed of it, Jehovah can and will create an entirely new person. Although no elder, no matter how just and compassionate, can undo the horrible wrongs committed, Jehovah can and will provide perfect justice. Jehovah has the wisdom, the power, and most importantly, the desire to set all things right.

What we need within the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses is not more lawyers fiddling with organizational policy. What we desperately need is Jehovah's judgment. The Watchtower has frequently advised victims of child abuse, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses in general, that we must "wait on Jehovah." Ironically, our waiting on Jehovah means that inevitably he is going to mete out some very harsh discipline upon those who probably imagine themselves to be least deserving of it. However, in regards to the so-called faithful slave, Christ Jesus stated a principle of accountability at Luke 12:48. It reads: "Indeed, everyone to whom much was given, much will be demanded of him; and the one whom people put in charge of much, they will demand more than usual of him."

Up to the present moment, the brothers have refused to take responsibility for any of the injustices that have taken place on their watch. It is not likely that they ever will, of their own accord. But Jesus assures us that there will be a settling of accounts with all of his servants. Jehovah proposes to bring the whole organization to its knees just as he did Israel on several occasions. Only when we acknowledge our error will Jehovah grant his people the blessings that we prayerfully anticipate.

In the concluding chapter of Hosea, Jehovah invites his chastised and humbled people to return to him. Verse one says: "Do come back, O Israel, to Jehovah your God, for you have stumbled in your error." Interestingly, the 3rd verse makes acknowledgement that it is by God "that a fatherless boy is shown mercy." This seems to indicate that part of the error that caused us to stumble had to do with our not showing mercy to the fatherless boy. (The fatherless boy can represent all of those who are disadvantaged, abused, and afflicted.) But, in spite of all of our stupidity and sins, like the loving and merciful Father that he is, Jehovah consolingly promises: "I shall heal their unfaithfulness. I shall love

them of my own free will, because my anger has turned back from him."

Whether you are personally a victim of child abuse, or perhaps one of many who are disturbed and even stumbled by the evils that have occurred within the organization, hopefully by our consideration of a few prophecies that deal with how Jehovah purposes to rectify such things, your faith in God might be restored and strengthened. The apostle Paul described God's word as being "alive and sharper than any two-edged sword." How true that is! How reassuring to know that men are not in control. Jehovah verifies for us through his written word that he has already seen what has taken place in secret. His solution is just as certain.

So whether you are a modern-day silent lamb or one who is heart-sick and dejected by what has taken place in Jehovah's organization, take courage from the fact that the true shepherd is at the door and his promise is as follows:

Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord Jehovah has said to them: "Here I am, I myself, and I will certainly judge between a plump sheep and a lean sheep, For the reason that with the flank and with the shoulder you kept pushing And with your horns you kept shoving all the sickened ones until you had scattered them to the outside. And I will save my sheep, and they will no longer become something for plunder; And I will judge between a sheep and a sheep. And I will raise up over them one shepherd, and he must feed them, even my servant David. He himself will feed them, and he himself will become their shepherd. And I myself, Jehovah, will become their God, and my servant David a chieftain in the midst of them. I myself, Jehovah, have spoken." (Ezekiel 34:20-24)

XJWNews.com News - October 14th 2002:

Free Expression

_POSTEDON 2002-10-14 19:36:59 by Mike Pence

News by Norm Havland

The Watchtower Society leadership do at times make some really outrageous statements. Statements so completely in conflict with reality that one would think even their most fervent followers would recognize as pure nonsense.

One such statement was made in an official press release about the Silentlambs march. It looks like this:

We respect a person's right to free expression. In fact, as Jehovah's Witnesses, we live by that principle every day of our lives.

Anyone with even the most superficial knowledge of the Watchtower Society must really choke on such a blatant dishonest statement. If there is anything that are totally and thoroughly banned within the Watchtower Society and among its millions of faithful followers it is free expression. We have just been witnessing what happened to those who have publicly used their alleged right to free expression and criticized the Watchtower leaders for their handling of child molestation within the sect. They were all summarily excommunicated. Their former friends and family wont even talk to them. What a convincing display of what the Watchtower Society really think of the right to free expression and what a demonstration that gives us all what they mean when they state that Jehovah's Witnesses live by that principle every day. Absolutely nothing could be further from the truth that such a statement.

Let us take a look at the real attitude of the Watchtower Society towards free expression.

As we all know free thought and thinking is of vital importance and the basis of free expression. What do the Watchtower Society hierarchy think about free and independent thinking?

quote:

*** w83 1/15 22 Exposing the Devil's Subtle Designs ***

Avoid Independent Thinking

20 From the very outset of his rebellion Satan called into question Gods way of doing things. He promoted independent thinking. You can decide for yourself what is good and bad, Satan told Eve. You dont have to listen to God. He is not really telling you the truth. (Genesis 3:1-5) To this day, it has been Satans subtle design to infect Gods people with this type of thinking.2 Timothy 3:1, 13.

21 How is such independent thinking manifested? A common way is by questioning the counsel that is provided by Gods visible organization.

As we can see from the above quote the prevailing idea in the Watchtower Society is that independent

thinking is actually invented by the devil! And typically enough if your independent thoughts results in a free expression that questions the Watchtower Society leaders counsel it is proof that it comes from the Devil. How is that for a demonstration of someone claiming to live by the principle of free expression every day? But what do Jehovah's Witnesses mean by the expression, independent thinking? Let us find out:

quote:

*** w83 1/15 27 Armed for the Fight Against Wicked Spirits ***

Fight Against Independent Thinking

19 As we study the Bible we learn that Jehovah has always guided his servants in an organized way. And just as in the first century there was only one true Christian organization, so today Jehovah is using only one organization. (Ephesians 4:4, 5; Matthew 24:45-47) Yet there are some who point out that the organization has had to make adjustments before, and so they argue: This shows that we have to make up our own mind on what to believe. This is independent thinking. Why is it so dangerous?

Well, here we have the definition. If you think that you yourself can decide what to think or believe, that you actually are free to make up YOUR OWN MIND about things then it is DANGEROUS? Would someone who claim to live by the principle of free expression every day of their lives write something like the quotes above?

But does this mean that the Watchtower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses dont know how important and vital independent thinking are to an individual in making decisions and making up ones mind? Are they really unaware of this simple fact? Let us find out. Read this next quote carefully:

quote:

*** w58 8/1 460 Dawns a New Era for the Irish ***

Fear has a great hold on the people. People are afraid of what their neighbors, their friends, relatives and clergy might think if they were even so much as to read the Bible on their own. For centuries the clergy have dominated their lives, told them what they can read, what they should believe and do. To ask a sound religious question is a demonstration of lack of faith in God and the church, according to the clergy. As a result, the Irish people do very little independent thinking. They are victims of the clergy and fear; but freedom is in sight.

In this quote we can clearly see that the Watchtower Society is fully aware of the danger involved when people do not think independently. We see that they criticize the Catholic clergy for not allowing their members to ask sound religious questions and as a result of the Irish clergy telling them what to read or not, they were harmed because they did: VERY LITTLE INDEPENDENT THINKING

If an Irish catholic asked a ask a sound religious question it was a demonstration of lack of faith in God and the church, according to the clergy. But let us for a moment compare what the Watchtower magazine said about independent thinking and asking questions about the Watchtower Society above.

quote:

*** w83 1/15 22 Exposing the Devil's Subtle Designs ***

Avoid Independent Thinking

21 How is such independent thinking manifested? A common way is by questioning the counsel that is provided by Gods visible organization.

There is absolutely no question about the fact that the Watchtower Society is perfectly aware of the harming effect the lack of independent thinking had on the Irish Catholics and presumably also how bad an effect a lack of such will have on any human being anywhere.

But still they seem to be extremely displeased when their own flock tries to exercise the same vital freedom within their own organization or church. Then independent thinking becomes a tool made by the Devil and any free expression or question about the decrees and instructions handed down by the Watchtower Society leaders is deemed dangerous and will result in immediate excommunication.

Can anyone spell hypocrite?

Evening Star U.K. Newspaper - October 14th 2002:

Jehovah's Witness guilty of sex charges

BY JANE HUNT

October 14, 200212:31

A SENIOR member of the Jehovahs Witness Congregation in Ipswich has been warned he could face a jail sentence after being convicted of two offences of indecent assault.

John Pickrell was today found guilty by a jury at Ipswich Crown Court of indecently touching a schoolgirl while giving her a piggyback on a beach and kissing another girl's foot.

Pickrell, 48, of Cedarcroft Road, Ipswich, has denied seven charges of indecent assault on the two girls.

Last week he was cleared of two of the offences on the direction of Judge Nicholas Beppard and today he was cleared of three others by the jury.

Sentence was adjourned for a pre-sentence report until the week beginning November 11.

Pickrell, who has no previous convictions, was released on bail but was warned by Judge Beppard that he could be facing a jail sentence.

Evening Star U.K. Newspaper - October 9th 2002:

<http://www.eveningstar.co.uk/content/news/NewsStory.asp?Brand=ESTOnline&Category=News&ItemId=IPEd09+Oct+2002+07%3A02%3A05%3A787> (<http://www.eveningstar.co.uk/content/news/NewsStory.asp?Brand=ESTOnline&Category=News&ItemId=IPEd09+Oct+2002+07:02:05:787>)

Man denies sex assault on girls

October 9, 2002 08:15

A SENIOR member of the Jehovah's Witness congregation in Ipswich indecently assaulted two schoolgirls, a court heard.

John Pickrell, 48, of Cedarcroft Road, Ipswich, has denied four offences of indecent assault on one of the girls and three offences in relation to the other.

Ipswich Crown Court was told yesterday one of the girls was aged between eight and 13 and the second was aged between 11 and 13 at the time of the alleged offences, some of which were said to have happened more than 20 years ago.

John Butcher, prosecuting, said Pickrell had been an elder in the Jehovah's Witness congregations at either the Kingdom Hall in Cavendish Street, Ipswich, or at Westbourne in Ipswich at the time.

He claimed Pickrell had kissed the first girl on the lips and put his tongue in her mouth and had indecently assaulted her on other occasions.

The victim had kept the alleged incident to herself until she told her husband about them in December last year.

Mr Butcher claimed Pickrell had also kissed the other girl, licked her hair and kissed her feet and toes.

Pickrell denied acting indecently towards the girls or indecently assaulting either of them. He admitted kissing one of them on the lips and tickling her bottom while giving her a piggyback, but said that had been an innocent display of affection.

The trial continues.

Mid-Valley Sunday Oregon News - October 5th 2002 (Also, the Associated Press Released the same Story on October 7th 2002):

POSTED: Oct 05, 2002 - 21:24:49 PST

Suit targets Jehovah's Witnesses

Benton complaint about sex abuse and church policy is said to be the first of hundreds across the U.S.

By Jennifer Rouse

Mid-Valley Sunday

A Corvallis man is suing the North Albany and North Corvallis Jehovah's Witness congregations and the religion's national headquarters for \$3 million. The lawsuit accuses church leaders of ignoring the sexual abuse he suffered as a child.

The suit is the first of hundreds of mass filings against Jehovah's Witnesses planned by the Texas law firm that filed it.

The complaint names the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York and numerous other defendants.

It alleges that when Tyler C. Davidow, now in his early 20s, was 4 or 5, a fellow Jehovah's Witness member abused him. His mother, Cathy Davidow, contends that when she went to the elders of the church, they did nothing to stop the abuse.

Tyler and Cathy Davidow both declined to be interviewed. In this report, Mid-Valley Sunday is not identifying the defendant also named in the suit because he could not be located to respond to the allegations.

Jim Riffe, an elder from the North Corvallis congregation, said he couldn't comment on the situation because he didn't know anything about it and hadn't been served with court papers yet.

"We'll address the matter when we are informed of it through the proper channels," Riffe said.

Steve Cuda, an elder from the North Albany congregation, also had not heard of the complaint and could not comment. It usually takes some time before respondents are served with notice of civil complaints.

Officials at the national headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in Brooklyn, N.Y., didn't know of the suit either.

However, J.R. Brown, a national spokesman for the organization, said that while Jehovah's Witnesses deal strictly with child abuse within the congregation, it isn't the church's job to report abuse.

"Nothing prevents them from calling the authorities," Brown said. "They don't have to call us first. These things operate separately. If the offender is part of the congregation, we will deal with it in a church setting. But if they are also reported to the authorities, we will not try to shield them."

A copy of the complaint was sent to the newspaper by Albany attorney James G. Nelson.

According to the lawsuit, Cathy Davidow owned a store called Blackbeard's Market, at 145 N.W. Second St., Corvallis, in the 1980s. While she worked at the market, she often brought Tyler with her and let him play in a storage area. Mother and child were members of the North Albany congregation.

In 1984, Cathy Davidow employed a woman who was a member of the North Corvallis congregation. According to the lawsuit, this woman often brought her teenage son with her to work, and, according to the lawsuit, he often stayed with Tyler in the storage area while the women worked.

In 1985, according to the complaint, Tyler told his mother that the teenager had been sexually abusing him for a year, and she went to the elders of her church.

Kimberlee Norris, the Fort Worth attorney handling the case, said that Jehovah's Witnesses encourage church members to take complaints to the church leaders.

"The control issue is so strong in Jehovah's Witness congregations," Norris said. "The setup is such that the elders are the voice of the Watchtower (the name of the Jehovah's Witness headquarters), and the Watchtower is the voice of Christ. They're taught that if you take it to the elders, you get the best forum already that you could ever be in."

According to the suit, when Davidow went to the elders of the church, they told her they would research the problem and take care of it, and that she shouldn't tell anyone else about it.

Oregon law requires members of the clergy, like teachers and social workers, to report any allegation of child abuse to the police. However, another law (ORS 40.260) provides an exception if it is part of a church's religious practice to keep confidential communications secret.

Brown, the national spokesman, said that Jehovah's Witness elders do report sex abuse in states where there are mandatory reporting laws.

"If it is a state that requires clergy to report, we of course would view that as taking precedence over ecclesiastical privilege," he said.

Time passed, and Davidow didn't see anything being done, either to help her son or to discipline the offender. She continued to ask the elders what they were doing about the issue, the lawsuit says. Eventually, she contacted the elders at the North Corvallis congregation, where the alleged abuser and his mother were members.

"The elders of (Corvallis congregation) instructed her to 'stop talking about it, we've got it handled,'" the lawsuit states.

In 1993, Davidow says she reported the matter to the Corvallis police.

"For her to come to that point, as a Jehovah's Witness, you have to come to the point where you're willing to be shunned," Norris said.

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that church members who rebel against the teachings of the church should be disciplined, for their own good, so that they might repent and return to fellowship.

That often takes the form of disfellowshipping -- all members of the congregation, even other family members, breaking all ties with the offender. An article on the Jehovah's Witness Web site mentions that even saying hello to a disfellowshipped person might be wrong.

When Cathy Davidow finally reported her son's abuse to the police, she was disfellowshipped. Tyler was not disfellowshipped but chose to leave the faith on his own.

The basis of the suit against the Jehovah's Witnesses is that the elders were negligent in failing to deal with the reports of sexual abuse. And according to Norris, it wasn't a simple oversight on the parts of elders in Oregon. She believes that child abuse in the Jehovah's Witness church is widespread because of the church's policies.

"It's not that they intend for children to be molested by the dozens," Norris said. "It's that their crummy policy allows this to happen. They've had notice upon notice upon notice that it is, in fact, occurring. At some point, does it rise to the level of gross negligence?"

That's why the suit doesn't just name the two local congregations, but the church's headquarters and subsidiaries in New York and Pennsylvania. And Davidow's suit is not the only one.

Norris and a team of other attorneys are filing suits alleging negligence against the Jehovah's Witness organization in all 50 states. Davidow's is the first because of the impending statute of limitations -- a civil suit for child sexual abuse can't be filed in Oregon after the victim reaches the age of 24.

Norris said the mass filings are "akin to a class action lawsuit."

Norris first began working on the issue last May, when a Texas woman approached her with a story similar to Davidow's.

"Her initial allegations were so outrageous as to cause me concern as to if they were even the truth," she said. "After I began to investigate her situation, and did research on other like situations, it became clear that what she experienced, and what others experienced, are systemic in the Jehovah's Witness organization."

Since then, Norris said she's heard almost the same story from 200 to 300 different people.

There are two specific Jehovah's Witness policies that Norris contends foster sexual abuse. One policy, she says, tells church members to report problems involving other believers to church leaders instead of police. The other is that the church requires two eyewitnesses to an incident before the accused person can be punished.

Brown, the Witness spokesman, said that while the church does require two witnesses or other compelling evidence before meting out any church discipline, that's beside the point because that requirement deals only with internal church procedures. He said the church does not forbid members from reporting crimes to the police.

"We're not trying to deal with the penalty of the law," he said. "That's a separate thing from our point of view. Yes, an abuser should pay the penalty, even if he has to sit in jail for 10 or 15 years."

Norris said that despite what church leaders say about encouraging church members to go to the police if they wish to, that rarely, if ever, happens among Jehovah's Witnesses.

Norris said that while Tyler Davidow does hope to reclaim damages for the emotional pain his unacknowledged child abuse caused him, he and the other people she represents have a larger goal in

mind.

"This is really difficult for him, but he wants to see policy change," she said.

"We want to change Watchtower Society policy that, in my opinion, fosters and encourages child abuse."

Evangelical Times News In Brief - October 2nd 2002:

JW organisation to face accusation of child abuse

A federal civil sexual abuse lawsuit has been filed in St Paul, Minnesota, against the Brooklyn-based Jehovahs Witness organization. The case is significant because it is one of a relatively small number filed against the Jehovahs Witnesses national headquarters. However, there will be many more, according to the leader of a nationwide support group for church members who have been abused by Jehovah Witnesses.

Edited by - UnDisfellowshipped on 23 October 2002 1:59:7

Edited by - UnDisfellowshipped on 24 October 2002 23:27:35



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Transcript of Australian News Channel 9 Sunday Television Program "Silent Witnesses" (This Program Aired on TV on September 22nd 2002):

The Catholic and Anglican churches in Australia are already engulfed in the scandal of child abuse. Sunday has managed to get inside the Jehovah's Witnesses, and found the WTS has secretly pursued a policy of obstructing police investigations into child abusers.

Aired September 22, 2002

GRAHAM DAVIS, REPORTER: At the Melbourne Tennis Centre, the gods of sport make way for the real thing, as 10,000 voices praise the almighty. These are just some of the 60,000 or so Australians who belong to the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, better known as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

PREACHER: We need to be zealous as proclaimers of God's kingdom, shining as illuminators of the world.

REPORTER: They're the clean-cut evangelists who appear at our doors, preaching Armageddon and the paradise to come for true believers.

PREACHER: Call back on everyone who shows even the slightest interest, even if we've just left them with a tract.

REPORTER: Yet as we'll see, the shepherds, as church leaders portray themselves, have created a hell on earth for some of the most vulnerable of their flock and they're outlaws in the classic sense, having placed themselves outside the laws that protect children from sexual predators. When it finally dawned on you that what you were witnessing was a policy of covering up child abuse, how did you feel about them?

NATALIE WEBB, CHILD ABUSE VICTIM: Devastated. Disappointed. Angry.

REPORTER: Today, victims like Natalie Webb speak out for the first time, accusing the church of covering up the crimes against them. She was abused by her own father, Victor, an outwardly respectable

member of the Bentleigh congregation in suburban Melbourne.

NATALIE WEBB: My earliest memory is having a bath with my father and he was touching me, and from other things around me, I realised that I would have been about four.

REPORTER: Four years old?

NATALIE WEBB: Four, yep.

REPORTER: And how long did the abuse go on for?

NATALIE WEBB: Till I was... just turned 17.

REPORTER: 17?

NATALIE WEBB: Mmm-hmm.

REPORTER: And presumably it progressed from..

NATALIE WEBB: Just touching to intercourse, penetration.

REPORTER: Natalie lived with her terrible secret until she was married - her father beaming like any other on her wedding day. Then, unable to bear it any longer, she told her story to this church elder, Maurice Hadley. Was there any suggestion whatsoever that the police be informed?

NATALIE WEBB: None at all. The opposite, actually. Maurice said to me that the authorities shouldn't be notified because it would be a bad witness and that they would be able to handle the situation.

REPORTER: So Maurice Hadley told you quite specifically not to go to the police?

NATALIE WEBB: Yes, yes, and no psychiatrists or psychologists either for me because I was having difficulties.

REPORTER: Why did he ban psychiatrists or psychologists from seeing you?

NATALIE WEBB: Because they're worldly and they are possibly Satanic and could fill my head with rubbish.

REPORTER: Incredibly, Natalie's story is the norm, not the exception, for child abuse victims in the Jehovah's Witnesses. Simon Thomas was 12 when he fell prey to this man, Robert Souter, of the Corrimal congregation on the NSW south coast. Even when Souter admitted his crimes to church elders, he was allowed to continue as a Jehovah's Witness. He also continued to molest other children. Was there any suggestion that anybody go to the police over this?

SIMON THOMAS, CHILD ABUSE VICTIM: No, none at all. My parents spoke to elders locally, they spoke to travelling overseers, and they were told that they shouldn't go to the police and the best thing to do would be to keep the congregation clean, not say anything, pray more and leave it to Jehovah.

REPORTER: How can you keep the congregation clean by keeping quiet and covering up something like this, when the person who's unclean is allowed back in?

SIMON THOMAS: Well, I don't know. I don't know.

REPORTER: Today, some disturbing answers, clear evidence that the Watchtower Society routinely tries to pervert the course of justice in child abuse cases by obstructing police investigations.

JIM DONALD, FORMER ELDER: Well, this is my copy of an elders' book and these are my handwritten notes taken down at the dictation from the circuit overseer.

REPORTER: Jim Donald is a former church elder now blowing the whistle on his fellow brothers with details of an edict so sensitive, it was never committed to paper.

JIM DONALD: This was a letter to all bodies of elders.

REPORTER: And it says here "child abuse confidential". What is it telling us there?

JIM DONALD: It's saying to us here "If interviewed by social workers or police or other authorities, "do not reveal if a confession has been made. "Contact society immediately."

REPORTER: So if a child abuser has said, "Yes, I did it", you're not to tell the police that?

JIM DONALD: No, not at all.

REPORTER: Do you think that's obstruction?

JIM DONALD: Obviously. Obviously.

REPORTER: Jim Donald is a Justice of the Peace who once spread Jehovah's word as a church elder in the northern NSW town of Glen Innes. Now he confines himself to spreading news of worldly matters

on his paper round, having abandoned the church four years ago.

JIM DONALD: We were to resist every approach by the authorities to willingly give over any information.

REPORTER: And you knew, did you, that that was the agenda, that you were not to cooperate?

JIM DONALD: Absolutely. You see, every instance like that is to be seen as an attack against pure worship and against Jehovah's name, and so what they call theocratic warfare is to take place.

REPORTER: Theocratic warfare?

JIM DONALD: Yes.

REPORTER: What does that mean?

JIM DONALD: That means we are in a battle situation.

REPORTER: With the police? With the State?

JIM DONALD: With the State.

ANDY FARRELL, FORMER MEMBER: They have a phrase they refer to which is theocratic warfare, and that is basically that it's acceptable to lie or to cover over things if it's for the good of God's purpose.

REPORTER: Andy Farrell left the Jehovah's Witnesses five years ago after a lifetime's association.

ANDY FARRELL: They won't condone breaking the law where it's a more black and white issue, say it was a murder case or something like that, but there are certainly a lot of problems of a lesser scale that the church tries to deal with internally that probably belong in a court of law.

REPORTER: Child abuse?

ANDY FARRELL: Yeah, exactly.

REPORTER: You've written here "search warrants and subpoenas". Now, what did they tell you?

JIM DONALD: They may make a forced entry into the hall. So we were encouraged to stand in front of the door and not to willingly open the door for them.

REPORTER: Officially, the church denies all knowledge of the concept of theocratic warfare, but Jim Donald's account of the verbal instruction not to cooperate with police was confirmed to Sunday by another former elder, though he wouldn't be filmed. There's nothing on paper, right?

JIM DONALD: No.

REPORTER: Nothing on paper at all?

JIM DONALD: No.

REPORTER: Do you think this is because their legal department would have known they might have a problem with this in the future?

JIM DONALD: Oh, I think so, yeah.

REPORTER: Because they've got a big problem with this, haven't they?

JIM DONALD: Absolutely, yes.

REPORTER: And the man who was once the society's own lawyer agrees.

REV WARRYN STUCKEY, FORMER WATCHTOWER SOCIETY LAWYER: I think it can have the practical effect of perverting the course of justice.

REPORTER: It could?

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: It could have that practical effect.

REV WARRYN STUCKEY ADDRESSING CHURCH: Let's commence our service by singing together our first hymn number 673 - 'There is a redeemer'.

REPORTER: The Reverend Warryn Stuckey has left behind the law and the Jehovah's Witnesses to become an Anglican priest. It was a short journey physically, for his church is a stone's throw from the Watchtower's Sydney headquarters. But in personal and theological terms, his was a momentous defection and as a former elder and director of Watchtower companies, he's a potent witness against his former associates.

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: I could imagine that if it was a case of any other crime, like murder or something, that there would be full cooperation and why in this case there is not suggests that there is

something that they're protecting.

REPORTER: Protecting the church's reputation or even protecting child abusers perhaps?

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: Or particular child abusers.

REPORTER: The Jehovah's Witnesses, in fact, routinely shield paedophiles from the law - as in the case of Robert Souter, allowing them to offend again and again. It's been called a 'paedophile paradise'. Would you agree with that?

JIM DONALD: Yeah, I've heard that, yes.

REPORTER: Would you agree with that?

JIM DONALD: Yes.

REPORTER: You would?

JIM DONALD: Yes.

REPORTER: Paedophile paradise?

ANDY FARRELL: Yes.

REPORTER: You'd agree with that?

ANDY FARRELL: I think that's true.

REPORTER: So this was the body of the Kingdom Hall here?

SIMON THOMAS: Yes.

REPORTER: And in the greatest betrayal of all, far from suffering the little children, the church has inflicted untold suffering that lingers into adulthood.

SIMON THOMAS: I remember that the first time he actually touched me and did something to me, I just - that was a real life-changing moment. It was terrible. I just knew it would never be the same after that.

REPORTER: For years, Simon Thomas has privately nursed the hurt of a blighted childhood at the Kingdom Hall. Now he wants his story told of how the church protected his abuser, Robert Souter.

SIMON THOMAS: It was supposed to be a really nice, safe place, but it wasn't for me or a lot of other kids.

REPORTER: You now know, don't you, that after Souter was abusing you, he was abusing a whole host of others?

SIMON THOMAS: Yes.

REPORTER: How many?

SIMON THOMAS: I know of 10 personally, but the police that I've spoken to have said there's around 40.

REPORTER: 40 others?

SIMON THOMAS: That they know of.

REPORTER: After you?

SIMON THOMAS: After me.

REPORTER: If the church had listened to the pleas that you were making, how many of those kids could have been saved?

SIMON THOMAS: Well, all of them, I think.

REPORTER: All of them - 40 kids?

SIMON THOMAS: I think all of them could have been saved.

REPORTER: Ingleburn, south-west Sydney, the Watchtower's Bethel or House of God, its sprawling Australian headquarters. More than 300 people live and work on this site, that includes a publishing arm printing Watchtower material in 70 languages. In the legal department here, every instance of child abuse known to the church is carefully filed away, but it's not reported to the authorities. The church regards such cases as confidential. So, just how many child abusers are there on the files in there? Well, the church tells us pointedly, it's none of our business. But at every turn in this investigation we came across victims unwilling to speak out, not because of their abusers, but because of the church - fearful of losing their friends, even their families. The church calls it "Keeping the congregation clean". Not of paedophiles, but of anything that damages the Watchtower's reputation. How do you think you're

going to be treated by the church from now on?

SIMON THOMAS: I don't know. It's yet to be seen. But I would rather say something than to just be quiet and wait any longer.

REPORTER: Surprisingly, Simon still counts himself a witness, whereas Natalie Webb has left the church behind, unable to come to terms with the blind eye it turned to her father's depravity.

NATALIE WEBB: Because my dad wanted me to have sex with animals and have lesbian liaisons and like all these things.

REPORTER: And you told them that?

NATALIE WEBB: Oh yeah, yeah, they knew, and they said "We don't need to know details to make a decision. We're being guided by God".

PREACHER: Jehovah, our God of love, we come before your lofty throne and ask that we can be heard by you.

REPORTER: But before we examine these cases in detail, some understanding is needed of what sets the Jehovah's Witnesses apart, what makes their critics doubt they'll ever be shamed into reform by the kind of allegations that have forced changes in the mainstream churches, like the Anglicans and Roman Catholics. Is there any chance whatsoever that this organisation can reform itself?

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: No.

REPORTER: None?

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: None.

REPORTER: So if there's going to be any reform of their handling of child abuse, it's going to have to be imposed on them?

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: Yes.

REPORTER: To Jehovah's Witnesses, there's only one true religion - theirs. Jehovah God, the only God, his word in the Bible to be taken literally. The act of baptism through total immersion symbolises total surrender to Jehovah and his only legitimate authority on earth, the Watchtower Society. Witnesses live in what they call "the truth", the rest of us in "the world", a world the church would have it governed by Satan.

PREACHER: If you decide you want to do some of your own thing, well, you can. But be careful, because this world is deceived. It's deceived by the Devil.

REPORTER: And Satan's temptations abound, even across a crowded room. Jehovah's Witnesses aren't allowed to marry outside the church, a source of much heartache in itself. What were the circumstances that led to you leaving?

JIM DONALD: I attended a son's wedding.

REPORTER: Your own son?

JIM DONALD: My own son, yeah.

REPORTER: What was wrong with that?

JIM DONALD: Well, he was marrying a young lass who was an Anglican. Now, all other churches are considered as children of the Devil. So they said - and I quote from the man who was the branch coordinator at the time - "You don't give your children to the Philistines."

REPORTER: But the strictures go on. Jehovah's Witnesses can't vote, can't join the military, aren't allowed to celebrate Christmas, even their own birthdays.

ANDY FARRELL: Birthdays because they see it as bringing too much attention to a single person. With Christmas, I think everybody understands that a lot of the symbolism associated with Christmas obviously isn't Christian, it's come from other practices around the world and they use that as part of their justification.

REPORTER: And most controversial of all, Jehovah's Witnesses can't have blood transfusions, a dictate based on an obscure biblical passage that's cost many thousands of lives worldwide.

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: I was 18 at the time, my brother was 20. He shot himself in the next room. Um, he shot himself in the head. We rushed in there, he was bleeding from every - you know, from his ears, his nose, everything. My first thought, I said to my parents "Whatever you do, don't let them give him a blood transfusion".

REPORTER: So you'd been brainwashed?

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: I had been brainwashed. That is what I thought, he mustn't have a blood transfusion. Here's my brother dying in front of me, and that was my first thought.

REPORTER: Your priority.

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: My priority.

REPORTER: How do you feel about that?

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: Oh, on the verge of tears now as I think about it. It was just so callous, so... yeah, that's what the religion does.

REPORTER: Bad stuff.

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: Bad stuff. Bad stuff.

SIMON THOMAS: Some of it actually here inside the hall...

REPORTER: And then there's the child abuse, all the elements of exploitation, betrayal and cover-up present in the saga of what happened to Simon Thomas. He actually molested you inside the church itself?

SIMON THOMAS: Inside the Kingdom Hall, yeah, yep.

REPORTER: Amazing.

SIMON THOMAS: It is, looking back it was amazing.

REPORTER: And equally amazing, Natalie Webb's story. Her father's abuse compounded by the callous indifference of church leaders when it was brought to their attention. You must have been devastated?

NATALIE WEBB: Well, I tried to take my own life a few weeks later because I couldn't cope with it, mm.

REPORTER: So you tried to commit suicide?

NATALIE WEBB: Mm.

REPORTER: As a result of that, did you get any help at all from them?

NATALIE WEBB: I got a counselling session from them saying that it was due to me not forgiving my father, that's why I wasn't coping.

SIMON THOMAS: Well, I was told that to endure until the end is a... is to be faithful. It demonstrates your faith. And I was also told to leave it to Jehovah because Jehovah will work it out, but why can't we expose these things that are happening and then leave it to Jehovah?

REPORTER: In part two, the shocking details of these cover-ups. Yeah, I just wanted to talk to you about the sex abuse case involving Natalie Webb. And we confront the elders, who in Jehovah's name and with the church's backing, kept the authorities at bay. Do you recall telling her that she shouldn't go to the police?

MAURICE HADLEY, CHURCH ELDER: Not at all.

REPORTER: She says you did?

MAURICE HADLEY: Well, that's her word against mine, isn't it?

REPORTER: Like many victims of child abuse, Natalie Webb kept her secret into adulthood, but at the age of 26, she could cope no longer. It was her husband who finally brought matters to a head.

NATALIE WEBB: He rang up my father and said, "We can't live with this anymore. It has to come out in the open. "I'll give you a week to go to the elders."

REPORTER: But Victor Webb wasn't about to confess, so he was exposed. OK, so your husband goes to the elders. Which elder did he go and see?

NATALIE WEBB: Maurice Hadley.

MAURICE HADLEY: Maurice Hadley, yes, I'm Maurice Hadley.

REPORTER: Hi - Graham Davis from the Sunday program. I just wanted talk to you about the sex abuse case involving Natalie Webb.

MAURICE HADLEY: Oh, right.

REPORTER: You know her father?

MAURICE HADLEY: Well, indeed I do.

REPORTER: You used to play tennis with him, didn't you?

MAURICE HADLEY: (Laughs) Where did you get all this information?

REPORTER: Well, we have our sources. Do you still have any contact with Vic?

MAURICE HADLEY: Oh, occasionally.

REPORTER: What did Maurice Hadley say to him?

NATALIE WEBB: Um well, he was very shocked and couldn't believe it.

REPORTER: Because your father had been so devout?

NATALIE WEBB: And they were quite friendly.

REPORTER: What do you think about what he did to his daughter?

MAURICE HADLEY: Oh, I think it's deplorable. Absolutely disgusting.

REPORTER: Why had...

MAURICE HADLEY: And I have never ever condoned that man's behaviour.

REPORTER: As senior elder at the local Kingdom Hall, Maurice Hadley formed a judicial committee, the way the church deals with all breaches of its code of behaviour, from smoking a cigarette, through to serious crimes.

NATALIE WEBB: There were three elders, including him, in that committee. And they apparently - so Maurice told me - spoke to Bethel in Sydney and decided amongst themselves that no-one should know about it, it should be a private reproof.

REPORTER: So, for sexually abusing his daughter from the age of four, a crime he readily admitted, all Victor Webb got was a reprimand behind closed doors. A private reproof?

NATALIE WEBB: A private, yep so, and then he would be put on a course of bible studies, because that's what was wrong with him - spiritually he was sick, so he was told.

REPORTER: At the very least, Natalie Webb had wanted her father disfellowshipped - expelled from the congregation - the ultimate sanction for Jehovah's Witnesses. It didn't happen. Why didn't the elders of the church disfellowship him for what he did?

MAURICE HADLEY: Why didn't they?

REPORTER: Yep. Why didn't YOU?

MAURICE HADLEY: Well, I'm not the decision maker.

REPORTER: You were.

MAURICE HADLEY: No, no, I was only one of them - I was a committee - part of the committee at the time.

REPORTER: Can you tell me why he wasn't disfellowshipped?

MAURICE HADLEY: Well, not now I can't.

NATALIE WEBB: I'd believed all my life that when you do something wrong, you get disfellowshipped, and I guess I went a little bit crazy and I just couldn't work it out.

REPORTER: A secret deliberation, a private reproof, no recourse whatsoever to the proper authorities. Did you go to the police?

MAURICE HADLEY: ..which is a reasonable - no, I didn't.

REPORTER: Why not?

MAURICE HADLEY: Well, it was something for the family to decide and do.

NATALIE WEBB: Maurice said to me that the authorities shouldn't be notified because it would be a bad witness and that they would be able to handle the situation.

REPORTER: So Maurice Hadley told you quite specifically...

NATALIE WEBB: Mmm-hmm, yes.

REPORTER: ..not to go to the police?

NATALIE WEBB: Yes.

MAURICE HADLEY: Yeah, and I say that that's not true.

REPORTER: You swear by that?

MAURICE HADLEY: I swear by that categorically.

REPORTER: You never said that to her?

MAURICE HADLEY: Never said that to her.

REPORTER: Yet here's something that lends weight to Natalie's claim - a letter from her mother to Maurice Hadley and the other elders in 1997 -

"Your inability and reluctance to deal with the police shows we would have been waiting forever."

REPORTER: By now, the family had had enough and had gone to the police themselves.

NATALIE WEBB: Because I'd never had any dealings with the police, I was very apprehensive, but they were just the most compassionate, wonderful lot of people, and I was so surprised. I got more caring and concern from them than I did from any elder. Genuine caring.

REPORTER: Victor Webb pleaded guilty in the Victorian County Court to eight counts of indecent assault and seven counts of incest. He was sent to jail for 10 years, but the church elders supported the criminal, not his victim.

NATALIE WEBB: They sent three representatives from the congregation to be with Dad, yep, and...

REPORTER: During the trial?

NATALIE WEBB: During the trial, and no-one was sent for me, and in fact, they ignored us when we walked into the court, they wouldn't even speak to us. I guess they thought I was Satanic or heading down that way, yeah.

REPORTER: But the real evil-doer is still being supported behind bars. You go and see him in jail?

MAURICE HADLEY: I visit him periodically.

REPORTER: So you go and see him in prison?

MAURICE HADLEY: About twice a year.

REPORTER: And why do you do that?

MAURICE HADLEY: Why do I do it?

REPORTER: Mm.

MAURICE HADLEY: Well, don't you believe that people can change?

REPORTER: Even now, Victor Webb hasn't been disfellowshipped, though the private reproof became a public reproof when the police became involved.

MAURICE HADLEY: Yes, before all onlookers, other members of the congregation were advised of his situation so that parents could, if they chose to, take precautionary steps to avoid situations that might compromise their children.

REPORTER: And that was it. How do you feel about the church now?

NATALIE WEBB: Mm, um... I'm still very disappointed. The more I hear, I just am so saddened that it's so endemic and everywhere. It's very saddening.

REPORTER: And there are other cover-ups in the church that have had even more serious consequences, allowing paedophiles to offend again and again. What happened to Simon Thomas is, by any measure, a shocking indictment of the Jehovah's Witnesses and their willful disregard of the secular law. Now this is where he brought you or followed you quite a bit, wasn't it?

SIMON THOMAS: Yep.

REPORTER: We're back at the place where, aged just 12, Simon first encountered his abuser, Robert Souter.

SIMON THOMAS: You know, he'd touch and feel and he'd laugh about it or he'd give me a clip around the ear, give me a good whack, and...

REPORTER: Just to make sure you went along with him?

SIMON THOMAS: ..just to make sure I, yeah. And then he'd go back up inside.

REPORTER: And then there were the bible study sessions at Robert Souter's home.

SIMON THOMAS: Probably the worst of what happened to me happened here at this house.

REPORTER: And we're talking about extreme abuse?

SIMON THOMAS: Yeah, extreme, yeah, extreme abuse. At first it was almost surreal. It was like it wasn't happening, but I was afraid to say anything. It's just the usual - I was just afraid because I didn't want my parents to be upset and I didn't want the congregation to be upset, I didn't want bad things said about Jehovah's Witnesses, so I basically just...

REPORTER: Kept it to yourself?

SIMON THOMAS: ..kept it to myself, copped it on the chin.

REPORTER: For how long? SIMON THOMAS: For about three years.

REPORTER: Then one night, a shocking revelation. When Simon's younger brother has a nervous breakdown on a church trip to the NT.

SIMON THOMAS: He phoned my parents to tell them that he'd been abused by Robert Souter, and it was horrific, the situation was terrible. So my father approached one of the elders and said, "Look, Robert Souter has done this and this and this to my son." So the elder said, "OK, we'll take care of it." And I'd heard this, obviously, and I approached the elder that my father spoke to and I said, "Look, my brother's telling the truth because it's also happened to me."

REPORTER: Can you tell me the name of that elder?

SIMON THOMAS: That elder that we spoke to at that time was John Wingate.

REPORTER: John Wingate?

JOHN WINGATE, CHURCH ELDER: That's right.

REPORTER: Yeah, I'm Graham Davis from the Sunday program at Channel 9. I just wanted to talk to you about Robert Souter and the abuse of the Thomas boys in Wollongong.

JOHN WINGATE: No comment.

REPORTER: The boys first came to you, didn't they, the family first came to you?

JOHN WINGATE: No comment.

REPORTER: Well, Simon Thomas has told us that, so we know that. John Wingate is still an elder of the Cooma congregation in southern NSW, where Robert Souter had moved and we now know, had begun abusing children at the Kingdom Hall there. What did Wingate say to you?

SIMON THOMAS: Well, he said - he seemed to take it very seriously and he said, "Look." He said, "We'll chase it up and leave it with me." And that was the last we heard of it.

REPORTER: You said to him, "Leave it with me." He says that's the last he heard of it. Did you feel that you had any responsibility to get back to this family.

JOHN WINGATE: I have no comment to make to you. No, I have no comment to make to you.

REPORTER: Unbeknown to the family, John Wingate and the other elders did act. They disfellowshipped Robert Souter, expelled him from the congregation. But it wasn't long before the Thomas family got some devastating news.

SIMON THOMAS: It was around about the six months and they reinstated him into the Cooma congregation.

REPORTER: What did you think when you were told that?

SIMON THOMAS: I couldn't believe it. I was stunned and I was unbelievably upset.

REPORTER: Now, what that family wants to know is why he was reinstated into the church around six months later?

JOHN WINGATE: Ring the Watchtower Society of Australia and they'll answer all your questions regarding that situation.

REPORTER: Well, can you tell me, sir, why you...

JOHN WINGATE: I cannot make comments on it.

REPORTER: Why can't you speak about it?

JOHN WINGATE: Because I'm not at liberty to.

REPORTER: Why?

JOHN WINGATE: Because I'm not.

REPORTER: You handled the case.

JOHN WINGATE: That's none of your business.

SIMON THOMAS: I spoke to an elder down there and he said Robert Souter was repentant so when you're repentant, you're allowed back into the congregation.

JOHN WINGATE: Do you have a problem with hearing? Do you have a hearing impediment? I just told you...

REPORTER: I'm trying to find some answers.

JOHN WINGATE: You're not going to get answers off me because I've told you...

REPORTER: So in the absence of any answers from the elders, let's look at the Watchtower's guidelines for dealing with child abuse -

"When a judicial committee determines that a child molester is repentant and will remain a member of the Christian congregation, it would be appropriate to speak to him very frankly, strongly urging him as to the dangers of hugging or holding children on his lap."

REPORTER: I mean, what sort of a deterrent is that?

JIM DONALD: (Laughs) Well, it's none, obviously, because those sorts of things would be just, what would be in public view. The thing that escapes the society's viewpoint on this child molesting situation is that all of this takes place in secret.

REPORTER: So secret is child abuse that Simon Thomas thought he was alone in being abused by Robert Souter, until he found out about his younger brother and then later, about another brother as well. Did you have any sense of guilt that you might have been able to save your two brothers?

SIMON THOMAS: I did, from then on, and I still have that feeling. And it's part of the reason why I'm doing what I'm doing today. Because if I'd said something back then, I could have saved - I could have helped, maybe in some way, dozens of others.

REPORTER: But maybe not. For in the most extraordinary dictate of all, the Jehovah's Witnesses rulebook insists on this - "There must be two or three eyewitnesses, not just persons repeating what they have heard. No action can be taken if there is only one witness."

REPORTER: Blind Freddy knows that a child abuser doesn't sit around waiting for two or three witnesses before doing anything. JIM DONALD: That's correct.

REPORTER: How is it that this escapes the elders of the church?

JIM DONALD: They rely on a biblical text which says that all matters are to be established on the mouth of two or three witnesses.

REPORTER: As Jim Donald tells it, this rule has stifled the plaintive cries of victims time and time again and was a major factor in his decision to leave the church behind for good.

JIM DONALD: A young lass made allegations that this particular individual had interfered with her sexual organs. Yeah. REPORTER: And you were given the job of investigating...

JIM DONALD: Yes.

REPORTER: ..this allegation? What happened?

JIM DONALD: Well, all we could do is pose the questions.

REPORTER: To him?

JIM DONALD: To him, and obviously he said, "Oh, no, no, that's all a mistake and she's had problems. And you know, she comes from a weird family," sort of thing.

REPORTER: So in the absence of the church's rule that there be at least two or three witnesses, this girl was not to be believed?

JIM DONALD: That's right.

REPORTER: And that was the end of the matter?

JIM DONALD: Yep.

REPORTER: But for her father's confession, that's just what would have happened to Natalie Webb. If he'd denied it and it was only your word against him, because of the two witness rule, nothing would have happened. Is that fair to assume?

NATALIE WEBB: That's correct.

SIMON THOMAS: This one's called 'The Wrestle'. It's actually wrestling with a decision on whether I

should actually go to the police.

REPORTER: For Simon Thomas, years went by, as he and his family nursed their trauma - black years chronicled in his paintings.

SIMON THOMAS: This one there, that's called 'Life at 15'.

REPORTER: Then, six years ago, Simon approached the church elders again.

SIMON THOMAS: And I said to the elders there that I was really struggling with what happened to me and that I needed some help. I wasn't coping.

REPORTER: And what did they say to you?

SIMON THOMAS: They said to me back then, they said - and these are the exact words - They said, "Obviously for this problem to be bothering you "for so long, "you're not praying enough."

REPORTER: You're kidding?

SIMON THOMAS: That's exactly what was said to me, so I shut up again for another year or two.

REPORTER: And then?

SIMON THOMAS: And then I decided that I was going to go to the police.

REPORTER: Robert Souter was sent to jail for a minimum of three years by Judge John Goldring, who had this to say about the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society -

"The church authorities took it upon themselves to act as if they were the civil authorities which they had no right to do. This matter was not reported to the police, as it should have been and I am surprised that the police have not taken any action against the church authorities. I hope they will do so. The State has responsibility of protecting young people and all citizens have a serious moral responsibility to assist it in doing so. I cannot criticise the church sufficiently seriously for not having reported this matter".

REPORTER: Do you feel any moral responsibility for the fact that he continued to abuse other children?

JOHN WINGATE: I think you have a moral responsibility to respect my wishes and follow the procedure I've given you and that is to contact the Watchtower Society of Australia. Don't harass me.

REPORTER: Every child in this photograph with Simon Thomas was abused by Robert Souter. As we now know, the total number Souter molested could be as high as 40.

SIMON THOMAS: I think all of them could have been saved, but I could have been saved myself because I found out that one of the sisters in the congregation had spoken to an elder and said that she'd seen Robert Souter doing something to HER son and this was before Robert Souter abused me.

PREACHER: Remember our hearts and minds are dedicated to Jehovah and we must be holy because he is holy.

REPORTER: We asked the Watchtower Society a series of questions about its handling of the cases of Robert Souter and Victor Webb and asked them to tell us how many child abusers they've uncovered in their ranks. We were told it wasn't the business of the media to know, though the church did say very few were elders or those holding positions of responsibility. In this letter, Viv Mouritz, the society's Australian president, declined our request for an interview and said about the claims of Simon Thomas and Natalie Webb -

"My inquiries indicate that the elders involved did not give instructions not to report the abuse to the police".

REPORTER: It's at odds with everything we've heard from a number of sources, including a judge. But on previous form, the congregation will be told our story is the work of Satan.

PREACHER: The media out there, with all its power and its might, it presents human nature in three Ds, three Ds - debauchery of every kind, deception of every kind and demonism of every kind - and we need to be aware of that.

REPORTER: But the authorities and the courts need to be aware of something else, something far more sinister - the church's notion of the truth. In this book 'Insight on the Scriptures', it says here, doesn't it "Lying generally involves saying something false to a person who is entitled to know the truth".

JIM DONALD: Yes.

REPORTER: Would your average judge or magistrate be somebody who was entitled to know the

truth?

JIM DONALD: It would be very difficult for a person not to uphold what the society would want. They would back the society, and they would see that as backing Jehovah, in which case, these people, the court, is not entitled to know the truth.

REPORTER: Is not?

JIM DONALD: No. And in that case they would say that's not a lie.

REPORTER: So it's quite possible, given this definition of lying, that a Jehovah's Witness could go before a civil court in this country and lie to their back teeth?

JIM DONALD: Yes.

REPORTER: And this from the man who was once the society's own lawyer.

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: That has always been, as long as I remember, has been Watchtower doctrine, that only those who are entitled to know the truth deserve the truth.

REPORTER: Right, but if they determined that a particular judge or a particular court is not entitled to know the truth, they won't tell the truth?

REV WARRYN STUCKEY: Correct.

REPORTER: Do you recall telling her that she shouldn't go to the police?

MAURICE HADLEY: Not at all.

REPORTER: She says you did?

MAURICE HADLEY: Oh, well that's her word against mine, isn't it?

REPORTER: So who is entitled to know the truth?

MAURICE HADLEY: I mean, who do you think you are anyway? Since when have you become the bees knees on all of this?

REPORTER: So is Vic repentant, is he, is that it?

MAURICE HADLEY: Well, I would like to think so, but that's not for me to judge, is it? That's between him and his God ultimately, is it not?

REPORTER: Him and his God?

MAURICE HADLEY: Well, don't you think that?

PREACHER: Brothers, as we continue to pray for help in controlling our sinful inclinations, we will see Jehovah help us.

REPORTER: Leave it to Jehovah, the constant refrain of those who purport to live in the truth and see themselves as his only true representatives. Their victims want them brought to account in the world, an official investigation into the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

NATALIE WEBB: It needs reform forced on it and waiting for Jehovah just doesn't work.

JIM DONALD: I think it needs to have the lid taken off, yeah, because young kids' lives are being ruined.

REPORTER: So it's time that governments cracked down on this organisation?

NATALIE WEBB: Oh, definitely, mm. I'd hate to think how many children are being abused now.

REPORTER: Even as we speak?

NATALIE WEBB: As we speak.

SIMON THOMAS: I find it hard, even though there are beautiful people within the Jehovah's Witnesses - a lot are still my friends - I find it extremely difficult to have a bond and to be a part of a brotherhood with them now. The organisation - the organisational procedures need to change because kids cannot suffer like that anymore. It's wrong.

Canadian Press (CP) News Story (also appeared in the Toronto Star Newspaper) - September 22nd 2002:

Sunday September 22 2:59 PM EST

Closing arguments to begin in Jehovah's Witness lawsuit; sexual coverup alleged

By JAMES MCCARTEN

TORONTO (CP) - They sit in the gallery like guests at a wedding, as neatly divided by their spiritual beliefs and lifestyles as the two sides in the legal battle they're in court every day to witness.

On one side sit dozens of Jehovah's Witnesses, meticulously groomed men and women - many clad in crisp, conservative business attire - on hand to support their church as it defends its doctrine.

On the other side are the friends and family of Vicki Boer, a former Witness who is suing the church and three of its elders for their handling of her allegations of sexual abuse nearly 15 years ago.

Until Thursday, their ranks included Grace Gough, a devout Jehovah's Witness for 20 years before she devoted her life to helping others escape what she considers little more than a cult.

"I couldn't have gone and sat through any more of it, even if I tried," Gough, 75, said Friday from her home in Fergus, Ont., where she runs a support group called Cult Awareness and Recovery.

"I just can't believe in this."

For two weeks, an Ontario Court justice has been getting a crash course in the ways of the Witnesses as Boer squares off against a church that shaped her life for more than 20 years.

Final arguments are expected to begin Monday.

Boer alleges the defendants - elders Steve Brown, Brian Cairns and John Didur, as well as the Watchtower and Bible Tract Society of Canada, the church's governing body - failed to get her adequate treatment for the abuse she suffered at the hands of her father between the ages of 11 and 14 in the family home in Shelburne, about 100 kilometres northwest of Toronto.

Rather than immediately notify the Children's Aid Society and allow Boer to seek counselling outside the church, she was required, according to Biblical principles, to confront her father and allow him to repent his alleged sins, the suit alleges.

Elders Brown and Cairns were more concerned about the "clean image" of their faith than they were about Boer's well-being, said Harald Momm, one of the five elders who resigned their positions over the case.

"They didn't want to have anything to do with the law of the land ... they wanted it kept quiet, and we didn't agree with that," Momm told court last week.

"This has been going on for 13 years and all I ever got out of it is: 'It is important to keep a clean image. Never mind about the victims.'"

During the final weeks of 1989 and early months of 1990, controversy raged within the Witness community in Shelburne over Boer's complaints, particularly among the eight elders charged with overseeing the congregation.

Momm and four others argued that Ontario law required them to immediately report a case of sexual abuse and allow the alleged victim to seek medical help and psychiatric counselling.

Eventually, the case was reported to Children's Aid and the police, although no charges ever ensued.

Meanwhile, with the remaining elders convinced of his "spiritual repentance," Boer's father, Gower Palmer, rose through the ranks and enjoyed a level of privilege within the congregation normally reserved for the most respected members, said Momm.

Palmer, 58, continues to live in Shelburne and has never been criminally charged. Colin Stevenson, who represents the defendants, argued that a childhood of sexual abuse at the hands of her father, not the ways of her church, sent Boer down the rocky path that has been her adult life.

Stevenson confronted Boer with a litany of problems - job insecurity, sexual dalliances, emotional turmoil - that have plagued her in the years since leaving the family she says abandoned her.

None of them - sexual harassment on the job, being ostracized by friends and her mother, a nervous breakdown and marital troubles, including a variety of extra-marital affairs - are the fault of the church elders whom she alleges failed to deal properly with the abuse, Stevenson argued.

But Boer stood her ground, wiping away tears as she insisted none of it would have happened had she been allowed at age 18 by the church to get psychiatric and medical help.

With her military husband overseas, she had a nervous breakdown "because my husband was gone and because my family had disowned me; I was being blamed, and everything I knew in my life was gone," she sobbed.

"If things were done properly, none of this would have happened. My mother wouldn't have hated me and I wouldn't have been left alone."

While victims of sexual abuse normally aren't identified in public, Boer has agreed to allow her name to be publicized as part of her effort to promote what she alleges in abuse within the confines of the church's congregations.

As part of their beliefs in a strict interpretation of Bible teachings, Jehovah's Witnesses reject anything political or "worldly" that distracts from their focus on Christ and the second coming, which they consider imminent.

Birthdays, secular holidays and Christmas are not celebrated; children are often required to leave class during the Lord's Prayer and the national anthem, Boer said.

And anyone who runs afoul of the religion's strictest tenets will find themselves excommunicated, or "disfellowshipped," often to such an extent that they're shunned by their own family.

For her part, it's been years since Gough saw her 56-year-old daughter or 18-year-old granddaughter, both Witnesses, because of the church's notorious tradition of turning a cold shoulder to outsiders.

Describing herself as "having a relationship with Jesus Christ," Gough now quotes Karl Marx - "religion is the opiate of the masses," she says - and shuns organized religion in all its forms.

"I do believe (Marx) was right there, and I do believe religion does more damage than anything," Gough said.

"I think when a person does as Christ said, to love one another - 'love thine enemies, pray for those who hurt you, pray for those who persecute you' - I think that's it, and I've been praying for that a lot".

The Toronto Sun Newspaper - September 18th 2002:

Wednesday, September 18, 2002

'Wicked' testimony

Church sex-abuse suit

By IAN MCDOUGALL, TORONTO SUN

An elder in the Jehovah's Witness church told court yesterday he was assured a report of sexual abuse had been passed on to the proper provincial authorities.

David Walker testified yesterday in the \$700,000 civil case of a woman suing the Jehovah's Witness church over allegations they failed to notify provincial authorities she was being sexually abused by her father and then traumatized by the way the case was handled by the congregation.

"We abhor what is wicked. This is wicked," Walker said. "I was assured this matter had in fact been reported to the authorities."

Court has heard that the woman's father turned himself into Children's Aid on Feb. 5, 1990 after a judicial committee was held in the Shelburne congregation to punish him.

Walker, an elder in the neighbouring congregation of Flesherton, was a member of the committee, along with Steven Brown and Brian Cairns. Cairns and Brown are both named as defendants in the lawsuit.

Earlier yesterday, court heard testimony from psychiatrist George Awad, who evaluated the woman in 1999.

He said he had concluded that the woman suffered from anxiety related to the sexual abuse she had suffered from her father and the way the case had been dealt with by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Globe and Mail Canadian Newspaper - September 17th 2002:

Elder defends treatment of abuse claim

By JANE GADD

COURTS REPORTER

Tuesday, September 17, 2002 Page A18

A Jehovah's Witness elder who dealt with a sect member's complaint of sex abuse testified yesterday there was no need to call child-welfare authorities because the alleged perpetrator planned to report the abuse to his doctor.

Alleged victim Victoria Boer is suing Steven Brown, as well as two other elders and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

Mr. Brown denied he discouraged Ms. Boer from seeking medical help herself.

Ms. Boer seemed reluctant to talk about the abuse, which was already four years in the past when Mr. Brown learned of it in December, 1989, and expressed frustration with another elder who had been pressing her to see a psychiatrist, Mr. Brown said.

"What were we to do? Take a young girl and twist her arm, say go today?" Mr. Brown asked Ms. Boer's lawyer in Ontario Superior Court.

He said he took the word of Ms. Boer's father, Gower Palmer, that he would speak to a doctor and later bring his daughter with him.

"The doctor would have the resources to refer her. We didn't," Mr. Brown testified.

"Our role was to be spiritual shepherds."

He said he and other elders decided after two meetings with father and daughter that Mr. Palmer was penitent and, although he minimized what he had done, could be trusted to keep his word about reporting, and not harm his other children.

Ms. Boer has testified the elders intimidated her into covering up the abuse to protect the movement's image.

The Toronto Sun Newspaper - September 17th 2002:

<http://www.canoe.ca/TorontoNews/ts.ts-09-17-0060.html> (<http://www.canoe.ca/TorontoNews/ts.ts-09-17-0060.html>)

Tuesday, September 17, 2002

Sex abuse stumped elder

Jehovah's Witness was unsure how to handle case

By IAN MCDUGALL, TORONTO SUN

An elder of the Shelburne Jehovah's Witness congregation admitted in court yesterday he would handle the case of a woman sexually abused by her father differently now by reporting the matter immediately to provincial authorities.

Steven Brown, one of the defendants in a \$700,000 lawsuit, testified that after a 1990 meeting with Children's Aid workers over the woman's case, congregation officials had a better understanding of how to handle child abuse, including their reporting requirements.

Brown, fellow elder Brian Cairns and the church are being sued by the woman for failing to report her case to provincial authorities, for forcing her to confront her father and for discouraging her from getting medical treatment.

Brown said he first became aware of the sexual abuse in the woman's home during a December 1989 meeting with Cairns. Court heard it wasn't until Feb. 5, 1990, that Children's Aid was told about the case.

During the meeting, the father confessed he violated his daughter.

Cairns and Brown had not dealt with child abuse before and were unsure how to handle it -- especially the requirement to report it to secular authorities, Brown said.

"We didn't know who to refer the plaintiff to, we didn't know who to report the abuse to," he said.

"We have a young woman, not living at home, 19 or 20 years old. We had determined there was no immediate threat. We wondered how to proceed."

Brown said they wrote to the Watchtower society, the Witnesses' governing body, asking for advice.

As they waited for a response, other church elders became alarmed they had not reported the case to the authorities, Brown said.

He added the division within the congregation became a problem at the end of January 1990 while a committee was being formed to punish the woman's father.

The committee revoked his church privileges and told him to report to a doctor and to Children's Aid.

The Toronto Sun is not naming the woman or her family because she is a victim of sexual abuse.

The Ottawa Citizen Canadian Newspaper - September 17th 2002:

<http://www.canada.com/search/site/story.asp?id=B7D7247C-58E8-48CB-A4B6-70FEC58B76E>
(<http://www.canada.com/search/site/story.asp?id=B7D7247C-58E8-48CB-A4B6-70FEC58B76E>)

Abuser posed no threat: church elder

Shannon Kari
The Ottawa Citizen
Tuesday, September 17, 2002

TORONTO -- An elder at a southwestern Ontario congregation of the Jehovah's Witnesses yesterday defended a church decision to allow a man accused of having sexually abused his daughter in the mid-1980s to report himself to authorities.

Steve Brown testified in Ontario Superior Court that the abuse had stopped and there was no reason to suspect the two younger children in the family were in danger when elders in the Shelburne congregation learned of the allegations in December 1989.

Victoria Boer, 31, is suing Mr. Brown, two other church elders and the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society for \$700,000, alleging "gross negligence" in refusing to report suspicions of child abuse as required by law.

Ms. Boer, who is permitting her name to be made public, alleges she was sexually abused by her father between the ages of 11 and 15, until her mother intervened.

The father has not been charged with a criminal offence, and he is not a defendant in the lawsuit.

A church committee did not expel the father or make the allegations public, Mr. Brown said.

"He was repentant and fit to be a member of the congregation," the church elder said.

"We were not sitting with a man who was determined to continue a course of wickedness."

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New Haven Register (Connecticut News) - September 14th 2002:

Protests planned against Witnesses

September 14, 2002

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) A group that claims child molestation is widespread among Jehovah's Witnesses is planning protests Sept. 27 at the denomination's world headquarters in New York City and elsewhere.

Silentlambs, a victim support group based in Benton, is organizing the rallies, including one in New York's Brooklyn borough. The Witnesses recently "disfellowshipped," or excommunicated, Silentlambs co-founder William H. Bowen, who is a former elder.

Bowen alleges that the Witnesses keep child molesting incidents secret, won't let victims warn other members about abusers in their congregations, and cut off and shun those who speak out about the problem.

J.R. Brown, spokesman at Witnesses headquarters, declined comment. Denominational leaders insist they comply with state laws requiring them to report abuse claims and allow members to report fellow

members to police.

The Toronto Sun Newspaper - September 13th 2002:

Friday, September 13, 2002

Jehovah's Witnesses in coverup: Ex-elder

By IAN MCDOUGALL, TORONTO SUN

A former elder of a Jehovah's Witness congregation told court yesterday the church and defendants in a \$700,000 lawsuit were trying to protect a sex abuser and keep the case hushed up.

Harald Momm, who stepped down as an elder in Shelburne, Ont. because of internal power struggles, said defendants Brian Cairns and Steve Brown and other church officials were trying to protect a man who sexually assaulted his daughter.

"Their primary concern was always about the abuser," Momm said.

CHURCH LAWSUIT

A woman, whom The Toronto Sun has chosen not to name, has sued the church and elders Cairns and Brown over allegations they tried to hide the abuse she suffered from the Children's Aid Society and was discouraged from getting counselling.

Momm also testified he was upset Children's Aid was not notified immediately of the abuse.

"We wanted the law followed," he said. "Cairns and Brown didn't care about the law, they wanted this kept quiet."

Momm first learned of the abuse when he returned from a Florida trip in January 1990.

He said he was shocked to find out Cairns and Brown had known about the case but had not informed Children's Aid despite church policy that secular authorities must be notified immediately in such cases.

Court heard earlier the woman's father turned himself in to Children's Aid officials in February 1990.

Canadian Press (CP) News -- September 12th 2002:

Thursday September 12 5:32 PM EST

Colleagues concealed sex abuse to protect 'clean image' of Witnesses, elder says

By JAMES MCCARTEN

<http://ca.news.yahoo.com/020912/6/owki.html> (<http://ca.news.yahoo.com/020912/6/owki.html>)

<http://www.canoe.ca/NationalTicker/CANOE-wire.Jehovah-Lawsuit.html> (<http://www.canoe.ca/NationalTicker/CANOE-wire.Jehovah-Lawsuit.html>)

TORONTO (CP) - Two church elders from an Ontario group of Jehovah's Witnesses were more worried about the "clean image" of their faith than they were the well-being of a young sexual abuse victim, one of their former colleagues said Thursday.

Harald Momm was one of eight elders in the Shelburne, Ont., congregation in 1990 when he learned one of their young disciples had accused her father of sexually abusing her several years earlier. But fellow elders Steve Brown and Brian Cairns were more interested in protecting the accused, Gower Palmer, than they were the welfare of his young daughter, Momm testified.

"They didn't want to have anything to do with the law of the land ...they wanted it kept quiet, and we didn't agree with that," he told lawyer Charles Mark.

"This has been going on for 13 years and all I ever got out of it is: 'It is important to keep a clean image. Never mind about the victims.'"

Brown, Cairns and the Watchtower and Bible Tract Society of Canada are among the defendants in a civil suit launched in 1998 by Vicki Boer, Palmer's daughter and herself a former Witness.

Boer, now 31, alleges the defendants failed to allow her adequate treatment for the abuse she suffered between the ages of 11 and 14 in the family home in Shelburne, about 100 kilometres northwest of Toronto.

Rather than immediately inform the Children's Aid Society and permit Boer to seek counselling outside the church, she was required, according to Biblical principles, to confront her father and allow him to repent his alleged sins, the suit alleges.

During the final weeks of 1989 and early months of 1990, controversy raged within the Witness community over Boer's complaints, particularly amongst the eight elders charged with overseeing the congregation.

Momm was one of a group of five who argued that Ontario law required them to immediately report a case of sexual abuse and allow the alleged victim to seek medical help and psychiatric counselling.

"(Brown's) reply to me was that he didn't see it that way," Momm said.

"I emphasized to him that we would have to do this reporting or I would do it myself. He made no comment."

Eventually, the case was reported to Children's Aid and the police, although no charges ever ensued. Five elders, Momm among them, resigned.

Meanwhile, Palmer - the remaining elders convinced of his spiritual repentance - rose through the ranks and enjoyed a level of privilege within the congregation normally reserved for the most respected members, said Momm.

Boer's 58-year-old father continues to live in Shelburne and has never been criminally charged.

During cross-examination Thursday, lawyer Colin Stevenson attacked Momm's motives for disagreeing with Cairns and Brown, suggesting the rift in the elders had been present long before the allegations surfaced.

He also argued that Momm and his allies were confusing the spiritual law of the Witnesses, which imposes a three-year statute of limitations on such things as abuse, with the law of the land, which requires immediate reporting.

At no time did Cairns or Brown ever directly tell Momm that they were trying to protect Palmer or that they were more concerned about the image of the church, Stevenson said.

And he made note of the fact that Momm himself, fearful that Cairns and Brown had no plans to report the abuse, did not go to the authorities.

"You yourself were concerned about the risks of potential prosecution for not reporting, were you not?" Stevenson asked.

"Yes," Momm said.

"And you yourself did not report it to the Children's Aid Society?" Stevenson continued.

"No, and I regret it to this day," came the reply.

John Saunders, at the time a researcher at the Watchtower's Canadian headquarters in Georgetown, Ont., told court he recommended in a memo that in cases of sexual abuse, the victim and abuser should not be made to confront each other.

"I included a note suggesting elders not force victims of abuse to face their abusers, since these kinds of confrontations are potentially psychologically dangerous," Saunders testified.

The recommendation was not included in a July 1988 directive from the Georgetown office advising elders to follow provincial law and notify authorities immediately in cases of sexual abuse.

While victims of sexual abuse normally aren't identified in public, Boer has agreed to allow her name to be publicized as part of her effort to promote what she alleges is widespread abuse within the confines of the church's congregations.

As part of their beliefs in a strict interpretation of Bible teachings, Jehovah's Witnesses reject anything

political or "worldly" that distracts from their focus on Christ and the second coming, which they consider imminent.

Birthdays, secular holidays and Christmas are not celebrated; children are often required to leave class during the Lord's Prayer and the national anthem.

NewsDay.com / Associated Press News -- September 12th 2002:

Group alleging Jehovah's Witnesses abuse plans protest

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) -- A group that claims child molestation is widespread among Jehovah's Witnesses is planning protests Sept. 27 at the denomination's world headquarters in New York City and elsewhere.

Silentlambs, a victim support group based in Benton, Ky., is organizing the rallies, including one in New York's Brooklyn borough. The Witnesses recently "disfellowshipped," or excommunicated, Silentlambs co-founder William H. Bowen, who is a former elder.

Bowen alleges that the Witnesses keep child molesting incidents secret, won't let victims warn other members about abusers in their congregations, and cut off and shun those who speak out about the problem.

J.R. Brown, spokesman at Witnesses headquarters, declined comment. Denominational leaders insist they comply with state laws requiring them to report abuse claims and allow members to report fellow members to police.

The Compulsive Reader Interviews Donald D'Haene, Author of "Father's Touch" -- September 12th 2002:

Donald D'Haene talks about the writing of his book, sexual abuse in the church and his ongoing faith, his screenplay, the importance of catharsis, the "incest exception" clause, the sequel to Father's Touch, his other projects and more.

Magdalena (The Compulsive Reader Reporter): In many ways Father's Touch is quite timely, with a wide range of sexual abuse cases and coverups coming to light in the Catholic church, around the world. You mention in your book, "what should have been labelled a crime is instead called 'a sin'" The Church Leaders in your book are, to some extent culpable in your abuse. Do you feel that there is something inherent in organised religions, particular fundamental ones, that encourages this kind of abuse?

Donald (Author of "Father's Touch" Book): Monsters use religion; religion doesn't create monsters. Consider just one of the three faiths my molester has professed at one time or another: Jehovah's Witnesses. This religion doesn't even believe in premarital sex -- there is no way they are responsible for my molester's actions. Unfortunately, society has this need to deflect responsibility from the perpetrator. History has shown, child abusers count on it. Nevertheless, the Elders handling our case did made the mistake of viewing our father's abuse of us as a sin and not as the crime it was! Yes, they personally failed us. But I long ago gave up the expectation that all in the world is true and just.

Magdalena: Has religion failed us? Why do you think that is (or isn't) the case?

Donald: I put it this way: I haven't got a problem with God. I'm just disappointed in some of his disciples. It is man who twists His word to their advantage. Both of my parents belong to different faiths. Both of those faiths teach that I will die at God's hands; my mother's: that I share the same fate of my father; my father's: that he will go to heaven and I will go to hell. What a world we live in, if a victim's fate is worse than that of his molester's? I think I'd rather go to hell than join my father in heaven.

Magdalena: And yet there is faith, and hope in your book. Have you personally found a viable alternative for spirituality in your life?

Donald: I have faith in the power of truth and honesty. In a bizarre way, I probably am more Christlike today -- now that I belong to no organized religion, than I ever did professing to be a Christian. Isn't it better to be honest about doubts and a personal shipwreck of faith, than to be a hypocrit and profess a faith that isn't matched by works and deeds?

Magdalena: You're working on a screenplay of the book. Is it a very different process for you from the actual writing? Equally painful?

Donald: Actually, translating my own work for the screen is quite enjoyable. The creative process is wonderfully challenging. Even during the difficult times when I was writing my memoir, I kept reminding myself, 'I have survived. I'm travelling back for a worthwhile cause. I never have to live that same life again!' Again, there is comfort in the truth.

Magdalena: Talk to me about the "incest exception" clause. Why do you think this clause exists?

Donald: The "incest exception" is the special opportunity the law gives to certain sex offenders in most states. It allows offenders related to the victim by blood or marriage to be charged with "incest," instead of "child sexual abuse" or "rape of a child." This "charge bargaining" is a covert form of "plea bargaining," and it can allow predators who grow their own victims to escape prison. This clause exists to 'help' everyone but the victim. The "incest exception" flourishes because prosecutors are elected on the basis of their conviction rates, without regard to the actual sentences handed out to criminals. Worse yet, the intrafamilial abuser escapes prison time and reenters the community. Victims who are considering charging their perpetrators must educate themselves for this harsh reality: the benefits of asserting oneself don't necessarily depend on happy outcomes, legal or otherwise.

Magdalena: Were you worried that this wasn't only your story to write. That you were also impacting on (and writing some parts of the stories of) your mother, your siblings, your partner Maurice, etc.

Donald: My siblings wanted me to write our story more than I even did. My mother and Maurice were equally supportive. Other than accurately portraying their experiences, that was not my worry. I was more concerned with my portrayal of characters outside my family. That's why I changed almost all their names --even the court officials. I felt this is a universal story. Naming names would detract from my story. As well, I spent countless hours making sure I was fair in my portrayals of religious figures and faith in general.

Magdalena: Have there been any negative repercussions.

Donald: Not yet. Well, perhaps my father's response to my book:
<http://www.fatherstouch.com/molester.htm> (<http://www.fatherstouch.com/molester.htm>)

Magdalena: The reviews and acclaim for your book have been very positive. Are you surprised at the impact you are having? The support from readers?

Donald: The response has been overwhelmingly supportive from every continent in the world. On the other hand, I think I've always had turbulent brilliance. After five years of hard work, people seem to think my book is outstanding. It was hell getting it there. Even at my most painful moments as a child, I'd step outside myself and wonder if there was some reason why I

was going through all this. The response to my story is inevitable; to my writing very rewarding.

Magdalena: You also mention on your web site that you are working on a second book. I note that you have published some fictional stories. Will your next book also be a memoir/sequel (the 'Tis to your Angelas Ashes)? Or are you planning to delve into fiction.

Donald: Considering the fact that I view Angela's Ashes as my favourite book of all time, I appreciate the comparison. Yes, my second book will continue the journey where Father's Touch left off. The challenge will be to top myself. The good news is Part II is equally eventful.

Magdalena: In what way is the writing process different in your second book from your first?

Donald: The most difficult part of writing Father's Touch was developing the right structure. Once I have determined the structure of book II, I think I will work the same way.

Magdalena: Do you feel that there is an important catharsis involved in telling, and facing a painful story like your own? Would you encourage other abuse victims to work through their own painful stories?

Donald: Probably one of the most important things a victim needs to do is tell their story. I caution victims to be selective. Many people will say the wrong things -- count on it. Tell you story to a therapist or social worker if possible. If you don't feel comfortable with one, find another. Their experience and objectivity will save you much heartache.

Magdalena: Tell me about your acting work. Is this a different Donald, or do you see some connection between Donald the actor and Donald the author?

Donald: There definitely is a connection, but I confess the best acting job I've ever delivered is playing the main character in my life: me.

Magdalena: What's next? Tell me about the most interesting projects you are currently working on.

Donald: A production company will be producing a short film based on just the first chapter of my book. I will be writing the synopsis, playing myself and working as a consultant on the film. I also have been asked to review books for RebeccasReads.com I feel this is an exciting new opportunity to free my mind in the works of other talented authors. First up: Booker nominee, Joan Barfoot's Critical Injuries

Edited by - UnDisfellowshipped on 13 September 2002 1:50:40

Edited by - UnDisfellowshipped on 13 September 2002 1:52:41

Edited by - UnDisfellowshipped on 13 September 2002 5:12:21



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UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped) *11 years ago***The Courier-Journal - July 28th 2002:**

Man vows to appeal Witnesses' expulsion

By Peter Smith

psmith@courier-journal.com (mailto:psmith@courier-journal.com)

A man is fighting a move by elders in the Jehovah's Witnesses to excommunicate him, saying he is being punished for his claims that church policies protect child molesters.

Bill Bowen of Benton, KY, says he will file an appeal Monday of a decision by three church elders to "disfellowship" him on charges of "causing divisions." Bowen said he was notified Thursday of the action after the elders met without him the previous evening.

If the excommunication is upheld by a separate three-elder appeals panel, Bowen would become the fourth person expelled this year from the church after criticizing policies on child molesters. The church denies such criticisms.

Jeff Steen, one of the elders who Bowen says decided to disfellowship him, would not confirm or deny the elders' action, saying church discipline is conducted confidentially in "a spirit of mildness, not confrontation."

Phone messages from The Courier-Journal were not returned by the other elders or by the press office of the Jehovah's Witnesses' headquarters in New York.

Bowen said the action against him is "absolutely not" justified.

"I have committed no sin against God; I have broken no law in the Bible," said Bowen, who resigned as an elder in December 2000 to protest church policies but had remained a member in good standing. "This is nothing but a kangaroo court to silence me."

Bowen contends Jehovah's Witnesses keep incidents of child molestation secret and refuse to let victims warn other members of predators in their congregations.

The Courier-Journal reported in February 2001 of court cases in several states in which Jehovah's Witnesses officials were accused of keeping secret the allegations of abuse by their elders or members, sometimes in violation of state law. Since then, new lawsuits making such claims have been filed in New Hampshire, Minnesota, and Washington state.

Officials with Jehovah's Witnesses have said that they abhor child molestation, report cases to authorities in states that require such reports and allow members to report fellow members to police.

Under church rules, Jehovah's Witnesses are to shun an expelled person socially as well as in religious contexts, and even family members are restricted in their relationships with disfellowshipped relatives.

Others expelled this year include Carl and Barbara Pandelo of Belmar, N.J., who have been outspoken in saying Jehovah's Witnesses treated their daughter's abuser with more compassion than her, and Barbara Anderson of Normandy, Tenn., a former employee at church headquarters in New York who has criticized church policy.

Anderson, who said she learned Sunday that her appeal was denied, said the church is acting "so that Jehovah's Witnesses will feel that they are justified to say to others that we are liars."

She said Bowen should not be punished for publicizing the issue. "It

takes a very brave Jehovah's Witness to go forth and do what he did," Anderson said.

David Clohessy, national director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, says Bowen is being treated similarly to whistleblowers in the molestation crisis in the Roman Catholic Church.

"The hierarchy should consider him a hero, not a pest," said Clohessy, who has corresponded with Bowen for 1 1/2 years.

icBirmingham.co.uk News - July 26th 2002:

Church's stance attacked

By Staff Reporter, Evening Mail

A man whose son was sexually abused by a Jehovah's Witness has criticised the church after leaders said they would consider keeping the paedophile in their ranks.

The father, who cannot be named for legal reasons, claims Jaswant Patti is still a member of the church, which requires its congregation to be "morally clean".

A Jehovah's Witness spokesman confirmed the church is carrying out an internal investigation into the case, after which Patti could remain a member if he shows "genuine repentance".

Patti was jailed for five years in 1999 after he was found guilty of four offences of indecent assault and one other serious sexual assault against two boys, then aged nine and 14.

Following the conviction, church leaders of the Rubery Congregation of the Jehovah's Witnesses, in New Street, Rubery, backed Patti. Philip Price, one of the church's elders, even questioned the verdict, querying the strength of the evidence.

The father of one of the victims said: "The church has a policy of disfellowshipping which can be applied to a person who has got a smoking problem and finds it hard to give up.

"Why is it Jaswant Patti, who has been convicted and whose name will be on the sex offenders' register for the rest of his life, hasn't been disfellowshipped?"

The spokesman for the UK headquarters of the church said he was not able to comment on specific cases.

But he added: "If someone has committed repugnant acts they will be disfellowshipped but it depends on a person's attitude.

"If a person shows genuine repentance it might not mean they are expelled. That's what the elders in the congregation would have to determine.

"To be one of Jehovah's Witnesses you have to be morally clean and we try our utmost to keep the depraved out. The person would have to go a long way to prove they're genuinely repentant.

"If they remained a member they would never occupy a position of responsibility."

The Paducah Sun Newspaper - July 26th 2002:

Bowen learns of disfellowship

The former Jehovah's Witness elder said he will appeal the decision, but he expects his appeal to be denied.

By C.D. Bradley, cdbradley@paducahsun.com (mailto:cdbradley@paducahsun.com) -- 270.575.8650

DRAFFENVILLE, Ky. -- Former Jehovah's Witness elder Bill Bowen, who resigned the leadership position in December 2000 to protest the church's handling of child molestation cases, was disfellowshipped after a brief hearing Wednesday night, he said Thursday.

Bowen said Jeff Steen of Murray, one of three elders on the committee, called him Thursday morning, but Bowen told the elders to communicate with his attorney, Rush Hunt of Madisonville, and hung up. Bowen said Steen then called Hunt and said Bowen had been disfellowshipped but provided no other information.

Neither Steen, nor the other elders on the panel George Bandarra of Murray and Ron Carey of Central City returned phone messages Thursday.

Bowen has said the church protects pedophiles by not reporting accusations to police and encouraging victims not to go to authorities to discuss the matter with anyone in the congregation. The church has denied any wrongdoing and claims it follows the law.

Bowen said he plans to appeal the decision, made at a hearing that Bowen had asked be rescheduled and was held without him. Bowen said he was across the street from the Kingdom Hall and the elders locked the door and blocked the windows. He added that the three elders appeared to be the only people present.

"The thing they have nailed to the wall is that they require two eyewitnesses before a child molester may be convicted" in the church, Bowen said. "I have flatly denied these charges against me, and they brought no witnesses against me. It's a vast inconsistency in the organization. If I was a child molester, they wouldn't have had a hearing. Because I'm a person who spoke out to protect children, they disfellowship me in 30 minutes."

Bowen said he received the return receipt from a letter Hunt mailed asking that the meeting be rescheduled so that his witnesses, coming from all over the country, could attend.

"They've stepped over about all their protocols, so I think they'll ignore my request for an appeal," Bowen said.

Bowen said being disfellowshipped which requires Witnesses, including family members, to shun him is the religion's equivalent of death.

"From my standpoint, the real crime is not disfellowshipping me," Bowen said. "The real crime is, now they're going to silence anyone in the organization who needs help or support. They will face disfellowshipping for logging onto the Web site."

Bowen, who started a support group for Witness abuse victims at www.silentlambs.org, said visitors to the site are split about evenly between current and former Witnesses.

Bowen becomes the fourth Witness disfellowshipped this year for speaking out on the issue, following Barbara Anderson, of Normandy, Tenn., and Carl and Barbara Pandelo, of Belmar, N.J.

The Paducah Sun Newspaper - July 25th 2002:

Bowen observes hearing from afar

The former Jehovah's Witness elder observed three elders enter Kingdom Hall. He said his request for another date was never answered.

By Matt Sanders, msanders@paducahsun.com (mailto:msanders@paducahsun.com) -- 270.575.8650

DRAFFENVILLE, Ky. -- As a panel of three elders discussed his future within the Jehovahs Witnesses on Wednesday night, Bill Bowen sat in his pickup truck across the street from the Kingdom Hall.

Bowen, of Draffenville, faced disfellowship, or expulsion, from the church for publicly criticizing its handling of sexual abuse allegations. He had asked church officials to reschedule the hearing for a time that would be convenient for his witnesses. Bowen said he did not receive a response, and although he sat across the street from the church during the 30-minute hearing, he still refused to attend.

I saw three elders walk in, but there were no witnesses, Bowen said. For any allegation of wrongdoing to be established within the church, there have to be at least two witnesses. Who serves as their witnesses, the three judges? I am not going in there when they have no witnesses and my witnesses are not here. There is no justification. This is not fair, its not impartial, its just a kangaroo court.

Bowen has complained that child-sex allegations are generally not reported to secular authorities by the Jehovahs Witnesses because of the churchs closed nature and insistence on handling problems internally. He resigned as a church elder in December 2000.

Church leaders have denied wrongdoing.

The hearing began at 7:30, and Bowen, still in his pickup truck, said he saw the elders leave the church around 8, but they did not speak to him.

Before the hearing, George Bandarra, an elder in the Murray congregation and one of the elders reviewing Bownens case, said elders would not comment on the proceeding because it was a private

church matter. He added that the elders would not make their verdict public but would telephone Bowen Wednesday night with the result. Bowen said the elders did not call.

A church hearing had been scheduled in May but did not take place, because the elders scheduled to hear the case did not show up. When the hearing was rescheduled for Wednesday, Bowen requested a postponement in writing because of short notice and said he had witnesses coming from California, Michigan, Tennessee, Florida and Louisiana.

Who schedules a meeting on a Wednesday night? I asked for a weekend meeting to give my witnesses time to come here. Its my right, according to church protocol, to be able to produce witnesses to speak on my behalf. (The elders) have not shown up twice, and when I have legitimate reasons for a postponement, they will not give me a reason.

I received no response from my letter. I received a letter from their attorney stating (the church) received my letter.

Bandarra did say the elders were picked from outside the Marshall County congregation to ensure an impartial verdict. He said after the elders review the case, they would pray and vote until a unanimous decision was reached. The other elders were Jeff Steen, also of Murray, and Ron Carey of Central City. Carey is an assembly overseer, who is in charge of the churchs circuit assembly, Bowen said.

Both Bandarra and Steen seemed concerned over the recent publicity that Bowens case has attracted, and again stated the case is a private matter. However, Steen mentioned that there are about 6 million Jehovahs Witnesses worldwide, and about 40,000 are disfellowshipped annually for various reasons.

Members of the church, even family members, are required to shun those who are disfellowshipped.

The Scottish News of the World - July 21st 2002:

Church 'harbouring fiends'

Jehovah's Witnesses Storm

By Ken Adams

SCOTS Jehovahs Witnesses are harbouring dozens of sex beasts within their ranks, the News of the World can reveal.

Campaigner Bill Bowen claims that at least 40 perverts across Scotland have been allowed to evade justice because of a church cover up.

The 44-year-old has been swamped with e-mails after a BBC documentary lifted the lid on the Christian fundamentalists.

He said: Concerned parents tell me the abuse is happening right now and is being covered up by church elders.

These children need to be protected fast, yet the authorities have not been involved.

Attacked

Bill, a former Jehovahs Witness elder, founded the US victim support group silentlambs, after a member of his own congregation was attacked. He told us: "I got a call from one Scot whose wife had been sexually abused as a child. Her abuser has since moved to another congregation. He has not been convicted and is free to keep abusing."

Bill, from Benton, Kentucky, added: "I urged the couple to go to the police."

The News of the World was shown some of the e-mails sent by Scots victims. One revealed: "At the age of 10 I was molested by the son of an elder." Another victim wrote, "I was abused by my brother."

The church's sordid secrets were exposed when Alison Cousins told how she was molested by her father. The 19-year-old, of Stevenston, Ayrshire, went to cops after elders ignored her claims. Her father Ian, 43, was later jailed for five years.

The Paducah Sun - July 20th 2002:

Bowen wants hearing delayed

* Former Jehovah's Witness elder Bill Bowen said he is unable to attend Wednesday's rescheduled hearing.

Staff and Wire Reports

DRAFFENVILLE, KENTUCKY,

A former Jehovah's Witness elder is asking that an excommunication hearing rescheduled for Wednesday be pushed back again because of the short notice.

Bill Bowen, 44, of Draffenville faces expulsion from the church for publicly criticizing the church's handling of sexual abuse allegations. In a letter to the elder who will chair his judicial hearing, Bowen said he is unable to meet Wednesday and hoped to reschedule on "a date acceptable to all concerned."

Bowen had a hearing scheduled in May, but it did not take place, because the elders scheduled to bear the case did not show up, Bowen said.

Bowen resigned as a church elder in December 2000 to protest the church's policy on handling sexual abuse cases. He has complained that child-sex allegations are generally not reported to secular authorities by the Jehovah's Witnesses because of the church's closed nature and insistence on handling problems internally.

Church leaders have denied wrongdoing.

J. R. Brown, a spokesman for the ' denomination, has said that parents are not punished by the church for going to the police first in cases of child molestation.

He also said if the church judicial committee finds a member guilty of molestation the member is removed from all positions of responsibility and may not evangelize door-to-door without being accompanied by a fellow Jehovah's Witness.

Members of the church, even family members, are required to shun those who are excommunicated or disfellowshipped. Three others who have spoke out against the church's policies have been disfellowshipped in recent months. They are Barbara Anderson, of Normandy Tenn. and Carl and Barbara Pandelo, of Belmar, NJ.

DAVID LETTERMAN Television Program:

Monologue on Tuesday, July 16th 2002:

David Letterman said this: "Are you tired of all the religious sex scandals? Now the Jehovah's Witnesses have a sex scandal. They grope you then they leave you a pamphlet. Then they went to court today but no one answered the door."

DAVID LETTERMAN Television Program:

Monologue on Monday, July 15th 2002:

David Letterman said this: "Did you hear there's a big sex abuse scandal concerning Jehovah's Witnesses in Minnesota? (no response from audience so he asks again) Did you hear about that???? (audience now groans. Noooooooooo) Yeah, well, uh, I sure hope this isn't true... I really hope it is not true because, uh, we would really hate to see people START avoiding Jehovah's Witnesses... We wouldn't want THAT to happen." (laughter from audience).

German Television Program KONTRASTE (<http://www.kontraste.de> (<http://www.kontraste.de/>); target="_new"> <http://www.kontraste.de> (<http://www.kontraste.de/>); Broadcasted a very well researched report on child abuse within the JW community. The report was only 10 Minutes long, but it was German Prime Time - the very first topic after the most watched Daily News Program. KONTRASTE (Contrasts) is very reputable TV Program. Two victims were interviewed and a JW Spokesman.

Protecting the Perpetrator Comes First - Child Abuse Among Jehovah's Witnesses

by Caroline Walter and Marcus Weller

caroline.walter@sfb.de (mailto:caroline.walter@sfb.de)"> caroline.walter@sfb.de
(mailto:caroline.walter@sfb.de)

Once again a scandal within a religious community involving sexual molestation of children by "men of God".

Caroline Walter and Marcus Weller report about a crime against children and a sinister cartel of silence.

Ursel Wagner was 9 years old when she was sexually abused by a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Ursel Wagner:

"This brother used to visit us and made the offer to my parents: "I would like to put the little girl to bed, and her read a good night story that will be fun."

Cornelia Wagner, Mother:

"Imagine, as I am there ironing my clothes and doing the dishes, this young man is in my daughter's room, reading stories to her and abusing her in the next room."

Ursel Wagner:

"In some way, I knew that it was not right what he did to me. But I was confused, because that was something that did not exist among Jehovah's Witnesses.

At that time, Ursel's parents were Jehovah's Witnesses also. When her daughter told them about the molestation, they proceeded the way they were required: they reported the incident to the elders in their congregation. But the elders told them not to make trouble and keep it quiet.

Cornelia Wagner:

"I was shocked. I could not believe what the elders demanded for me to do: remain silent. They gave some flimsy reasons and said by this we would also protect our daughter."

The family got no support by their spiritual leaders, instead the opposite was true: the perpetrator was protected, fellow congregation members are not warned .

Ursel Wagner:

"It still makes my angry how these people dealt with it back then. I am sure we could have saved some other girls from being molested. But nothing happened, nothing at all."

Cornelia Wagner, Mother:

"They made us feel that the roles had switched, we had become the perpetrators. It was as if we were accusing them and that did not fit their perfect picture."

Jehovah's Witnesses view themselves as a chosen group that lives rigidly by Bible principles. Jehovah's Witnesses believe in a soon-to-come doomsday called Armageddon that is survived by their members only. Their ultimate earthly authority is the worldwide operating Watchtower Society. 210.000 Jehovah's Witnesses live in Germany. They spread their teachings via the magazines "Watchtower" and "Awake". The obedience to the organization is obligatory for all members.

Stephan Wolf was a Jehovah's Witness for 20 years. Today he supports others leaving. More and more victims of child abuse contact him.

Stephan E. Wolf, Ausstieg e.V. (Exit Inc.)

"The woman's attitude is to be in submission and follow the principle of headship, this also applies towards children that are required to be obedient - if necessary violently. I think this prevailing attitude promotes an environment in which child abuse is more likely than in other parts of society."

Ruth Schlegel was born into a Jehovah's Witnesses environment. Her family lived strictly to the rules of the organization. Her father was an elder.

Ruth Schlegel:

"My father started to molest me when I was 9 years old. It began with touching me. It developed into sexual intercourse. That last time was when I was 15 or 16 or so when I was raped."

Ruth's mother reported the molestation to the highest leaders in the congregation, the Elders. But yet again nothing was done and the perpetrator was not reported to the authorities. For years after, Ruth's fathers abused other girls.

Ruth Schlegel:

"In the elders opinion they had done enough. They had a meeting. They had spoken to him and had demanded that he had to apologize to me. They had done everything the Watchtower Society says and so the case was closed. That was their opinion, from the religious point of view because everything

from outside i.e. the law, reporting to the police did not matter because the Society says they are above law, they deal with it internally."

Protecting the perpetrator and silencing victims - normal procedure of Jehovah's Witnesses?

Dr. Andreas Fincke, Protestant Church expert on cults:

"They have a closed society. When wrongdoing occurs they appoint judicial committees to deal with conflicts and moral transgressions. The idea behind this attitude is that you don't go to court with Brothers and Sisters but to deal with those things internally first. That sounds good but in reality it often results with those in authority the elders, always men, judging matters they have no business getting involved with."

Do elders actually judge in cases of child abuse? We asked Jehovah's Witnesses:

Uwe W. Herrmann, Speaker of Jehovah's Witnesses:

"Because of our Biblical understanding we believe that there are some specific sins for which the local elders are responsible."

PAY ATTENTION TO YOURSELVES AND TO ALL THE FLOCK is the title of the elders' manual. And it is there the Elders are told how to proceed:

"Some disputes should not be dealt with at secular courts."

And: "...it is the Elders decision if the statements are trustworthy."

Dr. Andreas Fincke, Protestant Church expert on cults:

"For a Jehovah's Witnesses who has become the victim of child abuse, it is impossible to get justice within the organization. The simple reason is that you need two witnesses that confirm the incident and that is almost always impossible when it comes to child abuse because there are of course no witnesses."

The Watchtower Society has built a wall of silence around the perpetrators called confidentiality. By making a simple denial pedophiles can live their inclination and remain in their positions within the congregation.

Stephan E. Wolf, Ausstieg e.V. (Exit Inc.)

"The main principle is to create a perfect image to the outside world. In their own eyes they are models to the outside world concerning moral standards, one of the buzzwords they like to use in the media. Having pedophiles in their midst does not fit that image, let alone the fact that the public gets to know that they are being protected in the movement. So, they are trying everything they can, to prevent the facts from coming out to the public."

But this perfect image is also intended to help Jehovah's Witnesses to get the recognition as a church. For 11 years, they have been going to court through all channels to get the same religious status as the Catholic and the Protestant Church. Recognition would result in several cost saving privileges i.e. to raise a church tax to create revenue.

Thus, the accusations of child abuse does not fit the image presented, yet more and more cases are coming out to the open while the organization keeps on denying there is a problem.

Uwe W. Herrmann, Speaker of Jehovah's Witnesses:

"We, the Religious Community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany, don't know of any cases of child molestation here in Germany."

Stephan E. Wolf, Ausstieg e.V. (Exit Inc.)

"I think the time has come that the public sees there is something going on in the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, pedophiles within have a perfect environment where nothing is being done and they do not have to be afraid."

Uwe W. Herrmann, Speaker of Jehovah's Witnesses:

"Basically, we don't punish at all. Only God can punish. The Elders of a congregation can only check if someone is repentant or not. If he repentant then the sinner gets further help to get over that sin."

It seems that only the victims get punished. Ruth Schlegel has been expelled from the Witnesses because of smoking and adultery. She still fights with the aftermaths of the abuse.



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11 years ago

The Press and Journal News - July 15th 2002:

CHURCH AT CENTRE OF PAEDOPHILE ALLEGATIONS

CLAIRE STEWART

The Jehovah's Witness Church in Scotland has vehemently denied allegations that it shelters paedophiles.

A Panorama programme screened last night on BBC TV claimed the church had records of known paedophiles within the faith that it refused to share with police.

The programme profiled an Ayrshire teenager who allegedly told elders at her church she was being abused by her father.

She claimed to have been told not to go to police, despite the fact that the man had already confessed to elders that he had abused her.

A spokesman for the British branch of Jehovah's Witnesses condemned paedophilia as "abhorrent" and stated the programme had failed to examine cases in which the church had approached the police.

The investigative programme claimed that the Watch Tower Society kept a worldwide database of members accused of child abuse. The list, which is claimed to contain more than 20,000 names, is based on details held by each Jehovah's Witness congregation and has many names that have never been reported to police.

Panorama claimed a code of silence existed within the faith based on Biblical teachings that members should turn to elders and not the police, and that members believed a crime had not taken place unless two members of the faith could give evidence of it.

Spokesman Paul Gilles yesterday denied that any Jehovah's Witness congregation would shelter a paedophile from the police.

"Sexual abuse of children is not just a terrible sin but also a crime that can leave lasting emotional scars on its victims," he said. "Jehovah's Witnesses everywhere abhor the sexual abuse of children and will not protect any perpetrator of such repugnant acts from the consequences of his gross sin."

Explaining why the church had chosen to snub the programme, Mr Gilles said: "We decided not to take part for two reasons.

"One is Jehovah's Witnesses are featured in the programme. We follow the Bible in everything we do and the way to resolve difficulties between spiritual brothers and sisters is not in the public.

"Our views are based on deeply held convictions which can't be expressed just in a few soundbites which might be edited. That's why we have chosen to address the allegations on our own website so we can give detailed answers in context."

However, the church did provide the programme with information on its policies towards child abuse.

Mr Gilles, speaking before the programme was aired, said he did not expect it to give an even-handed view.

"I don't expect it to be a balanced programme from what I have seen so far," he said. "They have highlighted cases which could have been handled better. We told them we can't discuss specific cases.

"They have trawled newspapers to find cases where things had gone wrong, but they didn't trawl newspapers to find cases where we had gone to the police."

The spokesman did accept there were cases of child abuse within the faith that could have been dealt with better and expressed regret at them.

Explaining the Jehovah's Witness process for reporting such matters, Mr Gilles said: "When a report is received, elders contact our national office in London for guidance to ensure that, firstly, the alleged victim and other potential victims are protected from possible abuse, and secondly that counsel is given to report crime to the proper authorities and to comply with any additional legal requirements.

"Jehovah's Witnesses further believe that it is the absolute right of the victim, his or her family or anyone else to report the matter to the authorities if they so choose. There are certainly no sanctions against any congregation member who reports an allegation of child abuse to the authorities."

About 8,600 Jehovah's Witnesses made the trip to Perth yesterday for the final day of the Zealous Kingdom Proclaimers Convention. The conference attracted visitors from throughout the UK and as far afield as the US. Organiser Bill Reid said: "The people of Perth have responded very well to us being here, from taxi drivers right the way through."

BBC PANORAMA Television Program - July 14th 2002:

Program Title: "Suffer the Little Children"

Program Producer: PANORAMA BBC1 U.K.

Date that this Program was Aired on Television: July 14th 2002, 10:15 P.M. BST

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Two years ago elders from this church heard a shocking story. This young woman told them her father was sexually abusing her. The elders called her a liar.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): What are you meant, meant to do then if he's doing something wrong? And they said "Come to us and we'll deal with it." And I said to them "Well, I've already spoken to you and you've told me I'm a liar".

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The elders sent her home to her father. They didn't tell her that three years earlier he'd confessed to them that he was abusing her sister.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Tulsa, Oklahoma and a gathering of the church that let this happen. Over 6,000 Jehovah's Witnesses are in town for their District Convention. Panorama is here too. We're looking for answers from the leaders of an organization that's under fire, facing mountain allegations that it's shielding abusers, silencing victims and putting children at risk.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): It's a world-wide problem that is of epidemic proportions within the organization and no one knows about it, unless your child is molested.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Stevenson is on the Ayrshire coast in Scotland. It's a quiet holiday resort, a close-knit town and home to a thriving community of Jehovah's Witnesses. Door to door service, Bible studies and conventions are at the heart of family life for this young woman. But now she's left the church which she says betrayed her. She doesn't want to be recognised. She had a strict religious upbringing, her parents wedded to the Biblical principle that the father is head of the household.

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): We'd pray together, kind of thing, I mean we prayed before meals and we'd pray before going to bed, and ask God for help and ask God for forgiveness for anything we've done wrong that day. It was very strict. I was scared of my dad for years. I was really frightened of him.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): She and her sister spent hours playing alone. Their father taught them that outside influences were bad. He prohibited friendships outside the church. But, from the age of 11, her make-believe games hid a painful truth - her father had started to abuse her.

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I was in my bed one night and that's when my dad came through and started touching me and feeling me. I just lay there hoping that he'd go away.

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY) [in Official Witness Statement at Selkirk's Police Office]: Over the years since I was 11 until I was 15 my dad had done things to me that he shouldn't have done like rub my breasts, finger me and try to have sex with me. I remember when we were in Perth we were staying in a tent. He started to touch me and he made me touch him, and he made me put his penis in my mouth and things like that.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Were you scared?

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Terrified! There was one thing my dad told me, if I'd ever told anyone about this he would break me apart.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): For years she kept quiet, but one Sunday, after a meeting at the Kingdom Hall, she asked to see church elders. She needed their help.

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): And I just told them everything that happened.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Did they tell you that this was serious, that you should go to the police, that they would go to the police for you?

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): No, they didn't tell me anything like that. They didn't make any mention of the police.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): They said they'd deal with it.

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Yes. After that they called my father in, and they had a very, very long chat with him. Then eventually they came out and we went home and that was the end of it.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): When confronted, Ian Cousins confessed he was abusing his daughter. He said he was sorry, so the elders sent him home with her. The abuse continued. Cousins

was reproved or admonished publicly by the elders, but church policy meant that no one was told why, not even his younger daughter.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): It was announced on the platform that Ian Cousins had been reproved, and after that I went to one of the elders and asked, well, "why has he been reproved?". And he said "It's because of something he did wrong" but he wouldn't tell me what it was.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Even when her sister moved out, sick of the abuse, Alison still didn't know why. She missed her sister and was lonely. With one daughter gone, Ian Cousins turned on the other. It all began with an innocent goodnight kiss.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I gave him a kiss, like a peck on the lips and then I tried to get up to walk away and he pulled me down and he forced his tongue through my teeth, my clenched teeth, and he tried to put the blame on me and said "Did you really think you should be doing that?"

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): He blamed you?

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Yes.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): It wasn't long before the abuse got worse. One day her father was accused of assaulting one of Alison's friends. She had to do something but had no where to turn - nowhere, except the Kingdom Hall. She asked to see a church elder.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I told him everything that had happened and what my dad had done to me and he said that he didn't believe me at all and he said that I was a liar, and that my dad would never do such a thing and my dad was such a nice man.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Like her sister, she was sent home. Her father - "the nice man" - was free to continue abusing her. So she gave the elders an ultimatum: either they did something or she'd go to the police. They did nothing.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY) [in Official Police Statement]: I have told the police about my dad because I am concerned that he has contact with other young girls through the church.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT WALLACE BURGESS (STRATHCLYDE POLICE): Some of these people gave good statements and very, very positive in their attitude in support of Alison and her sister. Other people felt that they didn't want to be involved and gave a negative statement and some people refused to speak to us altogether.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Why?

DETECTIVE SERGEANT WALLACE BURGESS (STRATHCLYDE POLICE): I've no idea why. They just refuse to speak to the police.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Were they Jehovah's Witnesses?

DETECTIVE SERGEANT WALLACE BURGESS (STRATHCLYDE POLICE): I believe they were.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): But they wouldn't help.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT WALLACE BURGESS (STRATHCLYDE POLICE): They wouldn't give a statement to us, no.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Only during the police investigation did the whole story become clear to Alison Cousins. Only now did she discover her sister had been abused too. Only now did she find out that her father confessed to elders 3 years earlier, yet no one had warned her, his next victim.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Nobody told me anything. They all basically kept it all under wraps and told nobody what had happened.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): What they did was keep a record of her father's name and confession on a church database - a register of suspected and convicted pedophiles to be monitored. We asked Alison Cousins to obtain a copy of her records using the Data Protection Act. There, in black and white, was proof that the Jehovah's Witnesses had known for 3 years that her father was a self-confessed pedophile. Yet, far from monitoring him, the elders twice turned a blind eye to his abuse of his daughters. When he confessed to church elders, Cousins got a mild rebuke. When he confessed in court, he got 5 years in jail.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT WALLACE BURGESS (STRATHCLYDE POLICE): I believe we were the last to know. They had told several people before coming to the police, and these people had not reported it

either to the police or the social services. We have a duty to protect, and if we're not told we are unable to protect.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): New York, the capital of big business, and a fitting home for one of the largest and richest religious organizations in the world. From here the Jehovah's Witnesses control over six million members. From here, the world-wide headquarters in Brooklyn Heights, every policy, every guideline, is dictated. Visitors are welcome and one message is clear. In this organization you adhere to God's word. Every month 50,000 Bibles come off the press ready to be sold world-wide. But this too is where they keep records of suspected and convicted pedophiles in their ranks. Bill Bowen, a lifelong member, has resigned as an elder. He says the men at the top are protecting the church, not the children.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): They do not want people to know that they have this problem, and by covering it up they just hurt one person. By letting it out, then they hurt the image of the church.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Elders must report abuse to the church's legal desk. Only if the law demands it must they contact the police. If it doesn't, they be told they have a moral duty to call them, but often it seems to stop here. It seems to go no further than the church's own secret database.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): Every detail is written down about what happened, where it happened, when it happened, how it happened.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): So you're saying the organization has its own sexual offenders register if you like.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): That's exactly right.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): That it's keeping to itself and not showing others.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): Exactly right. These men remain anonymous to anyone outside the organization and anyone really inside the organization unless you're personally reporting the matter.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): So was this the policy back in Stevenson that let Ian Cousins continue to abuse his daughters? The elders have stepped down and refused to talk to us, so we asked the man sent here to sort things out. Hello, Mr Briggs. We're from BBC Panorama as you know.

JONATHAN BRIGGS (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PRESIDING OVERSEER): I know that.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): We just want to ask you a few questions about the Ian Cousins Case.

JONATHAN BRIGGS (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PRESIDING OVERSEER): It's reasonable to really actually consider the brothers and sisters in the congregation that have had to undergo all this pressure. So I would just leave it at that. That's all I have to say on the matter.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The database, Mr Briggs, why should the Jehovah's Witnesses keep a database of men who have confessed to being pedophiles but the police aren't told? Do you think that's reasonable behaviour Mr Briggs?

JONATHAN BRIGGS (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PRESIDING OVERSEER): [Declines to respond, turns and retreats into the Kingdom Hall]

[JULY 11 2002]

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The latest name added to the list should be that of James Barrett. Three days ago, clutching his Bible, this elder from Rugby was convicted of indecently assaulting two boys and sentenced to two years in prison. The church was told of the allegations five years ago, but Barrett denied them and was allowed to remain an elder. So, how many names are on the secret database? We asked the headquarters in New York. They refused to tell us. "Focusing on numbers isn't meaningful," they said. After a lifetime in the church, Bill Bowen tells a different story. How many names do you suspect are on that list?

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): Twenty-three thousand, seven hundred and twenty.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): How do you know that?

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): I was contacted by sources within the church. I was given a figure of over 20,000. Two different sources came back to me and said that number is actually more specific and gave me a figure of 23,720. They told me that they had accessed the internal database and that figure was based on child molesters in the USA, Canada and Europe, and that's the figure that they were given.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Over 20,000 names on a secret database. That's why these people say the church has to listen. With Bill Bowen, they're calling for the Jehovah's Witnesses to come clean about their record on child abuse. His campaign, "Silent Lambs", has already heard from 5,000 victims. This candle-lit vigil is for them.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): Or it's what they're doing, once it's found out, causing their own members to be deeply disturbed.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Heather Berry and her stepsister Holly Brewer have flown here from New Hampshire. The man who abused them has been gaoled for a minimum of 56 years. He was Heather's father. Now Heather and Holly are breaking new ground, they're taking the Jehovah's Witnesses to court.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I'm Heather from New Hampshire. I don't want to tell my story but I've heard the word "victim" too many times today, and all of us are standing out here today and we're standing tall and proud and saying this happened and that it can't happen and we're survivors, and we're fighting and we're not victims.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): They're the first of those survivors to take their fight to court. They're claiming that not only did the church do nothing when they were abused, it ostracized and punished the family when they called the police.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I'm very glad I came, and like I said, I would do it again, and again, and again, and as many times as it takes to get a change in the policies and things that they hide constantly.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I'm really glad that the policy was talked about so much today, that it's an actually policy, it's not just a few elders that want to hide things. It comes from higher-up.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): It's a world-wide policy.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Yes.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): We asked the church for an interview to discuss the claims that they're putting thousands of children at risk. They offered us instead some video tapes. Here we have it, a box full of tapes in fact, Jehovah's Witnesses response, progressive understanding of pedophilia, education through publications, and one marked 'policies' and I'm told that's where we should get some answers. That night we watched the tapes, looking for those answers. In long letters, the organization had told us the welfare of children is of paramount concern to them, that they have a forceful child protection policy. We wanted to see it spelled out.

J.R. BROWN (WATCHTOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY'S OFFICIAL SPOKESPERSON): We've heard the suggestion that our policies may not be adequate to cover the problem of child molestation, but that's not the case all.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The policy couldn't be simpler. The elders should deal with all allegations of abuse.

M.R. INFANTE (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS): I think that's a very good policy, that the elders essentially would take charge of the situation of reporting the abuse to the authorities.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): But the authorities they're told to contact aren't the police, it's their own legal desk.

J.R. BROWN (WATCHTOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY'S OFFICIAL SPOKESPERSON): The fact of the matter is, we have a very aggressive policy to handle child molestation in the congregation, and it is primarily designed to protect our children.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): So how aggressive is it in practice? Just over a year ago Bill Bowen rang the legal desk in New York asking how he should handle an allegation of abuse in his congregation. The advice he was given has little to do with protecting the victim. He was told to go back to the man accused.

REPRESENTATIVE AT THE LEGAL DESK AT WATCHTOWER HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK: You just him again, "Now, is there anything to this?" If he says "No" then I would walk away from it. Leave it for Jehovah. He'll bring it out.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): Yep.

REPRESENTATIVE AT THE LEGAL DESK AT WATCHTOWER HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK: But don't get yourself in a jam.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): "Leave it for Jehovah". That, according to thousands of victims, is the Jehovah's Witness child protection policy laid bare. No one knows more about that than Sara Poisson. Holly Brewer and Heather Berry's mother knows her loyalty to the church cost her daughters dearly. Paul Berry, her husband, beat them. She suspect worse, that Heather was being sexually abused and went to the elders.

SARA POISSON (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I could tell from their looks on their faces that I had done a bad thing, that I had spoken against my husband which is a bad thing. And so their solution was that I should be a better wife, and I should pray more. That was their solution, that's how I could stop him from battering us. I assumed they were right. It had to be right because they know everything because they're God's representatives on earth.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): She couldn't convince them, but she was convinced that Paul Berry was sexually abusing their daughter, Heather.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): When I was about 3 years old I started displaying behavior that no 3 year old in their right mind would display. I was throwing stools out of 2 storey windows and I was, well, I went to Boston Children's Medical Hospital in the psychiatric ward when I was 3, because she found me stabbing myself with a screwdriver in the arm in the kitchen. He came to me in the black of night, Hands outstretched, there was no fight. The masked man slowly became familiar with my shape, Gently rubbing his hands on me, every nook, cranny and gape. My child, you are so sweet, So perfect and right, then I knew nothing but defeat. I tried not to think about the abuse as much as possible. I mean there was the physical abuse, there was the verbal abuse and there was the sexual abuse. And when none of it was happening, that was ideal, and that's what I tried to focus on the most.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): And all the while, you were going to the Kingdom Hall every Sunday.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): We were.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): You were going to meetings during the week.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): We were going out on door-to-door service.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Time and again, the girls were told to wait outside while their mother begged local elders for help. Time and again, they saw her sent home to pray harder and be a better wife. Holly, too, had her own story to tell, the story she'd kept secret from her mother, the story she knew by now the elders wouldn't want to hear. Her instinct was to tell the local policeman, but, after years in the church, she just couldn't.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): Holly would actually tell me that she was very angry about things at home and she did on more than several occasions tell me that "Some day, Sergeant Zeller, I'm going to tell you something that happened to me" and I always told Holly, "When you're ready, I'll be there. You know where I am."

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Her mother saw the elders more than a dozen times, but remarkably it never strong Sarah Poisson to look for help outside the church. You can say that your children's lives are in danger, and in the same breath that you couldn't possibly go to the police. How can that be?

SARA POISSON (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Because God would not want that. It would never have occurred to me, and even if it had, I would not have done it because he's a man. He's a baptized male and he's a ministerial servant and I was a woman and they're kids, and that's even worse than being a woman. "These things need to stay in this room" - I've heard that many, many times. "You need to pray about it more." I can show you my Bible, it's paper thin. I still have it. It's all worn out. I did a lot of praying.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Even after you had told them that her father was sexually abusing Heather, nothing changed?

SARA POISSON (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): No, no. Well yeah, things changed, they got a lot worse, for me.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): In the end, the decision was taken out of her hands. In school bruises were noticed on her children. Social workers were told. They gave her a stark choice, leave your husband or we take your children. But if she left him, she knew the church would cut her dead.

SARA POISSON (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): At that point, I had to make decision between God and my kids. And I knew.. well, at that time I knew, that if I

chose my kids, I don't have prayer, but I didn't care anymore. So we lost everything in one day.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Sarah Poisson had no life outside the Kingdom Hall. When the congregation cast her out she had no choice but to move away. She didn't just lose every friend she had, overnight she was homeless, penniless, scraping a living to bring up her children. The friends they'd had, openly shunned them. But with the family now free of the church Holly could finally tell her mother the truth: her stepfather had abused her too. When he tried to gain access to her younger sister, Holly finally did what the elders hadn't - she walked into the local police station.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): It was clear to me that it was a life's crossing, a road to cross. Never any doubt in my mind that Holly could do it. It was a tremendous effort on her part, and it smacked of raw courage from beginning to end.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The Holly Brewer who walked into his office that day was a very changed, a very defiant young woman.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): My earliest memory is like about 3 years old, my latest memory is 10 years old, and he gradually worked into being interested in me to full-blown sex, intercourse, over those years.

[2:47 p.m. MARCH 7 1997 Official Police Video]

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): It was a harrowing time. The police took Holly back to the house where the abuse had started.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): He had a room that he had found in a very, very old house that was underneath the barn that you'd crawl through a hole to get to, and once you were in there, you were isolated from the entire house, and from everything, and that's where everything would go down.

[3:22 p.m. MARCH 7th 1997 Official Police Video]

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): Would he kneel down on, next to you, or over you?

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): He'd like sit like this... and let me do..

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): All right

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): and then he'd lean over..

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): And did he tell you what he wanted you to do?

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I knew after a while.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): OK.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): She told the police exactly what Berry had wanted, of the brutal sexual assault she'd suffered throughout her childhood.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I had no vision of me growing up and being 16. I thought he was eventually going to kill me, you know - and then I'd be free and that's the way I looked at it.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): It's really hard to come back here now.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I know. He'd say things like "Thank you for obeying me" and he'd thank me for obeying him and reminding me of that word, that "obey" word. That was a big thing.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Paul Berry was confident Holly would never go to the elders. Apart from anything else, the Jehovah's Witnesses have a clear rule on sin. They need two witnesses or a confession before they'll take action. As Holly told her story, it seemed to police that this rule in a strict religious community would have let the abuse continue.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): All the way up to here..

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): So, this is the same piece of material.. All right.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): Sexual

abuse of children is not to be tolerated, and I don't care what their reasoning was, it was faulted reasoning. They were wrong, and as far as I'm concerned they were criminally negligent. That's my take on it.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): Even with just the child's word, with one witness, with just the mother's word, without the two witnesses their Bible tells them they need?

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): Well unfortunately most kids don't have several witnesses observing them get raped. That's an unfortunate part of it.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): It took nearly 4 years for the case to come to court. Paul Berry faced 17 charges of aggravated sexual assault.

SARA POISSON (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I was holding Holly's hand and she had a lot of pointy rings on, and she was squeezing my hand really tightly, and it took them a long time to get through the verdict because there were so many indictments, and when it was over my hand was all blood and I didn't even feel it. And it was so powerful to be believed.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): But not everyone did believe them, even after he was convicted by a jury on all 17 indictments. Two dozen members of the Kingdom Hall turned up at the sentencing hearing. They all appeared to give character statements for Paul Berry.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): He had already been found guilty and they found room in their hearts to stand in front of that child and say we don't believe any of it. And what they were saying was, they didn't believe the child, they didn't believe in the system of justice, they didn't believe the judge, they didn't believe the jury, they didn't believe anyone - except themselves.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Everything they were saying was "He's such a fine worker, I've worked with him secularly and he always shows up to work on time, he's such a good worker." Everybody said that and also the second half was everybody started saying "He's baby-sat our kids hundreds of times. I would let him baby-sit our kids every day, and he's such a good worker." And I was just sitting there like.. he's not on trial for being a negligent worker.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): I can't imagine how badly she must have felt not to have been believed by elders in her own close-knit community. What a horrible blow to a child this must have been. Shame, shame on them.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): But another serious accusation is levelled against Jehovah's Witnesses. In their efforts to cover-up abuse, they may even try to frustrate police investigations. In Birmingham, West Midlands police were told of a sexual assault by a Jehovah's Witness on a young boy. They asked local elders for help.

SERGEANT STEVE COLLEY (WEST MIDLANDS POLICE): They were very reluctant to give up any information towards me. It was an uphill battle so far as the church was concerned, with me, virtually at every turn. They actually said to me unless I provide two Jehovah's Witnesses who'd actually seen the offense, then as far as they were concerned the offense hadn't taken place.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The boy was Simon Brady. He was just 9 when he was abused by a member of this Kingdom Hall. He felt he could tell no one.

SIMON BRADY We're taught if you go to elders, if you want to be believed or you have a complaint about someone, then there has to be more than one of you, there has to be two people. There has to be more than one witness, basically, you know. What can I say? They want more than one witness, you know.. every time I've gone to them, you know.. they wouldn't have believed me. Statement of Simon Andrew Brady, aged 18.

SIMON BRADY (in Official Police Statement): I recall that one of the brothers of the congregation, a man known to me as Jaswant Patty began to take an interest in me. I would have been 8 or 9 years old at the time.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Simon Brady's parents were going through a divorce. Jaswant Patty offered to help out, take him off his mother's hands.

SIMON BRADY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): He'd take me for drives after the meetings, he'd take me home from the congregation, you know.. give me a lift home. I can remember on one occasion he took me to his sister's flat while she was away on holiday. He said we'd go in and we'd check his sister's flat, and there he really sexually abused me basically.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): What did he do?

SIMON BRADY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): It was quite severe, to be honest with you, it was severe. So even now, to think of it, I don't.. you know.. it hurts now to talk about it, to be honest with you, and I've done that once already. I find it very hard to talk about it any more, basically. He dropped me off at home. I remember going to the bathroom and scrubbing with Dettol, because I felt dirty at what had happened.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): For years he said nothing, afraid the elders wouldn't believe him. When he finally did speak out, his instinct as a 9 year old proved right.

SIMON BRADY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): It's not so much did they believe me. Did they want to believe me? They didn't want to believe me. I think in terms of my house, you know.. they weren't open-minded and I think they'd already made their mind up even before they got to my house.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The police did believe him, and they tracked down a second boy who'd been abused by Patty. But what happened next caused them serious concern. An elder confronted the victim's father, calling the man's son a liar. The father complained to the police, who warned the elder to stay away from the victim's families. His excuse was that, as an elder, he had every right to investigate the case for himself.

SERGEANT STEVE COLLEY (WEST MIDLANDS POLICE): It was his duty to test the evidence prior to the court case. I advised him that if that sort of behaviour continued, then if an allegation had been formally made, then I would have to investigate that particular person for offenses to pervert the course of justice, and in fact witness intimidation. The conversation did get a little bit heated towards the end, but obviously I'd a duty to protect my complainants and witnesses to the case. I made sure and sent out the signal that I was prepared to protect them and take drastic steps, i.e. arresting people, if they breached that.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): In Birmingham, as in New Hampshire, the elders supported the accused. Even after Patty was convicted and sentenced to five years in jail they didn't waver. At the next meeting in the Kingdom Hall, the elders made sure the congregation knew where they stood.

SIMON BRADY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): There's Nice McGivern saying "As a body of elders - that's including every elder in Rubery - we feel as a body of elders that basically this man is innocent, we believe he's innocent, and the Bethel have informed us they will do everything in their power to help this man".

SERGEANT STEVE COLLEY (WEST MIDLANDS POLICE): I then made it my duty to actually speak to the Legal Services Team of the Bethel in London and voice my disquiet about the lack of co-operation I'd had from start to finish from this inquiry.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Under police pressure, the elders did apologize and were demoted though not sacked. The London headquarters, the Bethel, refused to discuss any specific case. They said this was because the elders had to respect the confidentiality of the victims. But the victims wanted answers. We again asked for an interview with their spokesman, Paul Gillies. When he refused we phoned him, told him we were recording and asked a simple question. Are elders told to report allegations of abuse to the police or not?

PAUL GILLIES (WATCHTOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY'S OFFICIAL SPOKESPERSON): The elders' guideline is: if you get any single allegation of child abuse come to your attention, phone this office.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Why phone this office? Why not phone your local police station?

PAUL GILLIES (WATCHTOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY'S OFFICIAL SPOKESPERSON): Well, you see the first thing is we have to make sure for the protection of the child, that's our first priority.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Is it the protection of the child... is it fair to ask you, isn't it the protection of the church that comes straight to mind there?

PAUL GILLIES (WATCHTOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY'S OFFICIAL SPOKESPERSON): It is the protection of the child. We have a child protection policy.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): It was a long conversation and we asked if he'd be prepared to answer the same questions on camera. He refused. So it was back to America and back to a Jehovah's Witness convention in Tulsa. We'd been told we'd find a member of the Governing Body here. Ted JARACZ is one of the men responsible for the church's child protection policy. For more than two months we've been asking them for an interview. We want answers to some simple questions. Why do they keep their database of suspected pedophiles secret? Why don't they report all allegations of abuse to the police? Why do they send children back to the arms of their abusers? They refused to

talk to us. But here at last we had our chance. Mister JARACZ, tell me about the database. How do you justify keeping a list of people, men in some cases who have confessed to pedophilia, but you have not reported them to the authorities. What justification is there for you to keep that list?

TED JARACZ (MEMBER OF THE SUPREME GOVERNING BODY OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES): You know, you're from Britain. You have a privacy law. You have a directive from the European Union. You observe that, don't you?

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): So when allegations of abuse are made, is it alright to keep them private?

TED JARACZ (LEADING MEMBER OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES): I think you were answered. That question was answered strictly to your satisfaction.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Can you answer it now?

TED JARACZ (LEADING MEMBER OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES): I'm not going to repeat. I'll just tell you exactly and you will see it in writing. It is all in print. You know the Bible says "Do not go beyond the things that are written."? We don't go beyond the things that are written.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): And that was that. No doubt, no second thoughts. Just a simple belief that Jehovah will sort it out, a belief for which others, younger and more vulnerable, may continue to pay a price.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): They're living in denial, denial of what's happening to their children, and it's not a matter.. you see, if they accept that, then they accept that there is a problem. So rather than admit that there's a problem, they will just let children go on and continue to be molested and not do anything about it.

BBC Panorama Advertisement for the Television Show - July 14th 2002:

Jehovah's Witnesses and child abuse

The Jehovahs witnesses are the latest in a succession of religious groups to come under attack for the way they have responded to allegations of child sex abuse within their ranks. A Panorama investigation to be shown on BBC1 tonight (Sunday) reveals that a number of legal actions against the organization are underway in America, but the problem is not confined to that country. Report by Panorama's Shabnam Grewal.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are accused of having a "child protection policy" that protects paedophiles. You can ask our panel about the organisation, its policies and how child abuse should be dealt with in a live forum on Monday 15 July at 14:00 BST, to be shown on this page and on Digital Satellite television.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/audiovideo/programmes/panorama/live_forums/newsid_2124000/2124808.stm (http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/audiovideo/programmes/panorama/live_forums/newsid_2124000/2124808.stm)

When child abuse is suspected within a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, "elders" in the church have a "child protection policy" to follow.

This involves reporting the matter to the church's own legal desk - but not necessarily to the police. The organisation's strict biblical interpretation means not only that the matter often remains a secret within the organisation, but also that victims can be sent back home to the abusive relationship which they have complained of.

A former elder, Bill Bowen, has spoken out to Panorama about these policies. He's now leading a campaign to change the church's attitude to child abuse within its ranks.

And we speak to victims caught up in this controversy from around the world.

E-mail us your questions for our panel to answer.

www.SundayHerald.com News - July 14th 2002:

Jehovah's Witnesses accused of building 'paedophile paradise'

Scottish branch of world church alleged to have sheltered abusers and kept information from police

By Torcuil Crichton

The Jehovah's Witnesses Church in Scotland stands accused of sheltering child abusers and keeping secret files of known paedophiles within the organisation which it refuses to share with police.

After a successful prosecution over child abuse within a Jehovah's Witnesses family in Ayrshire, Scottish police are understood to be preparing to bring a further case to court in the northeast.

The Jehovah's Witnesses church, which has six million members around the world, has been convulsed by revelations that its elders have protected sex offenders, failed to report accusations to the police and even punished children and families making accusations.

The Watch Tower, the church's worldwide head quarters in Brooklyn, is struggling to regain its battered authority after a string of child abuse cases stretching from the US to Scotland. An investigation by the BBC's Panorama programme has discovered that the Watch Tower Society keeps a worldwide database of members accused of child abuse. The list, which is claimed to contain more than 20,000 names, is based on details held by each Jehovah's Witnesses congregation and many of the names on that list have never been reported to the police.

Allegations of child abuse within the church first emerged in Scotland in the quiet seaside town of Stevenson in Ayrshire when 19-year-old Alison Cousins went to the police after being branded a liar by church elders to whom she had turned for help.

Cousins, who was brought up in the Jehovah's Witnesses, went to her church elders three years ago with the shocking allegation that her father, a respected member of the congregation, had been sexually abusing her.

Cousins, who followed the strict church rules that any allegations of wrongdoing must be dealt with within the congregation, broke down as she told her story to the men who dispensed moral guidance to the flock. In return she was told that she should do nothing.

'They told me that one of the scriptures in the Bible was that you should never take your brother to court,' Cousins told Panorama. 'And I said to them, 'Well what are you meant to do then if he's doing something wrong?' And they said, 'Come to us and we'll deal with it.'"

The church law which dictates that members must turn to elders rather than the police also demands that there must be two witnesses to a crime before taking any action. The biblical citation for this is found in Deuteronomy 19:15: 'No single witness should rise up against a man respecting any error or any sin. At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses the matter should stand good.'

In instances of child abuse, where there are no witnesses other than the child involved, critics of the church say the guide lines amount to a 'paedophile paradise'.

Eventually, because she didn't have corroborating witness statements for the elders, Cousins went to the police last year and as their investigation began, she made a shocking discovery. Church elders had known for three years that her father had been abusing her older sister, that he had confessed to the church but that no action had been taken.

Her father, Ian Cousins, who has since been prosecuted and sentenced to five years in jail, had merely been reprimanded by the elders and sent home where his abuse simply shifted from one sister to the other.

The way Cousins's case was dealt with by the church is not an isolated incident. The Jehovah's Witnesses are now reeling from a series of scandals worldwide and allegations that its self-styled Child Protection Policy does nothing but protect abusers and fails to ensure allegations of abuse are reported to the authorities.

According to its critics, child abusers within the organisation are protected by its strict biblical laws and the threat that any member disregarding the advice of elders by going to the police faces the prospect of being denounced and cast out of the congregation.

The organisation insists that it has a strict child protection policy and defends the database of self-confessed offenders as part of its strategy of dealing with abuse without referring to the judicial system.

The church keeps the existence of the list a closely guarded secret. Watch Tower states that it uses the list to monitor the activities of the men who stand accused of raping and molesting children. But former members of the church claim that keeping the list secret effectively shields abusers and allows abuse to continue. In the American Bible belt of Kentucky, Bill Bowen, who has spent his lifetime as a Jehovah's Witness and more than 20 years as an elder, claims the organisation covers up abuse by keeping this database secret.

According to Bowen, who has become a thorn in the flesh of the organisation, his sources inside Watch Tower indicate there are 23,720 abusers on the secret list -- who are protected by the system.

'Every detail is written down about what happened,' said Bowen. 'If this man moves anywhere, then if

any allegation surfaces again, this is the way they monitor these people.'

The church in the UK and the US refuses to discuss the list or its details with anyone not personally involved in a case. It was that wall of anonymity that allowed Cousins's father to remain at home and unchecked with his daughters at risk.

Bowen began his campaign to expose the church after having to handle an abuse case in his own congregation and becoming disturbed by the pressure it puts on the victim.

'When an allegation of abuse happens, parents are required to go to the elders first,' said Bowen. 'If the abuser denies the charge, they will turn back to the child and say, 'Do you have two eye witnesses to what happened?' That means the child and one other witness.'

According to Bowen, if there is not a basis to establish the allegation with two witnesses, the pressure is then turned on the accuser. If there is no corroborating evidence, the members making the allegations are warned not to repeat them against an 'innocent' or cause division in the church on pain of being 'disfellowshipped' -- effective lifetime exile.

'They're told if they don't obey these elders that God will kill them, and how God kills them is that when you're disfellowshipped, you're viewed as being dead,' said Bowen. 'It's like the biblical edict of stoning. Your own mother and father will not acknowledge you in public. Your own children will not speak to you.

'And they have a choice, they can be silent and retain their family and every friend they've known for the last 40 years, or, if they speak out, they will lose all that overnight.'

The wall of silence around abuse cases and the stipulation that there must be two witnesses before any action is taken has prevented thousands of prosecutions, according to US police.

Jack Zeller, a US police officer who dealt with several child abuse cases sees the irony. 'Unfortunately, most kids don't have several witnesses observing them get raped,' he said.

The same levels of obstruction and unco-operativeness have been encountered by police in the UK tackling allegations of child abuse within the church. Police investigations into allegations of sexual abuse within the Jehovah's Witnesses community in Birmingham were frustrated for a long time by elders in the church.

Steve Colley, an investigating officer with West Midlands police, was shocked by the determination of elders not to co-operate with his inquiries into allegations of abuse in a Birmingham congregation.

'I was surprised,' said Colley. 'They actually said to me unless I could provide two Jehovah's Witnesses who'd actually seen the offence, then as far as they were concerned the offence hadn't taken place.'

Despite this, each congregation keeps copious records regarding any spiritual infraction or wrongdoing committed within the church. Records of Ian Cousins's abuse of his eldest daughter were lodged but were only obtained by Cousins under data protection legislation. The papers show that the Jehovah's Witnesses in Ayrshire and in the organisation's headquarters knew for three years before she asked them for help that her father was a self- confessed paedophile. Instead of enabling elders to monitor him, the records showed they twice turned a blind eye to his abuse of his daughters.

'It is a paedophile paradise created by Jehovah's Witnesses,' said Bill Bowen.

'An abuser can go into any congregation, remain anonymous, have access to more children through activities in the church, and all he has to do is just keep denying it and he will have the confidentiality clause in Watch Tower policy to enable him to continue.'

Panorama's Suffer Little Children is on BBC1 tonight at 10.15pm

Here is the Web Page where you see the Article about Jehovah's Witnesses and Pedophiles in "The Sunday Sun" Newspaper, July 14th 2002:

The following is a transcript of the special letter to be read at all congregations in the United Kingdom preceding the airing of the BBC's programme "Suffer the Little Children" exposing the pedophile issue in the Watchtower:

WATCH TOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

THE RIDGEWAY LONDON NW7 1RN ENGLAND

TELEPHONE 020 8906 2211

July 14, 2002

TO ALL CONGREGATIONS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Dear Brothers:

At Psalm 144:15 we read: "Happy is the people whose God is Jehovah!" We see the truthfulness of this inspired statement when we associate with our brothers and sisters at conventions, assemblies, and congregation meetings. We enjoy a warm atmosphere of peace while we benefit from fine spiritual encouragement from Jehovah and his organization. (Psalm 29:11) What a contrast to those of the world who lack true spiritual guidance and a solid hope for the future! --Isaiah 65:13.

What enables us to maintain our happy spirit? For one thing, we fear Jehovah and we deeply respect the admonition in His Word, including what the Bible says on sexual matters. (1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Hebrews 13:4) At first, it was not easy for some of us to bring our lives into harmony with Jehovah's elevated standards. We had to make significant changes in our lifestyle before we could qualify for membership in Jehovah's clean, spirit-directed organization. Was it worth the effort? Absolutely! How happy we are to be living in harmony with God's righteous requirements!

In recent weeks, the press in this country has focused attention on the way accusations of child abuse are handled by various religious organizations. Such reports may cause some sincere individuals to ask about the procedures followed by Jehovah's Witnesses. Therefore, we believe that it will be beneficial to review with you our Bible-based position, so that you will "know how you ought to give an answer" to any who may inquire.--Colossians 4:6.

Simply stated, we abhor the sexual abuse of children and will not protect any perpetrator of such repugnant acts from the consequences of his gross sin. (Romans 12:9) We expect the elders to investigate every allegation of child abuse. Even one abused child is one too many. However, in evaluating the evidence, they must bear in mind the Bible's clear direction: "No single witness should rise up against a man respecting any error or any sin At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses the matter should stand good." (Deuteronomy 19:15) Later, this requirement to consider testimony of two or three witnesses was confirmed by Jesus. (Matthew 18:16) Thus, although they investigate every allegation, the elders in not authorized by the Scriptures to take congregational action unless there is a confession or there are two credible witnesses. However, if two persons are witnesses to separate incidents of the same kind of wrongdoing, their testimony can be deemed sufficient to take action.--1 Timothy 5:19, 24, 25.

What if someone is a proven child molester? The article "Let Us Abhor What is Wicked!" published in the Jan 1st 1997 , issue of The Watchtower had this to say on page 29: "For the protection of our children, a man known to have been a child molester does not qualify for a responsible position in the congregation. Moreover, he cannot be a pioneer or serve in any other special, full-time service." We take such decisive action because we are concerned with maintaining Bible standards and protecting our children. (1 Timothy 3:2, 9, 10) Everyone in the organization is expected to meet the same requirements, namely, to be clean physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually.2nd Corinthians 7: 1; Ephesians 4:17-19; 1 Thessalonians 2:4.

Our position is that the secular authorities deal with crime while elders deal with sin. To avoid a miscarriage of justice elders must not interfere with, prevent, or impede any secular investigation into child abuse. They must ensure that secular laws are adhered to (Romans 13:1)

To that end they are instructed to contact the legal dept at Bethel whenever they receive information from even one person who alleges that child abuse has occurred. When a report is received guidance is given by the legal dept to ensure that:

1. The alleged victim and other potential victims are protected from possible abuse.
2. The council is given to report crime to the proper authorities and to comply with any additional legal requirements.

The elders know that it is the absolute right of the victim, his or her family or anyone else to report the matter to the authorities, if they so wish. (Galatians 6:5)

At least since 1981, articles have been published in our journals, The Watchtower and Awake!, with a

view to educating Jehovah's people and the public on the need to protect children from child abuse. Besides the above-quoted article, there was the article. "Help For the Victims of Incest," which appeared in the , Watchtower. Awake! has featured such articles as "Your Child is in Danger!" "How Can We Protect Our Children?" and "Prevention in the Home" (October 8, 1993) as well as "Child Molesting-Every Mother's Nightmare," in its Jan 22nd 1985 issue.

We believe that we have a strong, Bible-based policy on child abuse. Over the years, as we have noted areas where our policy could be strengthened, we have not hesitated to follow through. At Kingdom Ministry Schools the elders receive ongoing reminders regarding this policy and related matters. And we continue to urge the elders to follow closely the procedures that we have established.

The moral cleanness of the congregation continues to be of vital concern to the "faithful and discreet slave." (Matthew 24:45) As we keep applying Scriptural principles in our lives, our happiness will increase. We trust that these reminders will be helpful to you as you share the Kingdom hope with right-hearted ones. We have much to be grateful for in the way of spiritual refreshment as a result of attending the "Zealous Kingdom Proclaimers" District Conventions. What a happy prospect! Yes, there is no doubt about it: "Happy is the people whose God is Jehovah!"-Psalm 144:15.

Your brothers,

Watch Tower B. & T. Society of Pennsylvania

BBC Panorama News Story on their Website - Friday, July 12th 2002:

Secret database protects paedophiles

The Jehovah's Witnesses organisation keeps a sex offenders register that nobody outside the church is allowed to see, a former "elder" tells Panorama.

Bill Bowen, who has spent his lifetime as a Jehovah's Witness and nearly twenty years as an elder, says the organisation covers up abuse by keeping this database secret.

His sources indicate there are 23,720 abusers on the list - who are protected by the system.

"They [the Jehovah's Witnesses] do not want people to know that they have this problem", he tells Panorama.

"And by covering it up they just hurt one person. By letting it out, then they hurt the image of the church."

Bible-based policy

Victims of abuse feel they cannot speak out

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses' interpretation of the Bible, allegations of child abuse must first be reported to the organisation's legal desk. The police are sometimes never told.

Action can only be taken within the congregation if there are two witnesses to a crime or a confession from the accused.

And if a member of the congregation is suspected or even convicted of child abuse, this fact is kept secret.

Bill Bowen, from Kentucky in the United States, resigned as an elder in 2000 in protest at this child protection policy. He told Panorama:

"These men remain anonymous to anyone outside the organisation and anyone really inside the organisation unless you are personally reporting the matter."

Danger ignored

The story of one young Jehovah's Witness from Scotland whom Panorama spoke to illustrates the danger of such a policy.

Alison Cousins was let down by the Jehovah's Witnesses' policy on child protection. When Alison Cousins was abused by her father she followed the procedure she had been taught - she turned to one of the elders.

Unknown to her at the time, her sister had also reported her own abuse by their father in the same way.

Despite having known for three years that Alison's father was a paedophile, the same elders sent Alison back home, where she continued to be abused.

In the end Alison went to the police and her father was sentenced to five years in prison.

We have a duty to protect and if we're not told, we're unable to protect

But the police had been the last to know.

Detective Sergeant Wallace Burgess of Strathclyde police said: "They had told several people before coming to the police and these people had not reported it either to the police or the social services.

"We have a duty to protect and if we're not told, we're unable to protect."

Legal advice: "walk away"

"With regard to any allegation concerning child molestation, the first edict elders are given is to call the legal department", says Bowen.

Little over a year ago, Bowen, as a concerned elder, rang the legal desk and asked for advice on how he should handle a suspected case of abuse in his congregation.

The advice was:

"You just ask him again: 'Now is there anything to this?' If he says 'no', then I would walk away from it...

"Leave it for Jehovah. He'll bring it out."

Despite this, the Head of Public Relations, J R Brown, maintains: "We have a very aggressive policy to handle child molestation in the congregations and it is primarily designed to protect our children."

When asked by Panorama about the number of suspected paedophiles on the database, Paul Gillies from the Jehovah's Witnesses Office of Public Information in the UK said: "It is not meaningful to focus on the number of names we have in our records".

With regard to their policy on reporting abuse to the authorities, he referred us to the 8 October 1993 issue of Awake!, page 9, which states:

"Some legal experts advise reporting the abuse to the authorities as soon as possible. In some lands the legal system may require this. But in other places the legal system may offer little hope of successful prosecution."

BBC Panorama News Story on their Website - Friday, July 12th 2002:

Alison Cousins: taking a brother to court

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that they should not take another member of their church to court.

1 Corinthians 6:1, 5

"Does anyone of You that has a case against the other dare to go to court before unrighteous men, and not before the holy ones?"

"I am speaking to move You to shame. Is it true that there is not one wise man among You that will be able to judge between his brothers, but brother goes to court with brother, and that before unbelievers?"

Alison's story

Alison Cousins is grew up in the small Ayrshire town of Stevenson, just outside Glasgow, where her parents were active members of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

When she told the elders of her local congregation that her father was abusing her they told her they would deal with it.

They did nothing however, and eventually she went to the police.

Her father was imprisoned for five years.

Alison told Panorama:

"They told me that one of the scriptures in the Bible was that you should never take your brother to court.

"And I said to them: 'well what are you meant to do then if he's doing something wrong?'

"And they said: 'Come to us and we'll deal with it'.

"I said to them: 'Well I've already spoken to you and you've told me I'm a liar'.

"I ended up having to go to the police because they were the only people that I thought would believe me."

BBC Panorama News Story on their Website - Friday, July 12th 2002:

Simon Brady: two witnesses

The Jehovah's Witnesses' policy means they do not act upon allegations of child abuse unless there are two witnesses to the event.

Deuteronomy 19:15

"No single witness should rise up against a man respecting any error or any sin, in the case of any sin that he may commit.

"At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses the matter should stand good ."

1 Timothy 5:19

"Do not admit an accusation against an older man, except only on the evidence of two or three witnesses."

Simon's story

When Simon Brady was growing up in Birmingham he was sexually abused by a man in his congregation.

He informed the elders, who wanted to know if there had been any other witnesses. Otherwise, this was just one person's word against another's.

Even after the man had been found guilty and sent to prison, the elders still have not taken any action because they lack their required second witness.

Simon told Panorama:

"They believe there has to be two witnesses to prove anything.

"It scared me, that scared me at nine years of age.

"There are going to be other kids out there now who are involved in this organisation and basically the guideline says they need two people to be believed or even to be taken seriously.

"Basically the chances are you're not going to have two witnesses."

BBC Panorama News Story on their Website - Friday, July 12th 2002:

Sara Poisson: obedience

The "elders" within the Jehovah's Witnesses church are regarded as God's representatives on earth. Other members are expected to act upon what the elders say.

Hebrews 13:17

"Be obedient to those who are taking the lead among you and be submissive for they are keeping watch over your souls."

Sara's story

Sara Poisson was a member of a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in New Hampshire in the USA.

She went to the elders because her husband was violent.

She also suspected - rightly, it transpired - that he was sexually abusing her daughter.

The elders told her she needed to pray more and be a better wife.

She believed them and the abuse continued.

Sara explained to Panorama why she did not simply leave with her children:

"The elders are in place to govern on earth as a substitute I guess - I can't think of a better word -

they're God's representatives on earth.

"God's representatives on earth have told me repeatedly this is my fault.

"I haven't figured it out yet... 'keep working at it and it will end'...

"OK, so I did, and I kept trying to do that.

"It would never have occurred to me to take this outside of the congregation."

BBC Panorama News Story on their Website - Friday, July 12th 2002:

Child abuse policy

Panorama investigates the Jehovah's Witnesses policy on child abuse

The Jehovah's Witnesses deal with child abuse according to principles they interpret from the Bible.

They stress the need to "abhor what is wicked", but after applying two very specific verses of scripture.

First, if any allegation is made against someone, that person must confess or there must be two witnesses to the act for it to be proven:

"No single witness should rise up against a man respecting any error or any sin... At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses the matter should stand good." (Deuteronomy 19:15)

Secondly, there is an admonishment against taking legal action against a fellow Jehovah's Witness.

Members are encouraged to keep matters resolved within the congregation and not go outside to worldly courts for assistance:

"Does anyone of YOU that has a case against the other dare to go to court before unrighteous men, and not before the holy ones?" (1 Corinthians 6:1-11)

Internalised

The Jehovah's Witnesses do not, in any of their policy letters sent from the headquarters to the elders of each congregation in the world, tell the elders to report immediately any allegation of child abuse to the police or other authorities who are trained to investigate such claims, unless they are required to do so by law.

They are however required to report the matter to the "Bethel" legal department of the Jehovah's Witnesses headquarters in that country.

The local elders themselves must carry out an investigation, interviewing the victims and the alleged abuser.

They are not provided with any training in how to deal with child abuse.

Official procedure

Two elders meet separately with the accused and the accuser to see what each says on the matter.

If the accused denies the charge, the two elders may arrange for him and the victim to restate their position in each other's presence, with elders also there.

If, during that meeting, the accused still denies the charges and there are no others who can substantiate them, the elders cannot take action within the congregation at that time.

This is because of their adherence to the Bible passage in Deuteronomy: "No single witness should rise up...".

However, even if the elders cannot take congregational action, they are expected to report the allegation to the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in their country, if local privacy laws permit.

As well as making a report to the branch office, the elders may be required by law to report even uncorroborated or unsubstantiated allegations to the authorities. In this case, they are expected to comply.

Additionally, the Jehovah's Witnesses publicity information states that the victim may wish to report the matter to the authorities, and it is his or her absolute right to do so.

BBC Panorama News Story on their Website - Friday, July 12th 2002:

History of the Jehovah's Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witnesses are a Christian sect with over six million members worldwide.

They were founded in Pennsylvania in the USA in the 1870s by Charles Taze Russell as a bible study group.

Pastor Russell, as he was often called, launched the magazine Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence in 1879.

The group continued to preach, convert and publish its magazine and as the membership rose it expanded into neighbouring states.

By 1880 there were scores of congregations around the United States and the following year the "Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society" was formed.

In 1884 it was incorporated, with Russell as president, and the name was eventually changed to the "Watchtower Bible and Tract Society".

International spread

By 1909 the work had become international, and the society's headquarters were moved to its present location in Brooklyn, New York.

Printed sermons were syndicated in newspapers, and by 1913 these were being printed in four languages in 3,000 newspapers in the United States, Canada, and Europe.

Books, booklets, and tracts had been distributed by the hundreds of millions.

In 1931 the name "Jehovah's Witnesses" was officially adopted, replacing the original name that described members as "International bible students".

Present day

From fifty people preaching full-time in 1888, the organisation has grown to approximately 6 million members around the world.

All true Jehovah's Witnesses are required to go witnessing from house to house offering Bible literature, and recruiting and converting people to what they call "the truth".

They work unpaid and some, called "pioneers", regularly spend at least 70 hours each month in door-to-door witnessing.

In the UK there are about 120,000 members who live by the rules of the organisation and call themselves Jehovah's Witnesses.

BBC Panorama News Story on their Website - Friday, July 12th 2002:

Who runs the Jehovah's Witnesses?

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society - the corporate entity that runs Jehovah's Witnesses - is controlled by a governing body which currently stands at around eleven men.

These men have all been Jehovah's Witnesses for many years and most are, in addition, "anointed" brothers.

Being anointed means they will be part of a special group of 144,000 who will join Jehovah and Jesus Christ in Heaven to rule the earth after Armageddon, in which all non-believers will be destroyed by God.

Becoming an anointed one is not something that is done by voting or selection. Rather the anointed one knows directly from God that he or she has been chosen.

Authority from God

The governing body is seen as the channel from God on earth, authorised to direct all activities of Jehovah's Witnesses.

They send directives to the ordinary "publishers", as members are often described, through letters to the elders, through their publications and through the conventions held every summer around the world.

The governing body has a chairman and this post rotates around the group on an annual basis.

Practical duties

There are also more practical matters involved in running the dozens of organisations around the world which make up the worldwide Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

These involve controlling the publishing and printing of 700 million "Watchtower" and "Awake" magazines annually, organising the conventions, building new Kingdom Halls and starting new congregations around the world.

These are done by thousands of people around the world, many of whom take a vow of poverty, working on the miscellaneous tasks that are involved in running an organisation which has an annual income of around a billion dollars.

BBC Panorama News Story on their Website - Friday, July 12th 2002:

Jehovah's Witnesses: system of membership

The Jehovah's Witnesses do not have a system of clergy and laity. Rather they see every baptised person as being an ordained minister who is able to teach and preach.

Each country where there are Jehovah's Witnesses has a headquarters called the Bethel.

Here, volunteers live and work, publishing and printing the organisation's books and magazines.

There are about 500 people living and working in the Bethel in London and over 5,000 in the New York Bethel.

Elders

All Jehovah's Witnesses are part of a congregation of up to 200 members who are led by a body of "elders".

The elders are men (never women) who are chosen at the recommendation of local elders based on scriptural qualifications and appointed by the governing body as their direct representatives in the local congregation.

These men are described by the governing body as "God's representatives on earth". They have the authority to decide whether any person can remain a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses or not.

Such decisions are made by holding judicial hearings. When someone either confesses to, or is accused of, a sin or spiritual transgression, he or she is questioned by elders.

Sanctions or punishments in the form of restrictions, public reproofs or outright expulsion from the congregation are meted out.

'Disfellowship'

Unrepentant sinners who show no remorse can be "disfellowshipped" which means that other members are required to shun them and not associate with them in any way.

This will include all family members and Jehovah's Witnesses the disfellowshipped person may have known all his or her life.

The person is viewed as being "stoned to death" in the biblical context and will not be accepted back unless approved by the elders.

A disfellowshipped person can be reinstated into the congregation after at least one year of meeting attendance after which they are deemed repentant.

Circuits

About 20 congregations make up a circuit and are supervised by a circuit overseer. He will regularly visit the congregations and take part in the choosing of new elders and other matters.

About ten circuits make up a district and are managed by a district overseer who could be responsible for the spiritual welfare of up to 40,000 people.

Above the district level is the Bethel in that country and then the headquarters in New York.

Kingdom Hall

Jehovah's Witnesses in each congregation use a "Kingdom Hall" - the place of worship at the centre of

their community.

Every Sunday the Witnesses will attend the Kingdom Hall for two hours to listen to a public talk, given by an elder from their own congregation or a visiting elder, and hold a Watchtower Study.

They will also have three other meetings during the week that consist of a Book Study, Theocratic Ministry School (a public speaking class) and Service Meeting (training for door-to-door work).

They will spend some time each week going from door to door to offer literature and bible studies in an effort to proselytise new members to their faith.

Witnesses who are very committed - called Special Pioneers - can spend up to 150 hours a month going door-to-door.

BBC Panorama News Story on their Website - Friday, July 12th 2002:

Jehovah's Witnesses: beliefs

The Jehovah's Witnesses are Christians who believe the teachings of the Bible, using their own translation.

Their beliefs differ from mainstream Christian religions in various areas.

They do not celebrate Christmas or Easter, but do remember Christ's death.

They believe Jesus Christ was not crucified on a cross but rather on a stake. For this reason, as well as the fact that they do not believe in using symbols in their worship, the symbol of the cross is not significant.

The end of the world

Jehovah's Witnesses believe they will survive Armageddon, the end of the world, and go on to live on a paradise on earth.

The imminent end of the world has always been a crucial part of their beliefs.

As early as 1876 Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the religion, wrote an article in which he gave the date for the end of the world as 1914.

The end of the world was proclaimed again by Judge Rutherford, the next president of Watchtower, in a talk given years earlier, "Millions Now Living Will Never Die", on the belief that God would bring the end to the world at that time.

The organisation no longer gives a specific date for the end of the world but strongly emphasises that it is due soon.

They believe there are only 144,000 who will go to heaven as rulers.

Blood

Jehovah's Witnesses believe taking blood into the body through the mouth or veins violates God's law. Those who do so can be expelled.

In Genesis 9, humans are told they can eat any flesh except that which still has its soul, or its blood, in it. Also in the books of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, First Samuel and Acts 15 are texts which the Jehovah's Witnesses claim point to the Bible's disapproval of the consumption of blood.

This policy extends to disallowing blood transfusions, even those which involve a person's own blood.

Over the years the organisation has softened its attitude somewhat and no longer condemns organ transplants or the infusion of blood products.

Despite still banning transfusions of a person's own blood which has been earlier removed and stored, they do allow blood which is lost during an operation to be collected, cleaned and returned to the body in a process called blood salvaging.

This policy of refusing blood transfusions has been very controversial and sometimes brought the Jehovah's Witnesses into conflict with medical and legal authorities.

Government or military service

Jehovah's Witnesses do not swear allegiance to any organisation or nation.

Because of this they are not allowed to join any armed forces, nor can they participate by voting in any

election, run for any political office, sing a national anthem or participate in any activity associated with proclaiming allegiance to any earthly government.

This has caused problems for Jehovah's Witnesses in countries where there is national service or the swearing of allegiance to the flag .



(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

11 years ago

Christianity Today - July 8th 2002:

<http://christianitytoday.aol.com/ct/2002/008/14.15.html>
(<http://christianitytoday.aol.com/ct/2002/008/14.15.html>)

Watchtower Ousts Victims, Whistle-Blowers

Jehovah's Witness members allege sect policy protected child molesters.

By Stan Guthrie

A former Jehovah's Witness elder, who campaigns against what he says is a sect policy that protects sexual abusers of children, says sect leaders have disfellowshipped nearly 50 members or abuse victims who have gone public with their criticism.

Local leaders of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, which oversees Jehovah's Witness congregations, are considering whether to disfellowship former elder Bill Bowen, 44, of Draffenville, Kentucky, for "causing divisions." Bowen, 44, has enlisted 30 supporters to speak on his behalf and has been a leading public critic of the Watchtower's handling of molestation cases.

"I think there will be an uprising," Bowen told Christianity Today. "We don't challenge Jehovah's Witness doctrine and belief. But what they have got to stop is breaking the law."

Bowen says Watchtower leadership is aggressively severing ties with those who publicly criticize the movement. Leaders recently booted out three members after they appeared with Bowen in a May 28 expos broadcast on Dateline NBC.

Watchtower spokesman J. R. Brown disputes Bowen's figures. Brown says offenders are excommunicated only for biblical reasons. "No one has to be disfellowshipped," Brown told CT. "Only unrepentant offenders are disfellowshipped."

Bowen founded silentlambs inc., which monitors allegations of sexual abuse by Jehovah's Witnesses (Christianity Today, March 5th, 2001, Page 23). He says 1,000 people have contacted his organization with credible reports of sexual abuse.

Pioneer Press News - July 2nd 2002:

Two file sex abuse suit against Jehovah's Witnesses congregation

BY STEPHEN SCOTT, Religion Editor

Two women filed a civil suit Tuesday alleging they were sexually abused as young girls by a fellow member of a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Annandale, Minn.

The women, both now 22 and living in the Twin Cities, say the religion's very tenets make it virtually impossible for victims to come forward, because at least two witnesses are required to corroborate any act of wrongdoing.

After these incidents, said the plaintiffs attorney, Jeffrey Anderson of St. Paul, these women went to the elders, and they were told, "We don't

really believe you, because we require two witnesses to this for it to have happened, and if there aren't two, you are giving false testimony.'

At issue is Jehovah's Witnesses understanding of the Bible, specifically Deuteronomy 19:15, which says a single witness shall not suffice in convicting a person of a crime or wrongdoing.

Although Jehovah's Witnesses do not interpret every passage of the Bible literally, they base their beliefs solely on principles found in the Bible.

If the accused denies the charges and there are no others who can substantiate them, the elders cannot take action within the congregation at that time, says the group's official statement called Jehovah's Witnesses and Child Protection.

Both plaintiffs allege that while they were between 10 and 12 years old, they were fondled by a male member of the congregation who was eight years older.

Named as defendants are Derek Lindala, 30, of South Haven, Minn., who is alleged to have fondled the girls on separate occasions either in his family home or while on church-related activities; the Annandale congregation; and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, which is the Jehovah's Witnesses incorporated headquarters.

Newsweek Magazine; New York; June 24th, 2002; Julie Scelfo;

Witness to shame

Volume: 139

Issue: 25

Start Page: 81

ISSN: 00289604

Subject Terms: Scandals

Sex crimes

Religion

Child abuse & neglect

Companies: Jehovah's Witnesses

Watchtower Bible & Tract Society

Abstract:

Full Text:

RIPPLE EFFECTS

Another religion faces a scandal of its own

As Roman Catholic bishops issued a mea culpa last week, Jehovah's Witnesses, a cloistered group of 980,000, moved closer to facing a sex-abuse scandal of their own.

In January a woman from Sacramento, Calif., filed a lawsuit charging that church leaders knowingly failed to notify civil authorities that she was raped by a member of her congregation.

A former church leader in Maryland was indicted in February for sexually assaulting three women who say they were told by elders not to report the abuse, and were excommunicated when they did.

After additional stories aired recently on TV, a victims' support group run by William H. Bowen was deluged with e-mails and phone calls. "Catholics only protect the priests. Jehovah's Witnesses do it for any member of the church," says Bowen, a former elder from Kentucky.

Sara Poisson says that prior to her husband's conviction for sexually abusing her daughters, church elders told her to "pray more and be a better wife."

Church spokesman J. R. Brown says the group instructs local leaders to notify police when required by law. They also conduct their own investigation: "That consists of going directly to the accused." If someone confesses, says Brown, he will be prohibited from going door-to-door unless accompanied by another Witness. Brown points out that people who accuse the church are often lapsed Witnesses, and "open prey" for exploiters. But victims like Poisson's daughter, Heather Berry, 20, say it's the church that does the exploiting. "They're letting the kids down. I don't think there's anything Christian about allowing abuse to continue." [Photograph]

The Associated Press (AP) State & Local Wire - June 24th 2002:

June 24, 2002 , Monday, BC cycle

SECTION: State and Regional

LENGTH: 382 words

HEADLINE: Conviction upheld in child molestation case

DATELINE: CONCORD , N.H.

BODY:

The state Supreme Court on Monday refused to throw out a Hollis man's conviction on child molestation charges.

Gregory Blackstock was convicted early last year of sexually assaulting a young girl in 1999, while working as a handy man for the girl's uncle and living with her aunt and uncle in East Kingston during the week.

He also was convicted in a separate case of molesting the girl's twin cousins. He had befriended the family while attending a Jehovah's Witness church in East Kingston .

Blackstock appealed the first conviction, arguing that prosecutors did not prove he had touched the 9-year-old girl's genitals. She testified he put his hand inside her pants and touched her between her legs, in an area prosecutors called her "private parts."

He also said the trial judge ruled incorrectly that if he was allowed to ask the girl's aunt whether she was upset with him, the aunt could say why she was

upset: Because he had confessed to church elders that he also molested her daughters.

Blackstone wanted the aunt's testimony limited to saying that she was upset with him in a matter involving her family, so the jury would not know he was accused of molesting other young girls.

The aunt was a key witness in the first trial because Blackstock told her he had touched her niece, although he claimed it was accidental.

The court ruled Monday the jury could reasonably conclude that when the girl testified he touched her private parts between her legs, he touched her genitals.

Associate Justice James Duggan also said the trial judge's decision regarding the aunt's testimony was fair.

"To permit the defendant to elicit the fact that the aunt was biased against the defendant based on undefined 'bad feelings' could create a false or misleading impression concerning the reasons for the aunt's bias," Duggan wrote in the 4-0 decision.

Blackstock is serving five to 10 years in prison in that case, and an additional 10 to 20 years on three counts of sexually assaulting the twin girls. He was convicted of molesting the twins even though a judge ruled his conversations with church elders were confidential and the elders could not be compelled to testify.

In an unrelated case, he is accused of sexually assaulting a Hollis girl between 1989 and 1996.

THE FOLLOWING GERMAN NEWS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY POSTED BY BILL BOWEN ON JUNE 13th 2002:

"This is a rough I repeat rough translation of the article. This is the German equivalent of 'Time' magazine according to the reporter.

silentlambs"

SPIEGEL ONLINE - June 12th 2002:

URL: <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/0> (<http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/0>),1518,198436,00.html

Child abuse with the Jehovah's Witnesses

The Silence of the Lambs

By Alexander Schwabe

Weighty accusations are being raised by Jehovahs Witness against their own religious community. The organization protects child molesters from prosecution by legal authorities. Some of the critics are

being disfellowshipped for speaking out.

Hamburg -Since his birth for 44 years William H. Bowen from Calvert City Kentucky was a faithful Jehovahs Witnesses. For many years he pioneered for the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, spending thousands of hours placing literature at the homes of his neighbors. As he went from door to door his purpose was the assist his fellowman to serve Jehovah and have the hope of living forever in Gods kingdom. As a young man, Bill Bowen followed the usual expectations, served two years in "Bethel", defined as the "house of God", Bethels are located around the world, it is an institution, in which according the a booklet called Dwelling together in Unity from 1990, it provides the following regulations, any woman who becomes pregnant is sent home, all doors are locked to the outside world, only one telephone to the outside is provided, which may be used only with the permission of superiors, and at Bethel all members must work daily eight hours for the interests of kingdom for the benefit of Gods work.

Bowen, who makes a living by the production of fragrance candles, had many privileges within the organization due to his long years of service. He served in many managerial and administrative functions within the church. He had participated in well over one hundred judicial committees, in which of the failure of brothers and sisters were judged in one of his last administrative capacities he had to face a decision: Should he stick to the theocratic rules of the Watchtower that were required to be followed, or should he make public that there were sexual crimes in Jehovahs organization.

"Leave it in Jehovah's hands"

In the year 2000 Bowen was faced with a problem involving a fellow Elder in the Congregation, it was discovered in records that this elder had molested a child on multiple occasions. The chairman of the original committee within the local witness community decided to keep the case hidden. Bowen contacted the Circuit Overseer, which wanted to keep matters quiet also, according to Bowen.

When the man from Kentucky called the Legal Department at headquarters of Watchtower in Brooklyn New York, the accused elder was finally removed, but Bowen however was tacitly instructed to leave the reporting to police, "in Jehovahs hands.

The candle maker decided not to follow the instructions from Brooklyn. Instead to protest Watchtower Policy by resigning as Presiding Overseer and elder at his congregation in Draffenville, Kentucky, and take the case public to bring attention " to the public the fact that children were being hurt and Watchtower policy must change."

In order to increase the pressure on leadership within the Watchtower home office to act "in the interest of the flock, Bowen created the website www.silentlambs.org , in the course of the last year more than one thousand Jehovahs Witnesses tell their stories of sexual crimes within the church. "The lambs were silent for a long time", says Bowen. Now they have a place, where molestation survivors can speak out and take legal action against those who hurt them.

"Thousands are sexually abused"

Erica Rodriguez had been raped as a child from the age of four to eleven years on a weekly basis. In the January she filed a lawsuit for how she was treated when she came forward about her abuse. The elders encouraged and supported not Erica but the former best friend of her parents, Manuel Beliz, 49, who was sentenced in the fall of 2001 to eleven years prison for molesting her. In the civil action submitted in the Federal Court for the State of Washington raises similar issues against the Watchtower as Bowen. She accuses them that, child molesters find on a routine basis "refuge, protection, sympathy and support", and often escape prosecution. The 23-year old estimates that the Watchtower organization has "thousands" of children and young people that are sexually abused.

This is basically untrue, says the Watchtower Public Information response in Brooklyn. The Governing Body of Jehovahs Witnesses claim an outward appearance of having a proper and progressive approach when it comes to sexual misconduct. "If church elders learn of child abuse, they proceed strictly in accordance with local laws, if it is required they report it", in a statement of the Brooklyn office for Public Information from January 2001. It is neither forbidden to the victims or their parents nor is it discouraged to report child abuse to the authorities even if the accused one of is a Jehovahs Witness.

"God will kill you"

The truth according to Bowen is quite different. Hundreds of abused were afraid of making statements because they were intimidated and threatened. Should one dare nevertheless to open their mouth they could count on sharp punishments to the point of disfellowshipment. When a person is disfellowshipped the organization requires that no one of the faith including immediate family will even speak to the individual who is being punished. Bowens father was forced to state on a video, which was passed on the press, his son is a liar - although Bowen father was not even aware of the case he was dealing

with. His fellow brothers and sisters spread malicious rumors about his personal conduct and his family. Bowens parents and his mother-in-law want to have nothing more do in the meantime with their grandchildren. In letters they have communicated: "God will kill you for your point of view."

They are obviously holding to the Jehovahs Witness theology that is to always protect the image of the organization at all costs. Bowen says: "The sad truth is that no Jehovahs Witness is allowed to criticize Watchtower leadership."

"Pedophile Paradise"

Bowen criticized it. In a letter to the Governing Body of Jehovahs Witnesses that world-wide has approximately six million followers, on the surface they claim to have a world wide brotherhood," Bowen accuses the brotherhood of protecting child molesters by a "code of the silence". The Watchtower organization has become a "Pedophile paradise," due to directives, which are authorized by the Governing Body.

It would be considered traumatic to have the victim, through church directives, to be required to face the molester in a meeting, in which parents and victim describe in detail before the elders, how they were raped. The elders decide if a crime has been committed instead of allowing the police to investigate first. In the event the accused denies the allegation the victim is then required to produce at least one witness to the act of abuse - which is often not possible in the case of child molestation. If the victim pursues the matter by telling fellow congregation members then they could face disfellowshipping.

John Robert Brown, director of the office of Public Information at the home office in Brooklyn, rejects what Bowen says. Brown states they do not confront molested child with the accused in presence of parents and three elders. Also they never threaten anyone with disfellowshipping. Even persons, who were found guilty of serious sins in the organization, could remain a Jehovahs Witness, if they were found repentant by a judicial committee. If an individual was found guilty of child molestation, he cannot under any circumstances serve as an elder. "Elders are religious leaders, says Brown.

The most hated man within the organization

"All lies!" says Bowen, which became in the meantime the most hated man within the organization. It is very likely he will be disfellowshipped. At the end of May he appeared with Erica Rodriguez, California, married couple Carl and Barbara Pandello, New Jersey, and Barbara Anderson, Normandy TN, - all together as Jehovahs Witnesses-on NBC. The program "DATELINE" reported a problem with the way child molestation is handled within the church.

The Pandellos reported, their daughter had been molested by her own grandfather Clement, a Jehovahs Witness, for several years. In 1989 Clement Pandello was sentenced to undergo therapy and received five years probation through the court. Pandello was disfellowshipped for only 18 months when he was reinstated as a Jehovahs Witness in good standing. When the determinations suggested the suspicion that Clement had molested little girls for four decades - among other things also another grandchild -, in 1994 again he was disfellowshipped but in 1996 he was again reinstated and once again accepted back into the Jehovahs Witness community.

Anthony Valenti who appeared in court at the hearing of the Pandellos had stated under oath, as an elder he had encouraged the victims to not report the matter to the police regarding Clement Pandello. The record of the court shows Valenti justified his advice with a reference to the Bible verse, which stated not to take your brother to court.

Disfellowshipping Unrepentant Sinners

Erica Rodriguez repeated to DATELINE the way she was treated when she reported her molestation. When she informed the elders at her congregation in Sacramento of the sexual abuse of Beliz who was not yet disfellowshipped, the elders told her to not report the crime to the police. They went on to threaten her with disfellowshipping if she tried to report the matter: "if you go to the police, you will be condemned by God."

The Governing Body in Brooklyn meanwhile has appointed committees, to provide a solution on how to deal with this problem. A decision has been made on how to deal with those who have spoken out and are considered traitors. The Pandellos have already been disfellowshipped. The reason has nothing to do with them speaking out publicly, says the world headquarters. Also it has no connection with the NBC program. A Judicial hearing is also moving against Barbara Anderson, who served ten years in the world headquarters at Bethel and now assists in Bowens project "silentlambs" she also is being disfellowshipped. When asked for the basis Brooklyn says the procedures are confidential. Anderson was delivered a letter, in which the disfellowshipping was announced. Anderson is in the process of appealing the decision.

A judicial hearing arranged against Bill Bowen was canceled with no notice according to his statement,

after he appeared for his hearing with 20 witnesses, who supported his position. Erica Rodriguez to date has not been summoned for a judicial hearing for appearing on Dateline according to Bowen, due to having filed civil actions against the organization.

Guardian U.K. Newspaper - June 10th 2002:

Sect demands biblical proof

Stephen Bates, religious affairs correspondent, Guardian

Elders of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the have been given instructions to deal with pedophiles after a series of damaging revelations.

But its critics say that the sect's decision to accept accusations only if the abuse has two independent witnesses is unlikely to solve the problem.

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, its headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, is used to implicit obedience and is struggling to regain its battered authority.

In a letter to be read at services, it says: "We abhor the sexual abuse of children and will not protect any perpetrator of such repugnant acts ...

"However, we must bear in mind the Bible's clear direction: 'No single witness should rise up against a man respecting any error or any sin. At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses the matter should stand good (Deuteronomy).'"

The church, which has 6 million members around the world, has been convulsed by the revelation that its elders have protected sex offenders, refused to report accusations to the police, and even punished children and families making accusations.

Two members have been charged with "disrupting the unity of the congregation" and "undermining confidence in Jehovah's arrangement" for repeating their accusations on an NBC television program.

Barbara Anderson, a former headquarters employee who claimed to have seen hundreds of suppressed files of accusations, was expelled after a private hearing held in her absence. The case against the second, Bill Bowen, a elder, has been postponed.

Mr Bowen was so alarmed by the suppression of allegations that he created a website, silentlambs.org, to investigate the scale of the problem.

He told NBC: "It's a pedophile's paradise within the organization. I believe that. I believe it with all my heart."



(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

11 years ago

NBC DATELINE

WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION

DATE: May 28th, 2002

ANNOUNCER Speaking: From our Studios in New York, here is Jane Pauley.

JANE PAULEY Speaking: Good evening. At some point it may stop being news--each time another person comes forward to say they were sexually abused as a child by a trusted religious figure--but not yet, though tonight it's not Priests under fire.

In fact, our story began long before the Catholic Church scandal broke last January. The scenario of alleged abuse is much the same, but the consequences of coming forward, for people whose Faith was the center of their lives, would be harsh and profound. Here's John Larson.

JOHN LARSON (Dateline Reporter) Reporting:

In a small town like Othello, Washington, neighbors are often friends, and friends like family. Which makes the story you're about to hear even more painful. Because, for Erica Garza (Rodriguez), who grew up here, there was no one closer, no one she trusted more than her

parents' best friend.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: You would have never known by looking at him, or by the way he acted what he was doing on the side.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: What that friend, Manuel Beliz, was doing was molesting Erica, sexually abusing her. She says it started when she was just five years old.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: I remember it just like it was yesterday.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: What was your reaction when he first started touching you?

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: I didn't know any better. I just remember it hurt.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: Out of anything, I just remember the hurt.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: A hurt that grew, she says, because her molester pressured her to keep it all a secret. And while that may not be surprising, this isn't a story about a molester trying to stay in the shadows. This is a story about others who may have played a role not only in Erica's abuse, but the abuse of other victims as well.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: They didn't care about what had happened. Everything they did was trying to hide the facts.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Both Erica and her molester were members of the same Church, Jehovah's Witnesses.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Jehovah's Witnesses are evangelical Christians best-known for going door-to-door handing out Awake! Magazine. Jehovah's Witnesses have 6 million members worldwide, and some controversial rules--no birthdays or Christmas, no blood transfusions, no military service, no saluting the flag--all of which separates them, sometimes even isolates them from mainstream America. In fact, in the world of Jehovah's Witnesses, anyone outside the Church--most of you watching tonight--are considered part of Satan's world, a world which, as depicted in the Church's Literature, will be destroyed by God.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: True Jehovah's Witnesses, those who closely follow the Church's Rules, will survive to live forever on a perfect earth.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: But now there are accusations that the Church, run out of its Headquarters in New York, called the Watchtower Society, is covering up cases of child molestation, protecting molesters and keeping secrets that put children at risk.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Consider what happened to Erica Garza. By the time she was 16, Erica's family had moved away from Othello to a new home and new Kingdom Hall in California where one day she found the courage to tell her family her terrible secret.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: And what did her father, Reuben Garza do?

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Report it to the Police?

Mr. REUBEN GARZA (ERICA'S FATHER) Speaking: No. Never mentioned report it to the Police. Take care of it in the Congregation.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Reuben Garza, who was one of the Church's Lay Ministers, or "Elders", says that's precisely what Jehovah's Witness Leaders had taught him. And so instead of going to the Police, he and his wife, Alexandra, called the Elders back in Othello.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: But let me say the obvious. I mean, your daughter's been raped. Didn't you think, 'I've got to go to the Cops?'

Ms. ALEXANDRA GARZA (ERICA'S MOTHER) Speaking: That was my first reaction. But as a Witness, first you've got to go to the Elders when you have a problem.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: But the Elders didn't go to the Police, either. Why? Well, Legally, they didn't have to. Only 16 States require Clergy Members to Report any and all suspected child abuse, and Washington State is not one of them. Instead, Church Elders opened their own Internal Investigation. It's one of the things that sets Jehovah's Witnesses apart from most other Religious Groups. The Church has its own Judicial System.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Whenever a Church Member is accused of doing something wrong--whether it's breaking a Church Rule like smoking, committing a sin like adultery, or even committing a Crime like rape--the local Church appoints a Special Committee of Elders to Investigate the charge. Now, if the accused is found guilty, they can be reprimanded or, in worst cases, kicked out of the Church,

Disfellowshipped, potentially cut off from their friends and family, losing their chance, they believe, at everlasting life. For a Jehovah's Witness, there can be no greater punishment.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Erica Garza expected her molester would, at the very least, be Disfellowshipped. But after five months of waiting for the Church in Othello to act, she got angry and did the unthinkable.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: So I called my Elders and I said, "Look, I'm taking it to the Police."

JOHN LARSON Speaking: What did they say?

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: "Don't. Or else."

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Or else what?

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: That's what I said. I said, "Or else what?" And he said, "Just don't." I said, "What? I'll be Disfellowshipped if I take it to the Police? Is that what's going to happen to me?" And he said, "Yes. You will be Disfellowshipped." And I was just, like, "What? You're going to Disfellowship me for being raped, yet the guy who raped me is still a Jehovah's Witness?" And they said, "Don't. Don't take it to the Police. You will be condemned by God."

JOHN LARSON Speaking: It was October 1996, and Erica says she finally decided whatever the penalty, she had to go to the Police. Following an Investigation, Manuel Beliz was charged with molestation and rape.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: And the Church? Erica says her California Kingdom Hall not only Shunned her, but Shunned her family as well.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: What happened?

Mr. GARZA (ERICA'S FATHER) Speaking: I was removed as an Elder.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: So they kicked you out.

Mr. GARZA (ERICA'S FATHER) Speaking: Yes, they did.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Erica felt abused, abandoned by her Church and alone. But what she couldn't have known was that it would be 4 more years before another Jehovah's Witness, this time, an Elder 2,000 Miles away, would take a special interest in Erica's case. The Elder had uncovered Evidence, he says, that there were many more victims like Erica within Witness Kingdom Halls. And now he, too, was about to break with the Church and go outside into what Witnesses believe is the realm of Satan--the outside world--to expose the Church's Secrets.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: You talking to me right now, it's like you're talking to Satan.

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking: That's correct. I'm attacking God, is what they've said about it.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: In the view of the Church, sitting down with us right now (is attacking God).

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking: Yes.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Bill Bowen is a Candle-Maker in Kentucky, and a lifelong Jehovah's Witness. It all began, he says, about two years ago when he was filing Confidential Church Records at the Local Kingdom Hall and stumbled on this Letter. It described an admission dating back to the 1980s, a molestation case that he says the Church had swept under the rug.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: About how old was this child that was involved in this case?

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking: As I reviewed the material, it appeared to me she was about 11 years of age.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: And the admitted molester? A man Bowen knew well, a fellow Elder who got only a slap on the wrist from the Church as was never reported to Police.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Outraged, Bowen put a Message on the Internet to see if there were other similar cases. The response, he says, was an avalanche of pain and frustration.

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking: These were all Jehovah's Witnesses that had been molested and silenced within the Church.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Bill Bowen is not saying Jehovah's Witnesses have more molesters than any other Religious Group. The problem, he says, is how the Church handles the cases that come to its attention.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Like the case of Daniel Fitzwater, a Jehovah's Witness Elder in Nevada. Bowen discovered that according to the Church's own Internal Records, Church Officials knew of 17

girls who had accused Fitzwater of molesting them. But Police say the Church NEVER passed that information on to them.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Bowen also learned that in New Hampshire Paul Berry beat and sexually tortured his step-daughter, Holly Brewer, from the time she was 4. But Holly's mother says that when she complained to Church Elders that Berry was beating Holly and her other kids, the Elders told her to be a better wife and to pray more. She also says they NEVER informed Police as required by State Law. The Church denies that, saying she never told them of the abuse. Holly later ran away from home and says she disfigured herself with tattoos and piercings in response to the abuse.

Ms. HOLLY BREWER Speaking: It started out by me internalizing the pain. It really did. It started by me, "I want to mess myself up. I want to make myself look as ugly as I can. I don't want any guys to hit on me. I don't want to be attractive to people."

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Both Paul Berry in New Hampshire and Daniel Fitzwater in Nevada ultimately were convicted of sexual crimes and are now in prison. But Bill Bowen says many others in the Church accused of sexual abuse have NEVER been reported to Police. It's a claim he says he's heard, though not verified, from several hundred current and former Church Members.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: His conclusion: disturbing to day the least.

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking: It's a pedophile paradise within the Organization. I believe that.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: What's the danger that you've been consumed by this to the point that -- that you've blown it all out of proportion? I mean pedophile paradise? Come on.

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking: I believe it with all my heart.

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking: There is a massive problem in the Organization.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: But Bill Bowen is just one man in one Congregation in Kentucky.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: This woman, Barbara Anderson, worked for a decade inside Jehovah's Witness (Bethel) Headquarters. When Anderson saw Bowen's Messages on the Internet, she says she realized she had to tell him there was much more to the story, involving children in MANY of the 11,000 Congregations across the Country.

Mrs. BARBARA ANDERSON Speaking: I don't believe that they're safe within their Church.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Anderson was a Researcher at the Watchtower Society in the early 1990s when a Senior Official there asked her to look into the Church's handling of sexual abuse cases.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: What she found, she says, sickened her: hundreds of molestation cases on Record, all kept SECRET in Church Files -- SECRET not only from the outside world, but from the Members themselves, the families, the mothers and fathers and children who trust the Church is looking out for them.

Mrs. BARBARA ANDERSON Speaking: I believe that if they asked to see the Congregation Records, they will find that there are many Envelopes with Letters that discuss men -- or women -- in the Congregation that were accused of molesting a child.

The Following three Paragraphs were edited out of the Original Dateline Broadcast to fit into the Time Slot, but they were added back in when the Dateline Show Re-Aired in the weeks after the Original May 28th 2002 Broadcast:

JOHN LARSON Speaking: In fact, Anderson gave Dateline a Copy of this Letter written in 1992 by a Psychotherapist, a Jehovah's Witness himself, who said he'd treated many Witnesses who'd told him they had been molested, and he had personally dealt with a number of Elders who were more interested in suppressing a matter of abuse.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Did the research that you did, talking to these Therapists and Psychiatrists, and the victims themselves, did it change the way you thought about the Church and what was going on behind closed doors?

Mrs. BARBARA ANDERSON Speaking: Yes, because the Watchtower Society didn't want to acknowledge that these girls were telling the truth because they were accusing Elders of molesting them.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Why would the Church want to keep these cases secret and in-house? Anderson agrees that part of the problem is the Church's distrust of the outside world, but she says it's

not that simple. Anderson says when Church Elders Investigate crimes like child molestation, they follow instructions that may prevent them from taking action -- ancient instructions taken from the Bible itself.

Mrs. BARBARA ANDERSON Speaking: They basically use a Scripture in 1st Timothy 5:19 that states you're not to make an accusation against an older man unless there are two or three witnesses.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: What are the odds that there are going to be two or three witnesses to an older man molesting a 8-year-old girl?

Mrs. BARBARA ANDERSON Speaking: No molester is going to have any witnesses, that's for sure.

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking: The sum and total of their Investigation will be going to a pedophile and saying, "Did you do it? Nope? Well, OK. Guess we'd better go on then. Sorry we bothered you."

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Bill Bowen says if you want to get an idea of how the Church sweeps cases under the rug, just listen to part of a conversation Bowen Recorded a little over a year ago with an Official in the Jehovah's Witness (Bethel) Legal Department.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Bowen calls seeking advice on how to handle a suspected molestation case involving a young girl and her father. Instead of being told to report it to the Police, Bowen is told to confront the suspected abuser.

Bethel Headquarters #1 Speaking On the Phone: Good afternoon, Watchtower.

Bethel Headquarters Receptionist Speaking On the Phone: Good afternoon, Legal Department.

Bethel Headquarters #2 Speaking On the Phone: You just ask him again, "Now is there anything to this?" If he says "No," then I would walk away from it.

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking On the Phone: Yep.

Bethel Headquarters #2 Speaking On the Phone: Leave it for Jehovah. He'll bring it out.

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking On the Phone: Yep.

Bethel Headquarters #2 Speaking On the Phone: But don't get yourself in a jam.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Again, there was no insistence that this matter be brought to the Authorities in the outside world. Bowen says he was so upset by the whole case he resigned as a Church Elder and vowed to help abuse victims. He didn't know that halfway across the Country, Erica Garza as feeling the same frustration as she prepared to face her molester in Court.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Did any of those Elders, any of the people in the Church stand up and speak on your behalf?

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: No.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: But Erica Garza was about to find out that she wasn't really all alone.

Announcer Speaking: DATELINE NBC, winner of 10 Headliner Awards for Excellence in Journalism. America's most watched, most honored News Magazine, DATELINE, will be right back.

ANNOUNCER Speaking: From our Studios in Rockefeller Center, here is Stone Phillips.

STONE PHILLIPS Speaking: She was just 5 years old when she says she was first molested by a respected Member of her Jehovah's Witnesses Congregation. Now a young woman, Erica Garza wants justice. She says Church Leaders threatened to Expel her if she went to the Police, but she went anyway and now her alleged attacker is on Trial for molestation and rape. Here with the conclusion to our story, John Larson.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Erica Garza's accused molester, Manuel Beliz, showed up in Court with plenty of support.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: His side was full of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: People I thought were my friends, but they were there to support him. And on my side was my family.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Even though Beliz had apparently CONFESSED his crimes before Church Elders, it appeared to make little difference. He was Expelled from the Church, but only temporarily. Elders allowed him to rejoin the Church before the Trial.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: John White, the Congregation's Top Elder (Presiding Overseer), explained at a Court Hearing.

Mr. JOHN WHITE Speaking From the Recorded Court Trial Audio Tape: We're satisfied that he was

repentant and could be admitted to the Congregation again. To us, we don't see a problem.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: White also told the Court that when a Church Member is called before the Elders and admits to a crime, they consider it a Religious Confession and that, just like a Priest or Rabbi, he and other Elders have good reason not to testify about it in Court.

Mr. JOHN WHITE Speaking From the Recorded Court Trial Audio Tape: Jehovah's Witnesses do not want to harbor criminals or dangerous people. But we want the Confidentiality because if that's taken away from us, why should a person ever confess anything?

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Did anybody say, "We understand the pain that this girl has gone through?"

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: They say we -- they feel sorry for me.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Even without the Church's help or the testimony of Elders who, Erica says, knew what had happened, in August of 1998 Manuel Beliz was convicted, Guilty on two counts of rape and two counts of child molestation. He was sentenced to 11 1/2 years in prison, but two years into his term, his conviction was overturned on a technicality over how the Jury had been selected. Erica had stood up, faced her abuser, even challenged her Church, but now he was being let out of prison.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: I was so disappointed, I was sad, I was heartbroken and I didn't know what to do.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Manuel Beliz was released from prison to await a new Trial.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Last summer DATELINE found him back at the Kingdom Hall, about to join others going door-to-door, evangelizing for the Church.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: It just makes me so sad because I was raped and I was -- I'm being Shunned, and he raped me and -- and he's being loved. It just -- it -- it gives me chills up my spine just to think about it.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: How do Jehovah's Witness Leaders respond to complaints that they're trying to bury cases like Erica's? They declined a request for an On-Camera Interview, but spoke to us Off-Camera, and provided us with a Video-Taped Policy Statement by Spokesman J.R. Brown.

Mr. J.R. BROWN (Watchtower Society's Main Spokesman) Speaking From the Video Tape: Jehovah's Witnesses feel child abuse is an evil. It's an evil of our time, it's an evil in our society and so we abhor it.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Church Officials say they publish Articles like this, educating Members and training Elders how to help abuse victims.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: The Church also says Elders are required to Investigate any allegations of abuse, and steps are taken to protect alleged victims from further abuse.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: And while Officials acknowledge that molesters who repent are readmitted to Church, they say known molesters are not allowed to hold a position of responsibility within the Church.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: They also insist that the Church complies with all Laws on reporting abuse in those States where it's required, even when there's only one witness to the crimes.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: But in States where Churches are not required to report, they say they do not discourage victims from reporting abuse to Authorities.

Mr. J.R. BROWN (Watchtower Society's Main Spokesman) Speaking From the Video Tape: When it comes to the matter of reporting, then that's something the parents can decide. We certainly never tell them not to report a case of child molestation.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: In a Letter to DATELINE, the Church's General Council adds that "it is possible that a few of the 77,799 Elders of Jehovah's Witnesses have not followed the direction that they have been given regarding investigating and reporting child abuse."

JOHN LARSON Speaking: What remains unanswered, though, is why the Church gets involved at all with investigating what are criminal matters. And just how often do they turn one of their own into Authorities? We asked the Church for some examples, proof that they're as tough as they say they are on Members who abuse children.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: The Church waited 6 MONTHS, but finally offered us 2 cases. And right away we noticed something. In both cases, the victims were Jehovah's Witnesses, but their alleged molesters were not.

They were non-believers from outside the Church.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: In fact, we could only find 2 cases where the Church took an active role in turning in one of its own, including the case of this man, Clement Pandelo.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Pandelo, seen here in Family Videos confessed to Church Elders he'd molested his own granddaughter.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: How did the Church handle it? The parents of the young victim, Clement Pandelo's own son and daughter-in-law, Carl and Barbara Pandelo, also Jehovah's Witnesses, told DATELINE the Church pressured to agree to a deal in which Clement Pandelo pled Guilty to criminal sexual contact and endangering the welfare of a child. He was given only probation, NO jail time. And what did the Church Elders tell Barbara and Carl Pandelo?

Mr. CARL PANDELO Speaking: We should just let it go, that it's not Jehovah's time to deal with it.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: The Church says that's not true, and the Church apparently did Disfellowship Clement Pandelo 2 separate times. But each time they welcomed him back. So where is this CONVICTED CHILD MOLESTER today, a man who, according to Court Records, has admitted molesting girls ALL HIS LIFE?

JOHN LARSON Speaking: DATELINE found him going door-to-door, a Jehovah's Witness in Good Standing, evangelizing to people who know nothing about his record. His own son, Carl, says the Church should know better.

Mr. CARL PANDELO Speaking: He's a SEXUAL PREDATOR. When he goes door-to-door, he has a craving for young, juvenile girls, as he puts it. He's looking at that child, having those immoral thoughts in his mind while he's there.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: You know the Church now says they don't have a special problem. It's a societal problem and they do everything they can to stop pedophiles from hurting children within the Jehovah's Witness Church.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: What do you say to them?

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: Liars.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Even though her accused rapist had been freed on a technicality, Erica Garza was not about to let him off the hook.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Last summer, nearly 5 years after she first came forward, Erica headed back to Court.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Once again, not one Jehovah's Witness from her former Church came to support her. But this time, she wasn't alone.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: That out-spoken Elder from Kentucky, Bill Bowen, was there.

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking: Just to even things.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: And Bowen had set up a new Support Group for sexually abused Jehovah's Witnesses. And more than 20 people who had heard about the case through his Web Site were there to support Erica.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: Thank you, everybody, for being here.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: These are people who don't know me, who flew from all over the place for me, to be there for me because they realize, "Hey, you didn't do anything wrong." And it was so encouraging to see people there for me as opposed to him.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: In Court, Manuel Beliz took the stand. He denied molesting Erica, but did admit touching her inappropriately. Once again, Beliz was found Guilty.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: Guilty, Guilty, Guilty, Guilty.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Erica Garza says she has found justice in spite of her Church.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: Oh, I can't believe it. On all 4 counts.

Mr. GARZA (ERICA'S FATHER) Speaking: Just a little bit of justice. You deserve it.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: Thank you, God. Thank you, Lord.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: Her molester has been sent to prison for 11 1/2 years.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: Thank you for all your help, Bill.

Mr. BILL BOWEN Speaking: Everything's over.

Mrs. BARBARA ANDERSON Speaking: You'll sleep well tonight, won't you?

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: Yeah.

JOHN LARSON Speaking: All Erica wants now, she says, is for the Church to change its Policy and give molestation victims simple advice.

Ms. ERICA GARZA Speaking: "Take it to the Police." Hey, encourage me to take it to the Police. Don't tell me not to.

STONE PHILLIPS Speaking: Erica Garza and Holly Brewer are both Suing the Watchtower Society and their local Congregations. The Church is fighting the Lawsuits.

STONE PHILLIPS Speaking: The Church also told DATELINE that while some known pedophiles still go door-to-door, they are not allowed to do so alone.

STONE PHILLIPS Speaking: Finally, 4 of the people DATELINE interviewed -- former Elder Bill Bowen, Barbara Anderson and Carl and Barbara Pandello -- are facing possible Expulsion (Disfellowshipping) from their Congregations.

NorthJersey.com News - May 27th 2002:

A battle rises within Jehovah's Witnesses

Monday, May 27, 2002

By JOHN CHADWICK
Staff Writer

In 1989, a Jehovah's Witnesses member from Paramus pleaded guilty in a Hackensack courtroom to molesting his granddaughter.

Attracting no media attention at the time, the case is now part of a larger battle by the victim's parents and two other dissident Jehovah's Witnesses in Kentucky and Tennessee against the leadership of this insular Christian denomination.

Each of the four has complained publicly about the church's handling of sexual abuse complaints against members. They say the church seeks to handle such matters privately, rather than going to authorities.

This month, the Brooklyn-based church - formally named the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society - began expelling the four members.

Carl and Barbara Pandelo, the parents of the victim in the Bergen County case, say they were excommunicated two weeks ago for "apostasy," or forsaking their religious faith.

But the former Maywood residents say they suspect the real reason is retaliation because they voiced their complaints on NBC's "Dateline" program. The two other critics facing expulsion also went on "Dateline." The segment is expected to air Tuesday, a network spokeswoman said.

Because Jehovah's Witnesses are prohibited from listening to anyone expelled from the church, the Pandelos say the expulsion effectively forbids other members to watch the show.

"This was a preemptive strike," said Carl Pandelo, who lives with his wife in Belmar. "Even rebellious members who do watch it won't be able to discuss it with church elders."

Church officials declined comment on the expulsions, but defended their handling of sexual abuse complaints.

Unlike the current scandal in the Catholic Church, the accusations against the Jehovah's Witnesses dwell more on alleged abuse by congregants rather than faith leaders. But like the Catholic controversy, the allegations raise questions about how religious communities handle potentially criminal acts by one of their own.

The Pandelos' criticism of the church goes back to 1988, when their 12-year-old daughter told them she was molested by her grandfather. The suspect, Carl's father, Clement Pandelo, confessed, and was sentenced to five years' probation in a plea bargain, according to court records.

But the aftermath created a rift between the Pandelos and their congregation, then located on Saddle River Road in Fair Lawn.

The elders, or leaders of the congregation, played a large role in the case, instructing the grandfather to confess to authorities, then expelling him from the congregation, and finally forgiving him 18 months later.

In this tightknit religious community, where the faithful live by biblical injunctions and routinely seek guidance from church elders, the Pandelos said they were told to forgive the grandfather, and to keep his crimes secret from the other members.

They said the elders should have permanently expelled the grandfather, and informed the congregation of his wrongdoing. They're particularly upset he has been allowed to go door-to-door, preaching the church's message - although his wife is required to accompany him.

"There was no concern for my daughter, or any of the other children in the church," Barbara Pandelo said.

A spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses said the church believes in forgiving sinners if they show repentance, and members are expected to welcome them back to the fold. A Maywood man who served as an elder in the Pandelos' congregation said the elders kept a close watch on the grandfather to make sure he wasn't alone with children at church functions.

"As far as pedophilia is concerned, the elders will monitor the situation, besides whatever else is happening legally," said the elder, Anthony Valenti. "That continues to be the case today."

The rift widened when the congregation refused to testify for the Pandelos when they filed a lawsuit against the grandfather.

With the help of the Internet, the family joined forces with other critics a few years ago. They recently issued a joint press release after the church initiated expulsion proceedings.

Because New Jersey requires any citizen to report child abuse to the police, the elders in the Pandelo case said they had to call the authorities.

But critics as well as church leaders say that's not necessarily the case with every allegation, especially in states with no mandatory reporting laws.

Church officials say they decide on a case-by-case basis how to handle accusations. David Semonian, a spokesman at church headquarters, said congregation elders must consult with legal advisers at Jehovah's Witnesses' headquarters when faced with an accusation of child abuse.

"If the law requires [reporting], then that's automatic, and we would never try to discourage someone," Semonian said. "But a person may decide themselves that they do not want to report it. And we would not force them to do so."

Jehovah Witnesses, who claim 6 million members worldwide, live by a Bible-based theology that requires members to keep some distance from the trappings of the secular world. Under this "Christian neutrality," members do not salute the flag, serve in the military, or participate in politics.

Members say they strive to be decent, law-abiding citizens while following Jesus' example of being "no part of the world." Critics, however, say this world view has led to mistakes, such as handling cases of child abuse through congregation elders instead of calling in law enforcement.

"For any type of wrongdoing, you are supposed to report the matter to the elders, and they are to give you the godly direction on what to do about it," said William Bowen, once an elder of his congregation in Kentucky, and now one of the four facing expulsion. "If they tell you, 'I don't think you should report,' and you don't listen to them, you could be perceived as going against God's will." Bowen said he resigned his position as elder in 2000 after church leaders resisted his efforts to report an allegation of child abuse that dated back to the early 1980s.

Critics want the church to institute mandatory reporting, and to prohibit convicted abusers from holding leadership positions and engaging in door-to-door evangelizing.

Meanwhile, the Pandelos say they will appeal their expulsion to church elders, although they acknowledge they are no longer active Jehovah's Witnesses.

"It's more than the principle, it's the punishment that goes with it," Barbara Pandelo said. "We don't deserve them telling our friends that we are on the same level as adulterers, fornicators, or molesters."

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The Tennessean Newspaper - May 20th 2002:

Witnesses cite biblical basis for disfellowshipping

The Jehovah's Witnesses officials cite I Corinthians 5 as the scriptural basis for their practice of

disfellowshipping ? or shunning ? members who are unrepentant about serious sins such as adultery, theft, drug abuse and an attempt to create dissension in the congregation.

Spokesman David Semonian said this chapter of the Apostle Paul's letter to believers in Corinth tells members to quit mixing with unrepentant sinners.

In the New World Translation, the version of the Bible used by Jehovah's Witnesses, Verse 11 reads:

"But now I am writing you to quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man."

Usually, people who have been disfellowshipped work to rejoin the congregation, Semonian said. He did not have any statistics about how often people are disfellowshipped and later return to their congregations.

Witnesses do not worry that shunning former members will push them away, he said.

"It's a standard set out by Jehovah God himself in the Bible. We always know that his thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and anything he directs results in the best outcome for all of us."

Brian Lewis

The Tennessean Newspaper - May 20th 2002:

Disfellowshipping described as 'worse than death'

Kelsey Graham, a Bellevue businessman, was disfellowshipped from the Jehovah's Witnesses more than 20 years ago.

By BRIAN LEWIS
Staff Writer

Running afoul of Jehovah's Witnesses teachings cost Kelsey Graham his friends, his faith and his peace of mind.

"I've lost relatives to death, death I can handle," said Graham, a Nashville man disfellowshipped from the Jehovah's Witnesses. "This is something that's worse than death."

Graham, 47, was disfellowshipped, or excommunicated, 20 years ago for reasons he says remain unclear. The businessman thinks it is because he questioned church doctrine and procedures.

For Jehovah's Witnesses, a close-knit, proselytizing Christian organization known for door-to-door evangelism, disfellowshipping means being cut off from virtually the only people they know and starting over in a new and unfamiliar world. (Biblical basis for disfellowshipping)

"I thought everybody that wasn't a Jehovah's Witness was just in debauchery," Graham said, whose previous impression was that "it's just one big orgy and one big back-stabbing world."

Disfellowshipping, a form of discipline by Witnesses, has been in the news recently because a Tullahoma woman faces the possibility of excommunication on charges of "disrupting the unity of the congregation and undermining the confidence of the brothers in Jehovah's arrangement."

Barbara Anderson told reporters from the television news show Dateline that Jehovah's Witnesses have covered up sexual abuse. Anderson had a hearing May 10 but has not been notified of any disciplinary action. A New Jersey man and wife interviewed by the show have already been disfellowshipped, and a Kentucky man is awaiting a judicial hearing.

One reason that disfellowshipping is such a harsh punishment is that Jehovah's Witnesses are very much a closed society. Members are discouraged from developing relationships outside the organization, former Witnesses said. When people are excommunicated, they lose almost all of their friends.

In rare cases, people choose to leave by writing a letter of disassociation. The results are the same as disfellowshipping: The person is no longer a Witness and loses all privileges of membership.

After he was disfellowshipped, Graham said his parents and siblings continued to treat him like a relative but didn't discuss religion, he said. He no longer had any friends. If he wanted to phone somebody and say, "I've got a headache, I don't feel well," Graham said he couldn't do it.

The loss begins immediately once the elders announce a disfellowshipment at the church, he said.

"The people that greeted you before the meeting, if you decided to go, are not going to even make eye contact with you afterwards," Graham said.

"At the time that you most need spiritual uplifting is when this happens and you have no place to turn."

A person can be disfellowshipped for being unrepentant about serious sins such as adultery, theft, drug abuse or an attempt to create dissension in the congregation, said David Semonian, a spokesman in the denomination's Brooklyn, N.Y., headquarters.

While outsiders may view the punishment as harsh, Semonian said, members have a different perspective.

"It's direction from God's word," he said. "It actually is very loving. What the shunning does, it protects the congregation from unwholesome influences of those who blatantly disregard Bible influences."

Semonian said that it also serves to make those who have been excommunicated aware of how they've messed up.

"This person blatantly wanted to do what's wrong. By shunning him, it impresses upon him to come back in a right relationship with God."

Sometimes, however, that thinking backfires.

Tiffany DiDomenico of Smyrna left the Witnesses because she felt the elders' expectations of her were unreasonable. People are expected not to sin, but that's not possible, she said, and if they fail, there's a public disciplinary process.

"It's humiliating," she said. "It's very humiliating. My relationship with God should be between me and God, not me and the congregation."

She also developed serious doubts about church teachings that church elders never answered to her satisfaction. Although she neither wrote a letter of disassociation nor was disfellowshipped, the result was the same, she said. Friends and family shunned her.

One day she saw friends in Wal-Mart. But after making eye contact with her, she said, they looked away and acted as if she wasn't there. At that point, she said, she knew she'd been right to leave the faith.

"It made me very angry, and it hurt me. But more than anything, it reaffirmed my decision that leaving was the best thing I could have done for myself," she said. "I had always been told that my true friends were the Witnesses, that they were my true family. Now my supposed true family was turning their backs on me."

In addition, her father and her stepmother stopped talking with her. Calls to her father's residence were not returned.

Ironically, DiDomenico had previously somewhat shunned her mother after she left the Witnesses and told DiDomenico negative information about the religion.

DiDomenico said she is now a born-again Christian.

Graham, the Nashville man who was disfellowshipped, said he hasn't returned to organized religion.

He said his thoughts at the time of his disfellowshipment were: "I'm spiritually dead, I'm a doomed man, I have nothing to live for."

When he was first disfellowshipped, he felt certain he would perish at the battle of Armageddon, he said, which he thought would be relatively soon. Now, he has studied many religions but doesn't feel the desire to join.

"I believe in God," he said. "But I think ? the most important aspect of that faith is not doctrine but is love."

Brian Lewis covers faith, values and religion. Contact him at 259-8077 or brlewis@tennessean.com (mailto:brlewis@tennessean.com).



(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

11 years ago

This is a Letter that was sent to the Editor of the Tennessean Newspaper (May 19th 2002):

Closeness to God doesn't require church

To the Editor:

The stories of coverup of sexual abuse by the Catholic hierarchy and the Jehovah's Witnesses elders are a moral outrage. These innocent children have lifelong damage from this abuse, and these supposed leaders should be imprisoned for not reporting the abuse and for not helping these children to get therapy.

What is even more outrageous are the parents who knew about the abuse and did nothing, as was the case with the Jehovah's Witnesses who, incredulously, invited the abuser to dinner. The self-worth of someone like this is very low if they would place their place in a "community" above the welfare of their child.

As is the case with a lot of organized religion, people want to belong to something. It gives them a sense of self-worth, but it is a false sense of self-worth. Self-worth comes from the inside and knowing your relationship to God.

You can only be an integral part of a true community once you know that you can stand alone and that the community does not define who you are. The biggest lie that organized religion fosters on the masses is that you have to go through a priest, an elder, a minister, or any religious leader to either improve your relationship with God or to even have a relationship in the first place.

This lie is fostered by those same people either explicitly or implicitly, because they define their self-worth by how big their congregation is or how holy they are because they bring all these people to God.

They are not any closer to God than you or me, and they certainly can't bring someone to God. Only you can do that for yourself.

Lawrence Doochin

Franklin 37069

The Tennessean Newspaper - May 16th 2002:

Jehovah's Witnesses downplay sex abuse, women say

By LEON ALLIGOOD, Staff Writer

Melissa Trice, 30, of Spring Hill says she was molested by a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization.

Two Middle Tennessee women said they have a full understanding of a Tullahoma woman's claim that the Jehovah's Witnesses organization has downplayed or ignored child sexual abuse for years.

"In fact, nothing happened to the man who molested me," said Melissa Trice, 30, of Spring Hill, about an incident she says occurred in Shelbyville 22 years ago.

"One of the elders asked me, 'What were you wearing?' like I had provoked it. I will never forget that. I was 8 years old, for God's sake."

The other woman, who asked that her name not be used, alleged that a teen-ager in her Middle Tennessee congregation molested her repeatedly between the ages of 6 and 8.

"They prayed with him, but he didn't go away," said the 25-year-old woman who lives in the Nashville area.

The women were prompted to disclose their experiences after reading a story in Saturday's Tennessean about a Tullahoma woman who faced disfellowshipping, the equivalent of excommunication in the Jehovah's Witnesses faith. That woman, Barbara Anderson, risked shunning because she believed the organization repeatedly had ignored child sexual abuse by congregants.

Anderson was one of four Jehovah's Witnesses who told their stories to the NBC news show Dateline, which has been investigating the denomination for more than a year. A spokesman for the show said the segment is tentatively scheduled to be televised May 28. Two of the four were disfellowshipped last week, while Anderson awaits a decision. The fourth individual, a Kentucky man, is scheduled to have a meeting with local elders in a few weeks.

The Midstate women who said they had been abused were relieved to know someone was talking about the issue.

"Finally, I thought, 'Somebody is trying to do something about this,' " said Trice, who identified the person she said abused her, now deceased, as a member of the congregation her family attended.

The man was at her home to do odd jobs for her father on the day of the molestation.

"He sent my sister into the front room and called me to him. The elders tried to pass him off as old and senile, but he called me by my name. I don't think he was senile," she said.

Henry Carr of Shelbyville, who was identified by Trice as an elder in the church at the time of her abuse, would not comment on the woman's allegations.

"I'm not free to say anything on it, I guess. I don't want to get into all that stuff," Carr said in a telephone interview.

After the molestation, Trice said, she ran to her room and waited for her parents.

"I told them he touched me," Trice remembered. "They took the matter to the elders because that's what you do in Jehovah's Witnesses."

"You don't have associations outside church," said the other woman, who said her abuser also went unpunished by law because the now 18-year-old case never was turned over for prosecution.

According to state law, the women's cases should have been reported to authorities.

Since 1972, Tennessee has required that child abuse be reported even if someone only suspects abuse and has no direct knowledge of the abuse, said Carla Aaron, spokeswoman for the Department of Children's Services. Under the law, people who suspect abuse but do not alert authorities can be charged with a misdemeanor.

Trice said church elders advised her parents to keep peace in the congregation by inviting the abuser to dinner.

"Can you imagine how I felt, sitting across the table from him in my own house?" Trice said.

The allegations of abuses in the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, which has 1 million members in the United States, follows numerous press accounts of allegations of cover-up of pedophilia by Catholic priests nationwide.

Officials at the New York office of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, the incorporated name of the Jehovah's Witnesses, deny that there is an organization-wide attempt to avoid prosecution of child molesters so the organization will not be held up to public inspection.

Elders, parents and victims are encouraged to report suspected abuse to authorities, according to church officials and literature.

On one section of the Watchtower's Web site, officials deal with the subject of child abuse through statements from church officials.

Trice and the unnamed woman said the sexual abuse they suffered still affects them.

"I'm in my 20s, and I'm still not over what happened. I suffer with security issues and self-confidence issues. There's a lot that can affect a child for years and years," said the woman who asked to remain nameless.

She hasn't been to a meeting at her local Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall since 1997, which she said has caused a rift between her and her parents, who are still active in the organization.

"My parents and I are not on speaking terms. They don't understand."

Trice said she was left "thoroughly confused" by her abuse.

"Nobody explained to me that what happened wasn't my fault, and I thought that I was supposed to respond in a sexual way when a man took an interest in me," she said, saying her promiscuity led to disfellowship as a teen.

"It took me a long time to understand that I didn't do anything, but I'm still working through it all, but it's hard."

Both of the women are mothers and said they have taken extra precautions to make sure their children are not sexually abused.

"This is not going to happen to my child. I don't want it to happen to anybody's child," Trice said.

CNN News Website - May 11th 2002:

Jehovah's Witnesses expel parents of alleged abuse victim

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky (AP) -- A woman said she and her husband have been excommunicated from the Jehovah's Witnesses after speaking out against the church's handling of their daughter's allegations of sex abuse by another member.

Barbara and Carl Pandelo of Belmar, New Jersey, had been awaiting a decision since Monday, when a judicial committee of the church met in New Jersey to consider ousting them, a practice which the denomination terms disfellowshipping.

"They've just made it official now," she said Friday night in a telephone interview.

They are among four Jehovah's Witnesses who were threatened with disfellowship for sowing discord in the faith by speaking out against the church.

One of them, William Bowen, a 44-year-old former church elder from Draffenville, Kentucky, has complained that child-sex allegations are generally not reported to secular authorities by the Jehovah's Witnesses because of the church's closed nature and insistence on handling problems internally.

Anthony Valenti, an elder in the Pandelos' church, did not immediately return phone calls Friday night.

But J.R. Brown, a spokesman for the denomination, said earlier this week that parents are not punished by the church for going to the police first in cases of child molestation. He said anyone found guilty of molestation by a church judicial committee is removed from all positions of responsibility.

The Pandelos' dispute with the denomination dates to 1988, when their 12-year-old daughter said she was molested by her paternal grandfather, also a member of the faith. The grandfather has returned to the denomination.

Carl and Barbara Pandelo have not been active in the church for some time, she said, but she regrets losing the friends they made.

"To take someone and shun and abandon them is the most psychologically damaging thing you can do," Pandelo said.

Barbara Anderson of Normandy, Tennessee, has also been summoned to appear before a committee. Anderson has said she learned about the church's handling of abuse cases while working at its headquarters in New York City.

WashingtonPost.com News - May 11th 2002:

In Brief

Saturday, May 11, 2002; Page B08

Ouster Looms for Critics Of Sex Abuse Policy

Jehovah's Witnesses who publicly criticized their denomination's handling of sexual abuse allegations say it has started the process of ousting them.

A former elder, a former researcher in the Jehovah's Witnesses' headquarters in Brooklyn, N.Y., and the parents of a girl who was abused say they were summoned to meetings with local judicial committees.

J.R. Brown, a national spokesman for the Jehovah's Witnesses, confirmed that the four had been called to the hearings, but he said the proceedings may focus on "sins" unrelated to public comments on sexual abuse. He provide no specifics.

The judicial committees will decide whether the four should be "disfellowshipped," the group's term for excommunication.

William Bowen, the former Kentucky elder, resigned about 18 months ago to protest the denomination's response to child molestation. Bowen has been accused of apostasy and plans to meet with a judicial committee this month.

The others summoned were former researcher Barbara Anderson of Tennessee and Carl and Barbara Pandello of New Jersey, whose 12-year-old daughter allegedly was molested by her grandfather, a Jehovah's Witness.

The Pandellos have already had their meeting, but no decision has been released.

-- Associated Press

The Tennessean Newspaper - May 11th 2002:

Abuse charges put Witness at risk of shunning

Barbara Anderson, of the Manchester Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, faces possible disciplinary action.

By LEON ALLIGOOD
and EMILY HEFFTER
Staff Writers

TULLAHOMA, Tenn. A Coffee County woman faced congregation disciplinary action yesterday after alleging that leaders in the Jehovah's Witness faith have, for years, downplayed or ignored child sexual abuse by congregants.

Barbara Anderson feared that she would be disfellowshipped, the equivalent of excommunication, for her appearance on an upcoming episode of the NBC news show Dateline, in which she joins other alarmed members in speaking out against the denomination's alleged unwillingness to report abuse and to keep confessed pedophiles away from young children.

After the 1-hour, 45-minute meeting with three congregation elders yesterday, Anderson was hopeful that she would not be shunned for comments that appeared on a Web site run by a former Jehovah's Witness.

"Right now I am hopeful that disfellowship will not happen, but we'll see," she said as she left the worship center of the Manchester, Tenn., congregation of the Jehovah's Witnesses. This has been her spiritual home with her husband, Joe, for many years, although she stopped attending services in 1997 in protest of what she viewed as lax judgment on the part of the international organization's leaders.

A New Jersey couple, Barbara and Carl Pandelo, of Belmar, were disfellowshipped this week after speaking out against the organization's handling of their daughter's allegations of sex abuse by another member of the faith, Barbara Pandelo said last night. The Pandelos also had spoken to Dateline.

"What she (Anderson) alleges is not true at all," said J.R. Brown, a spokesman for the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc., the incorporated name of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Brown said he had been talking to Dateline about the show's story for a year but said he and other organization leaders did not know which members television producers had interviewed.

"We have no idea what she told Dateline," Brown said of Anderson.

Dateline spokeswoman Caryn Mautner would not go into details of the story or when it is scheduled to air. Mautner confirmed that Dateline had interviewed Anderson for a story about "accusations that the church was covering up cases of molestation."

Anderson has been a Jehovah's Witness for most of her life, as has her husband of nearly 45 years. She was summoned last week to yesterday's meeting.

She feared the worst.

"Most people don't understand what disfellowship would mean for a Witness. What I would lose is my family. Witnesses are not to associate with anyone who has been disfellowshipped," she said. While she would remain married to Joe, a congregation elder, Anderson said, her relationship with her son, also an elder, her daughter-in-law and her young grandchild would be jeopardized.

The consequences of excommunication are severe for a reason, Brown said. It is hoped that the harsh isolation that disfellowshipped members feel will draw them back to the organization.

Other members of the faith are not allowed to speak to disfellowshipped members. They can't greet them in a store or share a meal with them. Live-in family members can speak to the person but never about spiritual issues.

"Our statistics bear out that you have many people every year be reinstated," Brown said.

"My son said he thinks what I'm doing is a noble thing, but he disagrees with going public," Anderson said. In fact, she said she was reluctant to take her story public but said she had concluded that Jehovah's Witness leaders were not going to change the organization's policy unless forced to do so.

"They are accusing me of causing division, but this is not a theological question. This is a question of whether the church is doing everything they can to protect the children of Jehovah's Witnesses," Anderson said.

Brown said Jehovah's Witnesses have a strict policy about child sexual abuse. If parents come to congregation leaders with concerns that their child is being abused, the leaders follow state law, he said. If state law requires parents to report the abuse, congregation leaders tell them that.

People in the organization who are accused of sex abuse are subject to a hearing like the one Anderson attended yesterday, Brown said. They are automatically removed from leadership positions and can't go door-to-door without other members' being present.

Anderson said she knew of pedophiles in four Middle Tennessee congregations who had confessed to elders and who had not been disciplined. She said those elders did not go to authorities with what they knew.

There was no way yesterday to corroborate the accusations that Anderson made. Brown said they were false. A call to the local district attorney at his home yesterday did not yield a return call.

Yesterday, the Tullahoma woman was charged with speaking ill of the organization on an Internet site run by a former Jehovah's Witness. The article was sent as a personal e-mail but was picked up by the dissident Web site and used without her permission, Anderson said.

"I explained this to the three elders, who listened. They treated me fairly, I think," she said.

None of the three elders who questioned Anderson yesterday would speak to reporters.

Anderson said none of the elders were aware that the three other Jehovah's Witnesses who spoke to Dateline faced disciplinary hearings this week.

"All they had was a request from New York for them to settle this issue," said Anderson, who thinks action was taken now to discredit the upcoming Dateline show.

"If you're disfellowshipped, then Jehovah's Witnesses everywhere cannot watch the show and they can tell their friends that we are disgruntled Witnesses and bona fide apostates and what we say can't be trusted," Anderson said.

The dilemma she finds herself in is distressing. "The church has been our life. We have sacrificed greatly," said Anderson, noting the decades of service that she and her husband had put in at Witness headquarters in New York.

Anderson said she was risking her reputation in the organization because of her belief that abuses could be curtailed if leaders would take appropriate measures.

"The people in the congregations don't know who they're sitting next to. People don't know who they are inviting into their homes," she said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

About Jehovah's Witnesses

Charles Taze Russell founded the denomination in Pittsburgh in 1872. There are about 6 million Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide, including about 1 million in the United States.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe they practice the oldest religion on earth. They refer to God as Jehovah, a name translated from the Bible's Old Testament.

Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe in the Trinity. Instead, they worship Jehovah and believe Jesus is God's son, born as a man and resurrected as a spirit. Witnesses refuse to bear arms, salute the flag or participate in secular government. They also refuse blood transfusions.

The Tullahoma News - May 11th 2002:

Whistleblower could lose her church, family

MARY REEVES, Special to The News May 11, 2002

When Barbara Anderson of Normandy walked into the Kingdom Hall of the Manchester Jehovah's Witnesses Friday afternoon, there was more than a religious affiliation at stake.

Her family, the children of the congregation, the children of Coffee County, and common sense and decency were her main concerns.

She has been a member of the religious group for decades, even working for The Watchtower at the Brooklyn homebase for more than 11 years.

But because of the denomination's policies toward pedophiles, she has not attended since 1997.

Because of the church's attitude toward whistleblowers, she is afraid she will never be able to attend again.

"They've ordered me to a judicial (within the church) hearing," said Mrs. Anderson. "They say I'm being divisive in the congregation."

Jehovah's Witnesses, more than 100 years old and tallying more than 1 million members in the United States alone, has several sanctions to apply to members who act outside of the bounds of established church policy. The most drastic is "disfellowship", or excommunication. Members are disfellowshipped, or DF'd in their own terminology, are shunned by other members of the congregation. Even those who live with the DF'd member are forbidden to speak with her on spiritual matters.

Prior to the meeting with the church elders, Barbara was uncertain of the specific charges brought before her on which the proposed disfellowship would be based, but she feels she knows the true reason. It all deals with pedophiles, JW policy, NBC's Dateline television news magazine, and the actions she and others have taken against both.

While charges of child molestation rock the Catholic foundations, priests around the world are condemning the acts and condemning the church for protecting the perpetrators. According to Barbara, and Jehovah's Witness Bill Bowen of Kentucky, the Jehovah's Witnesses are doing something much worse.

According to Bowen, Barbara, and the Silent Lambs organization that Bowen established for abused Jehovah's Witness children, the denomination has protected confessed child abusers, even sending them back out into the field, going door-to-door to profess their faith.

And the victims?

At least two cases have been reported in which it was the victims who were disfellowshipped.

In one case, Erica Rodriguez approached the elders to tell them of another elder (the governing members of the church, always male) had been molesting her. She was told that if she notified the police, she would be the one disfellowshipped. She was shunned. Her abuser was convicted, disfellowshipped by the congregation, and was eventually reinstated.

In another case, the Pandelo family faces being excommunicated and has already been shunned for reporting their daughters' abuser - her own grandfather.

The Jehovah's Witness policy is such that members are encouraged to solve their problems within the church, according to Barbara.

"They say going to the police is a personal decision of the elders, if they know of a pedophile. Not everywhere. In some states, in Tennessee, they are required to report the abuse," she said.

JW policy also states that two witnesses or a confession are needed to prove the abuse occurred, but Anderson said that even confession didn't protect the victims and future victims of abuse.

"I know of two in this area - confessed molesters," she said.

Although the policy does indicate that those known molesters should only go door-to-door in the company of another Witness, Barbara stated that this was not always the case.

"The worst part is, I can't tell anyone. I can be disfellowshipped for slander, when he has confessed to being a molester and is not disfellowshipped," she said.

Barbara was not the only one to see the problem. Bowen, who also faces disfellowshipping this week, was outraged and established Silent Lambs. The organization not only serves as a support group for victims and their families, but as an advocate for change within the church.

It is that advocacy that now threatens Barbara's standing in the church. She, Bowen and the Pandelos were all interviewed for a Dateline segment about the issue, tentatively scheduled to air later this month. She, Bowen and the Pandelos all faced charges of "divisiveness" and other spiritual crimes in the same week.

In an interview with the New York Post, JW spokesperson J.R. Brown stated that the threatened excommunications had nothing to do with the Dateline interview and that "church headquarters had no idea that these people would be on the show."

Yet research displayed more than six internet announcements on the program, updates and names, all linked to the Silent Lambs and the Watchtower sites.

Brown also said that local congregation decided to charge the members with various spiritual violations.

"That is not true," said Barbara, who considers the elders of the Manchester Kingdom Hall to be good

friends. "That is a lie. They didn't know what it was about. Those orders came down from Brooklyn."

After the meeting, Barbara stated that the specific charges against her dealt with an article she had supposedly written for an apostate publication - apostate meaning one whose teachings were against the faith. Members can be disfellowshipped for visiting an apostate website, much less for writing for one. The article had been cobbled together from private emails she had sent to a friend, one who has since had a nervous breakdown. As for the charges of her being divisive within the Congregation, Barbara shook her head.

"They (the local elders) didn't even know about the pedophile cover-up," she said. "How can I be divisive if they didn't even know the work was doing on that?"

Apparently her leaders agreed, and told her they were sending a letter to the headquarters saying there was no proof of the charges levied against her. In bizarre Catch-22, she was asked if she could write to the apostate publication and request they explain the source of the article and remove it - and act that could get her disfellowshipped.

The real reason behind the charges she believes, is the Dateline program. If all the members scheduled to appear on the show are excommunicated before it airs, no practicing Jehovah's Witness will watch the program, shunning it - and the information it might supply.

Her status within the church is still in question. According to Barbara, she still faces the threat of excommunication, a result that would be devastating.

"This is my life," she said. Her husband of almost 45 years, Joe, is an elder, and her son, daughter-in-law and grandson are all members. If she is DF'd, her husband faces his own sanctions, and her son and his family would have to shun her. It is not a future Barbara wants at all, but it is a result she can live with if she must. The final result she said, must be a change in the church policy that protects pedophiles, so that it protects the victims instead.

"I'll lose my son to help Jehovah's Witness children," she said. "I'll lose my own grandson to help Jehovah's Witness children."

THE TIMES ONLINE (ENGLAND) - May 11th 2002:

Court & Social

May 11, 2002

Faith News

COMPILED BY LUKE COPPEN

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0> (<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0>),61-292689,00.html

An American man faces expulsion from the Jehovahs Witnesses after he questioned the religious groups handling of child sex abuse allegations. William Bowen, a 44-year-old former church elder, was threatened with disfellowship after he accused the group of failing to disclose allegations to secular authorities. Mr. Bowen was due to appear before a judicial committee yesterday at his church in Draffenville, in western Kentucky.

Normandy Post (France) Newspaper - May 11th 2002:

<http://www.normandypost.com/p/53/bd8b4d6ef242.html> (<http://www.normandypost.com/p/53/bd8b4d6ef242.html>)

Sat, 11 May 2002 WN Business Broadcasts WN Europe

Jehovah's Witnesses Kick Out Couple**The Associated Press, Fri 10 May 2002**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) A woman said Friday she and her husband have been excommunicated from the Jehovah's Witnesses after speaking out against the church's handling of their daughter's allegations of sex abuse by another member.

Barbara and Carl Pandelo, of Belmar, N.J., had been awaiting a decision since Monday, when a judicial committee of the church met in New Jersey to consider ousting them, a practice which the denomination terms disfellowshipping.

"They've just made it official now," she said Friday night in a telephone interview.

They are among four Jehovah's Witnesses who were threatened with disfellowship for sowing discord in the faith by speaking out against the church.

One of them, William Bowen, a 44-year-old former church elder from Draffenville, Ky., has complained that child-sex allegations are generally not reported to secular authorities by the Jehovah's Witnesses because of the church's closed nature and insistence on handling problems internally.

Anthony Valenti, an elder in the Pandelos' church, did not immediately return phone calls Friday night.

But J.R. Brown, a spokesman for the denomination, said earlier this week that parents are not punished by the church for going to the police first in cases of child molestation. He said anyone found guilty of molestation by a church judicial committee is removed from all positions of responsibility.

The Pandelos' dispute with the denomination dates to 1988, when their 12-year-old daughter said she was molested by her paternal grandfather, also a member of the faith. The grandfather has returned to the denomination.

Carl and Barbara Pandelo have not been active in the church for some time, she said, but she regrets losing the friends they made.

"To take someone and shun and abandon them is the most psychologically damaging thing you can do," Pandelo said.

Barbara Anderson of Normandy, Tenn., has also been summoned to appear before a committee. Anderson has said she learned about the church's handling of abuse cases while working at its headquarters in New York City.

TORONTO STAR Newspaper - May 10th 2002:

Sex scandal hits church**Four Jehovah's Witnesses face ouster for protest**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) Four Jehovah's Witnesses face excommunication for sowing discord in the faith by speaking out against the church's handling of allegations of child molestation.

William Bowen, a 44-year-old former church elder, complains that child-sex allegations are generally not reported to secular authorities by the Jehovah's Witnesses because of the church's closed nature and its insistence on dealing with problems internally.

The Jehovah's Witnesses shun the outside world in many respects. They refuse to bear arms, salute the flag or participate in secular government. They also refuse blood transfusions.

Bowen is to appear before a judicial committee today at his church in Draffenville, a small town in far western Kentucky.

Two others, Carl and Barbara Pandelo of Belmar, N.J., had their hearing this week and are awaiting a decision.

Barbara Anderson of Normandy, Tenn., has also been summoned to appear before a committee. Anderson has said she learned about the church's handling of abuse cases while she worked at its headquarters in New York City.

Like Bowen, the Pandelos say the real motivation is to silence them within the denomination, which

claims about 6 million members worldwide.

In a statement issued from their headquarters, the Jehovah's Witnesses said church leaders are "required by the Holy Scriptures to see to it that the congregation remains clean and unified." J.R. Brown, a spokesperson for the denomination, said parents are not punished by the church for going to the police first in cases of child molestation. And he said anyone found guilty of molestation by a church judicial committee is removed from all positions of responsibility and cannot evangelize door-to-door without being accompanied by a fellow Jehovah's Witness. Bowen disputed that, saying he has heard of cases in which parents were punished for contacting the police first, and instances in which abusers were allowed to go door-to-door on their own. Bowen, who spent two years working at the Brooklyn headquarters, said he took up the cause a couple of years ago, when he read a confidential file alleging a member had molested a child in the early 1980s. He said he was frustrated in his efforts to try to bring the problem to the attention of the church hierarchy.

"They did not want to face child molestation issues," Bowen said. "They did not want typically to turn perpetrators in. And they used the control of the organization as more or less an undisclosed way to prevent that from happening." Bowen resigned as a church elder in 2000 in protest, and has formed a support group for alleged abuse victims.

He said he has heard from thousands of alleged victims in the past year. The allegations involve both rank-and-file members of the church and, like the scandal engulfing the Roman Catholic Church, leaders of the faith.

Bowen warned that the denomination could face a flurry of lawsuits unless it changes its ways.

Two lawsuits already filed against the denomination in the past year in New Hampshire and Washington state accuse church elders of failing to follow state laws on reporting suspected abuse to police.

NEW YORK TIMES Newspaper - May 9th 2002:

National Briefing: Religion

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES SEX ACCUSATIONS Four Jehovah's Witnesses who have publicly criticized their church's handling of sexual abuse accusations have been summoned to church hearings that could result in their excommunication. The four assert that church elders did not immediately report to the authorities accusations of abuse by family or church members.

By Laurie Goodstein (NYT)

New York Post Newspaper - May 9th 2002:

FOUR FACING JEHOVAH OUSTER

By DAN MANGAN

May 9, 2002 -- Jehovah's Witnesses leaders are moving to excommunicate four people who have spoken to a television show about child molestation within the church, the four say.

If that happens, they claim, other Jehovah's Witnesses will be barred - also under the threat of excommunication - from watching the upcoming NBC "Dateline" episode detailing alleged abuse in the church and criticism of how the church handles such cases.

A spokesman for the Brooklyn-based religion called that claim "absurd."

Both sides agree that all Witnesses - including relatives of the four - would risk excommunication by having contact with any excommunicated person, except under certain circumstances.

While the four believe the show's impending broadcast has spurred the church's actions, church

spokesman J.R. Brown said that before Tuesday, church headquarters had no idea that these people would be on the show.

He also said local congregations decided to charge them with various spiritual violations.

CNN News Website - May 9th 2002:

Four Jehovah's Witnesses fight church's handling of child abuse cases

Bowen stands in front of his former church in Marshall County near Louisville, Kentucky on January 12, 2001.

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky (AP) -- As a pillar of his church, William Bowen sat in judgment of fellow Jehovah's Witnesses who went astray. On a few occasions, Bowen supported the ultimate punishment -- expulsion from the tight-knit religious group.

But now the lifelong Jehovah's Witness awaits judgment himself from fellow members of the faith. The 44-year-old former church elder is among four Jehovah's Witnesses threatened with excommunication -- or disfellowship, as the denomination calls it -- for sowing discord in the faith by speaking out against the church's handling of allegations of child molestation.

Bowen complains that child-sex allegations are generally not reported to secular authorities by the Jehovah's Witnesses because of the church's closed nature and its insistence on handling problems internally.

The Jehovah's Witnesses shun the outside world in many respects. They refuse to bear arms, salute the flag or participate in secular government. They also refuse blood transfusions.

Bowen is to appear before a judicial committee Friday at his church in Draffenville, a small town in far western Kentucky.

Two others, Carl and Barbara Pandelo of Belmar, New Jersey, had their hearing this week and are awaiting a decision.

Barbara Anderson of Normandy, Tennessee, has also been summoned to appear before a committee. Anderson has said she learned about the church's handling of abuse cases while she worked at its headquarters in New York City.

Like Bowen, the Pandelos say the real motivation is to silence them within the denomination, which claims about six million members worldwide, including about one million in the United States.

In a statement issued from their headquarters, the Jehovah's Witnesses said that church leaders are "required by the Holy Scriptures to see to it that the congregation remains clean and unified."

J.R. Brown, a spokesman for the denomination, said that parents are not punished by the church for going to the police first in cases of child molestation.

And he said that anyone found guilty of molestation by a church judicial committee is removed from all positions of responsibility and cannot evangelize door-to-door without being accompanied by a fellow Jehovah's Witness.

Bowen disputed that, saying he has heard of cases in which parents were punished for contacting the police first, and instances in which abusers were allowed to go door-to-door on their own.

Bowen, who spent two years working at the Brooklyn headquarters, said that he took up the cause a couple of years ago, when he read a confidential file alleging a member had molested a child in the early 1980s. He said he was frustrated in his efforts to try to bring the problem to the attention of the church hierarchy.

"They did not want to face child molestation issues," Bowen said. "They did not want typically to turn perpetrators in. And they used the control of the organization as more or less an undisclosed way to prevent that from happening."

Bowen resigned as a church elder in 2000 in protest, and has formed a support group for alleged abuse victims. He said he has heard from thousands of alleged victims in the past year. The allegations involve both rank-and-file members of the church and, like the scandal engulfing the Roman Catholic Church, leaders of the faith.

"I don't think we're trying to hurt the Jehovah's Witness organization," he said. "They claim they have higher moral standards than other religions and other groups. Well, this works to their advantage in every way to elevate their standards."

Bowen warned that the denomination could face a flurry of lawsuits unless it changes its ways. Two lawsuits already filed against the denomination in the past year in New Hampshire and Washington state accuse church elders of failing to follow state laws on reporting suspected abuse to police. Steve Lyons, an elder at Bowen's Draffenville church of about 60 members, said Jehovah's Witnesses are responsive to allegations of child abuse.

"I think we do as well as we can do," he said. "We comply with all local laws when it comes to reporting. We do our best to protect children in cases where even there's just been an alleged abuse."

The Pandelos' dispute with the denomination dates to 1988, when their 12-year-old daughter said she was molested by her paternal grandfather, also a member of the faith. Carl Pandelo's father has returned to the denomination, while the Pandelos face possible excommunication.

"It's almost like a public stoning," Barbara Pandelo said.

For example, Jehovah's Witnesses caught having contact with the excommunicated can themselves be expelled, she said.

"Nobody talks to a disfellowshipped person," she said. "They'll look right through you as if you're invisible."

Similarly, Bowen said he has been shunned by family members and has seen his candle-selling business hurt.

"While I may have certain personal regrets, if I had it to do over again, I'd do it a thousand times," Bowen said.

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia News - May 9th 2002:

<http://library.northernlight.com/EC20020509450000047.html?cb=0&dx=1006&sc=0#doc>
(<http://library.northernlight.com/EC20020509450000047.html?cb=0&dx=1006&sc=0#doc>)

Title: Religion News in Brief

Summary: KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) -- Religious leaders from Muslim nations disagreed at a meeting this week over whether suicide bombings in Israel should be condemned or considered legitimate means of resistance.

Source: AP Online

Date: 05/09/2002 12:03

Price: Free

Document Size: Short (1 or 2 pages)

Document ID: EC20020509450000047

Subject(s): Religion columns

Religious studies

Document Type: Articles & General info

Jehovah's Witnesses say they may be ousted over sex abuse comments

NEW YORK (AP) -- Jehovah's Witnesses who publicly criticized how their denomination handles claims of sexual abuse say the religious group has started the process of ousting them from the fellowship.

A former elder, a former researcher in the Jehovah's Witnesses' Brooklyn headquarters and the parents of a girl who was abused say they were summoned to meetings with their local judicial committees.

J.R. Brown, a national spokesman for the Jehovah's Witnesses, confirmed the four had been called to the hearings, but he said the proceedings may focus on "sins" unrelated to any public comments on sexual abuse. He would not provide specifics.

The judicial committees will decide if the four should be "disfellowshipped," the religious group's term for excommunication.

William Bowen, the former Kentucky elder, resigned about 18 months ago to protest the denomination's response to child molestation. He has since launched the Web site www.silentlambs.org to highlight the issue.

Bowen has been accused of apostasy and plans to meet with a judicial committee later this month.

The others summoned were former researcher Barbara Anderson of Tennessee; and Carl and Barbara Pandello of New Jersey, whose 12-year-old daughter was molested by her grandfather, also a member of the faith. The Pandellos have already had their meeting, but Brown said no decision has been released in their case.

The Courier-Journal Newspaper - May 8th 2002:

Jehovah's Witnesses act against abuse-policy critics

By Peter Smith, psmith@courier-journal.com (<mailto:psmith@courier-journal.com>)

Leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses are taking steps to excommunicate a Western Kentucky man and three other church members who have publicly criticized what they say is their church's secretive handling of child-molestation cases.

Bill Bowen of Benton, Ky., said he was summoned to a judicial hearing to be held Friday at his Draffenville, Ky., church to answer allegations of "causing divisions within the congregation and organization of Jehovah's Witnesses."

Bowen resigned as an elder in the Marshall County congregation in December 2000

to protest the church's handling of a

local case and its policies on handling abuse allegations. He has since formed a support group for abuse victims.

Bowen figured prominently in a CourierJournal report in February 2001 on sexualabuse issues among Jehovah's Witnesses, as did a New Jersey couple who also say they are threatened with excommunication, Carl and Barbara Pandelo.

A former employee at church headquarters, Barbara Anderson of Normandy, Tenn., said she also faces excommunication.

The Jehovah's Witnesses Office of Public Information declined to comment specifically on the four cases, citing confidentiality policies.

The Courier-Journal report cited court cases in several states in which Jehovah's Witnesses officials were accused of keeping secret the allegations of abuse by their elders or members in two cases, allegedly in violation of state law.

Leaders of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, as the organization is formally known, have disputed these claims, saying they obey all laws requiring the reporting of child abuse and do not interfere with police investigations.

They say that in states that do not require reporting of abuse, they prefer taking steps to protect children while not breaching what they see as confidential communications between elders and members.

Church officials say they might advise elders to move victims out of abusive homes or refer them to counseling.

Bowen said he believes the action is being taken to deter Jehovah's Witnesses from listening to him, the Pandelos and Anderson in news reports or on the Web site of his "silentlambs" organization (www.silentlambs.org).

He said church members who listen to the words of "apostates," or those who abandon the faith, are at risk of excommunication themselves.

Bowen said he has asked that his hearing be postponed from Friday because of plans for minor surgery.

In its statement, the Jehovah's Witnesses Office of Public Information quoted biblical references in saying elders must use church discipline to "shepherd the flock of God in their care."

"In fact, they are required by the Holy Scriptures to see to it that the congregation remains clean and unified," the statement said. "No hasty decision is made in this process."

The goal is not to expel a member, but to follow the Apostle Paul's injunction to "try to readjust such a man in a spirit of mildness," the statement said.

The Pandelos, of Belmar, N.J., were summoned to a hearing Monday night at their local congregation concerning unspecified "allegations of apostasy," according to a April 19 letter on Watchtower stationery.

Carl Pandelo said he and his wife stayed only five minutes, long enough to deliver letters of protest to the chairman of the disciplinary committee. They have not received a reply.

"It's not like we didn't expect it," he said. "You're not allowed to talk against the church in any way."

The pandelos, who no longer attend Jehovah's Witnesses services, have told The Courier-Journal that after Carl's father, Clement Pandelo, molested their daughter, the congregation acted more sympathetically to the molester than to his victim.

Elders did tell Clement Pandelo to turn himself in to police, and he pleaded guilty in 1989 to molesting three girls after admitting molesting children for 40 years.

An elder with the congregation told The Courier-Journal that church leaders did the best they could to mediate the situation.

Anderson said she has not seen the charges against her in writing but that her husband, an elder at a Manchester, Tenn., congregation, was told she was accused of "causing divisions."

"I categorically deny any of this," said Anderson, a former employee at Watchtower headquarters in Brooklyn, N.Y., where she said she first learned about the church's policies on handling abuse cases.

In the past year, two more lawsuits have been filed against Watchtower in New Hampshire and Washington state, accusing local church elders of failing to follow state laws on reporting suspected abuse to police.

In both cases, church members were convicted of sexual abuse.

One suit filed in January by Erica Rodriguez, who said she was repeatedly abused by a church member years ago, claims an elder at her former congregation in Washington state threatened her with excommunication if she reported her abuser to police.

A Watchtower statement denies this, saying that there are no sanctions against anyone who chooses to go to police, and that church elders and Watchtower did not know of the abuse until years after it had occurred.

In New Hampshire, two women are suing Watchtower, alleging elders failed to report suspicions of abuse. Their father was later convicted and sentenced to 56 years in prison for abuse.

Jehovah's Witnesses, founded in the 19th century, number about 1 million members in the United States and 6 million globally.

Best known for its door-to-door evangelism, the church views its teachings as authentic Christianity, though it parts company with other Christian bodies on some fundamental beliefs.

Like some other close-knit religious organizations, Jehovah's Witnesses practice church discipline within their congregations and sometimes "disfellowship," or excommunicate, members who are believed to persist in their errors.

NewsDay - May 8th 2002:

Jehovah's Witnesses Allege Sexual Abuse

By Ron Howell, STAFF WRITER

Some Jehovah's Witnesses say the group covers up widespread sexual abuse of children within the religion, which is headquartered in Brooklyn and known for sending adherents door-to-door to gain new members.

"Because of the closed community of Jehovah's Witnesses ... the whole issue of protecting sexual abuse among family members is very strong," said Barbara Pandelo, a Belmar, N.J., resident and a

Jehovah's Witness.

Pandelo said that in 1988 her daughter was sexually molested by a relative who is also a Jehovah's Witness.

She is one of several critics from around the country who have been commanded by their local superiors to appear at special hearings. Pandelo and the others say they are being targeted because of their outspokenness, especially on sexual abuse of minors.

A national spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, which says it has 6 million members worldwide, categorically denied the allegations.

"You cannot be a known sex offender and hold any position of responsibility within the organization," said J.R. Brown, the spokesman. "We have a very strong and aggressive policy for handling any sexual molestation that might take place."

In Kentucky, William H. Bowen, a member, said Jehovah's Witnesses have created "a pedophile paradise" because of their tradition of secrecy and reluctance to seriously investigate abuse.

Bowen said that as an elder he tried to investigate a case of sexual abuse, but church leaders told him a year and a half ago "to leave it in God's hands."

Last year he started a Web site, www.silentlambs.org, on which he claims there are numerous cases of sexual abuse committed by members and covered up by officials.

"This is their way of getting rid of us," said Bowen, referring to the local hearings.

Bowen and Pandelo maintain that the tradition of ringing doors and proselytizing new members invites problems for the religion. .

"When Jehovah's Witnesses go door to door they talk to anybody," said Pandelo, a homemaker. "Many times people [who are recruited] bring these [sexually abusive] tendencies into the congregation."

Pandelo said that although she has not worshipped with her local congregation since 1998, she fears being excommunicated.

All practicing members, even her old friends and relatives, would be required to shun her, she said. "You're viewed as if you're dead."

At a Monday hearing, she and her husband, Carl, did not present a formal defense. "But we did draft a letter and presented them with it and left," she said.

Jehovah's Witnesses spokesman Brown said only one hearing has been held so far and no action has been taken yet against anyone.

Kentucky NBC News Channel 6 - May 8th 2002:

Bowen fights excommunication for criticizing witnesses

Ernie Mitchell, NewsChannel 6

"Children are being hurt by the policies of this organization. The typical Jehovah's Witness is unaware of this unless their child is molested,"

A Jehovah's Witness who resigned as an elder will fight excommunication Friday. Bill Bowen is former presiding overseer, or pastor, of Jehovah's Witnesses at Draffenville. Bowen publicly denounces policies he says protect child molesters by refusing to reveal their confessions to police. Church officials have called Bowen to answer charges he is causing divisions within the congregation. Bowen says he will fight to remain a member, so he can support child abuse victims within the church. "I still consider myself to be a Jehovah's Witness in good standing," Bowen says.

Bowen says leaders want him "disfellowshipped," the group's term for excommunication, for starting his Silent Lambs.Org computer site in March, 2001.

Bowen says the site produces 30 to 40 E-mails daily about sexual molestation within the membership. He says witnesses have been kicked out for revealing members' admissions of child sexual abuse made to panels of lay elders. Members at Bowen's old Kingdom Hall in Draffenville say the church does not bar them from reporting abuse. They say they may council abusers to report their actions to authorities. But they admit discouraging members from telling just anybody. "The difference between needless gossip, let's say, and withholding information from those who have a right to know is two

different things completely," says Jehovah's Witness Bruce Waite.

Bowen wants Silent Lambs.Org to break down a code of silence he says was instituted by his church. "Children are being hurt by the policies of this organization. The typical Jehovah's Witness is unaware of this unless their child is molested," Bowen says.

J.R. Brown, national Jehovah's Witness public information director, says proceedings against Bowen are confidential.

Watchtower Society PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

May 8, 2002

STATEMENT

In harmony with what the Bible teaches, elders of Jehovah's Witnesses shepherd the flock of God in their care. They have the spiritual welfare of each congregation member in mind. (1 Peter 5:2) This pastoral work is done confidentially, out of respect for the congregation and the individual(s) involved. Even as the local elders are concerned about the spiritual health of each member of the congregation, they are also concerned for the spiritual welfare of the congregation as a whole. In fact, they are required by the Holy Scriptures to see to it that the congregation remains clean and unified. (1 Corinthians 1:10) No hasty decision is made in this process. It is never the goal of local elders to remove someone from the congregation. Rather, every effort is made, in harmony with Paul's words, to try to readjust such a man in a spirit of mildness. --Galatians 6:1



(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

11 years ago

North Jersey News - April 20th 2002:

Around the region

Saturday, April 20, 2002

A West Milford man pleaded guilty to child endangerment offenses Friday for sexual encounters he had with two teenage girls he met through his membership at the Jehovah's Witnesses temple in town.

Tom Blankenship, 23, had been befriended by an elder at the church and was often invited over for meals and visits, said Joseph Del Russo, Passaic County chief assistant prosecutor.

From the fall of 1998 through April 2000, Blankenship had sexual relations with one of the elder's relatives, a 17-year-old girl. He had similar sexual contact with another relative, a 14-year-old girl, from June 2001 through Feb. 21, Del Russo said.

Although there was no physical force used in the incidents, Blankenship was charged with multiple sexual assault charges because of the victims' ages. The incidents sometimes took place when Blankenship was over for visits, other times when he sneaked into the house late at night, Del Russo said.

The church elder contacted police Feb. 27 and Blankenship was arrested March 3 and charged with sexual assault, criminal sexual contact, and child endangerment offenses.

He pleaded guilty to two of the child endangerment offenses and will face a probationary sentence with up to 364 days in the county jail. Had he been convicted at trial, Blankenship faced up to 10 years behind bars.

- Jennifer V. Hughes

New Zealand Television News Story - April 8th 2002:

POSSIBLE MOTIVE FOR DISAPPEARANCE

UPDATED: 05:50PM MONDAY 8 APRIL

Police have finally uncovered a possible motive for the disappearance of a teenage Jehovah's Witness on a camping trip four months ago.

Other church members who were with Elon Oved, have admitted they were dressing up in women's underwear and taking photos of each other urinating.

Oved's father says his shy son would have left the group out of embarrassment and then lost his way.

Four months after his son disappeared in the mountains, Rami Oved says he's disgusted to find out exactly what happened on the tramping trip just before he went missing.

This photograph shows one of the group - a 15-year-old boy - wearing a bra. The group's leaders have also admitted taking photos of people urinating.

Elon's father, Rami Oved says: "Elon was very sensitive when it comes to that so I'm sure he was very fearful of being photographed or followed and therefore he was pushed further into the bush."

14-year-old Elon Oved was on a camping trip with fellow Jehovah's Witness church members in the Lewis Pass area last December... he disappeared after changing clothes behind a hut...his body was found two months later.

Police say while the conduct was not criminal, they are annoyed that they weren't told about the pranks.

The Jehovah's Witness church emphasised it was a privately organised trip... but said the photograph.."reflects behaviour that is totally unacceptable to the moral standards espoused by the Jehovah's Witness community. If photographs were taken of people urinating during the trip, such conduct is similarly inappropriate, even if the actions were meant as a practical joke."

Police have already re-interviewed the camping party... details of their behaviour will be heard at a coroner's inquest into Elon's death.

The Oregonian Newspaper - March 29th 2002:

Letter to Editor of The Oregonian Newspaper.

Witnesses hide molestation The Catholic church has hidden sexual abuse by moving guilty priests to new communities. Even more abominable, Jehovah's Witnesses hide the molestation of their youths by threatening the victims with expulsion if they try to warn and protect other members or even to report the perpetrators to police.

03/29/02

Last August, I was one of a group of advocates from across the nation to travel to Ritzville, Wash., to support one such victim when she brought charges against her Jehovah's Witness molester/rapist, Manuel Belize, at his retrial.

For at least three decades, Jehovah's Witness rape victims were accused of "consenting to fornication" for being unable to scream when criminally assaulted. An untold number were disfellowshipped and shunned. Some committed suicide.

How do the victims of these violent crimes become a danger to the fellowship, thus needing to be expelled and shunned? Is it not, rather, the other way around?

Sacramento Bee Newspaper - March 16th 2002:

Former El Dorado family dead in murder-suicide

Robert Bryant killed his children and wife, then himself, officials say

By Walt Wiley and Peter Hecht -- Bee Staff Writers

Published 2:15 a.m. PST Saturday, March 16, 2002

A family of six that moved from Shingle Springs to McMinnville, Ore., in May was found dead in a murder-suicide, authorities in Oregon said Friday.

Robert Bryant killed his wife and four children before turning the gun on himself, said Yamhill County District Attorney Bradley C. Berry.

All apparently had been killed by shotgun blasts.

"Mr. Robert Bryant killed his wife and children and then took his own life," Berry said. A motive is not yet known.

The children last attended school Feb. 22. Based on a receipt with a time stamp found in the home, the shootings are believed to have occurred the night of Feb. 23, he said.

The body of Bryant, 37, a landscaper who owned Bryant's Landscape Maintenance in El Dorado County from 1981 until the business failed 19 years later, was found in the living room with a shotgun still in his right hand.

Also dead were his 37-year-old wife, Janet Ellen Bryant, and their children: Clayton, 15, Ethan, 12, Ashley, 10, and Alyssa, 8.

Their bodies were discovered Thursday after several reports by neighbors that no one had been seen around the house for two weeks. Investigators believe they had been dead for three weeks.

The Bryants left California after Robert Bryant's business failed and a bitter split with family members and the Jehovah's Witnesses Shingle Springs congregation.

The Bryant family lived for four years in a well-kept, ranch-style home on an acre of manzanita and small oaks near Shingle Springs. They had purchased the home for \$159,000 in 1997 and sold it for \$245,000 in May.

The family moved to Mc-Minnville, 40 miles southwest of Portland, and lived in a travel trailer from midsummer until Christmas at the Olde Stone Village trailer park.

The Bryants finished paying in December for the 2.2 acres they bought for \$96,000 from Dennis Goecks, a former Yamhill County commissioner and neighbor. They planned to build a permanent residence next to the double-wide modular home in which they'd most recently been living, Goecks said.

"The family used to remind us of what we were like when we first got here," Goecks said. "They were excited to have found a beautiful place to live. They were excited about making it look really great."

In Shingle Springs, Mark Messier Sr., an elder at the Shingle Springs Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, said Bryant was expelled from the congregation about three years ago after he announced that he no longer accepted its religious teachings.

Messier said Bryant also became estranged from several branches of his family, including his parents, three brothers and a sister in the Shingle Springs and Cameron Park area.

He said other family members were Jehovah's Witnesses and the split appeared to involve differences over religious beliefs.

"He had isolated his children from the rest of the family," Messier said. "They wanted access to visit with the children, like grandparents would and like uncles would. But he (Bryant) was refusing to allow them visitation."

Messier said grieving members of Bryant's extended family were headed to Oregon on Friday.

The bodies were discovered by Yamhill County Sheriff's Detective Jack Crabtree about 9 p.m. Thursday during an unrelated call in the rural neighborhood.

Crabtree used a ladder to peer through a window after neighbors expressed concern for the family that had not been seen for weeks. He said that when he saw Robert Bryant's body on the floor, he knew he would find more bodies inside.

Ashley and Alyssa were in one room, in twin beds formed like an L. Older brothers Ethan and Clayton were in bunk beds in another room. Their mother was on the floor nearby. There was a lone spent shell for each victim.

At area schools Friday, teachers and students wept, hugged one another and talked about the kids they

hadn't had time to get to know very well.

Chris Webb, an 18-year-old senior at McMinnville High School, knew Clayton Bryant as a nice person who never gave anyone any problems.

"He would always be telling me about how he had redone some guy's whole lawn that weekend and that he had been paid," Webb said.

Michel Jo Scott owns a catboarding business in Newberg. She became worried about the family after Bryant failed to show up to complete irrigation work he had contracted to do.

She, like many others Friday, was left searching for answers.

"He just seemed to be such a nice fellow," Scott said. "He had the sweetest smile."

"When they sold their house and were packing up to move, he said he was having a tough time with his business here and he had a better opportunity in Oregon," said Bob Riley, a neighbor who lived a few houses down the gravel Pleasant View Lane where the Bryants lived near Shingle Springs.

Riley, whose family moved into the neighborhood in March 2000, said his family tried to befriend the Bryants because they had children of similar ages.

He said the Bryant parents kept a close watch on their children and seemed reluctant to have them socialize with the neighbors.

"We tried to create some opportunities for the kids to play together, and we invited them to our church," Riley said. "But (Robert Bryant) said they were Jehovah's Witnesses and they celebrated the Sabbath on Saturday instead of Sunday. We tried maybe a half-dozen times to get the kids together but came to the conclusion that they were a family that wanted to keep their kids close and they didn't want to expose them to outside influences of any kind."

He said Bryant would take the children on fishing and camping trips.

"The children were well-liked and respected by everybody who knew them," Messier said. "The children have always been very outgoing and energetic and sociable. But he limited their socialization. That was his choice."

ThisIsNorthScotland.co.uk News - March 4th 2002:

MISSING PAEDOPHILE IN PRISON FOR THREE YEARS

<http://www.thisisnorthscotland.co.uk/displayNode.jsp?nodeId=62692&command=displayContent&sourceNode=62244&contentPK=1190243> (<http://www.thisisnorthscotland.co.uk/displayNode.jsp?nodeId=62692&command=displayContent&sourceNode=62244&contentPK=1190243>)

IAIN MACIVER

09:00 - 04 March 2002

THE mystery over why a convicted paedophile from Alloa suddenly vanished from a remote village where he had settled controversially has been solved.

Jehovah's Witness Thomas Maxwell is in jail after being found guilty of a further string of sexual attacks and cruelty to girls - some as young as seven.

Some of the latest offences he was jailed for date back more than 30 years.

Maxwell, 61, moved to Leverburgh in the south of Harris just before his conviction in June, 2000, for sex offences against a 12-year-old girl.

In June, 2000, Maxwell was living in Woodlea Park, Sauchie, near Alloa, when he was found guilty at Alloa Sheriff Court on two counts of behaving with shameless indecency.

Islanders reacted angrily when he was sentenced to three years probation and 240 hours community service at Alloa Sheriff Court.

Sheriff William Reid said his decision not to impose a prison sentence was influenced by Maxwell's voluntary exile "to a remote part of the Western Isles".

In recent weeks, villagers in Leverburgh had been baffled over why Maxwell had not been seen since the end of January.

One said: "It was obvious Maxwell was no longer around. He was always wandering about the village and the beaches although most people would generally steer clear of him.

"But he had won over a few gullible people. Some would say they found him nice and pleasant and they kept saying that they could not fault his behaviour.

"These few people said he should not be judged even although they knew full well he had been convicted of serious child sex offences. That attitude is very worrying. It may have made Maxwell seem welcome."

Now papers released from Edinburgh Sheriff Court show that Maxwell, of 2 Burnside Cottages, Obbe Road, in Leverburgh, was put on trial on January 24 and was convicted on January 28.

He is now serving a three-year jail sentence after being found guilty on a charge that at various times between August, 1970, and November, 1974, at an Edinburgh address he fondled a girl who was just eight when the abuse began.

The lewd, indecent and libidinous conduct continued until she was 13, according to the charge.

Maxwell was also found guilty of attempting sex with the same girl on an occasion between October, 1972, and June, 1975, at either the same address or an address in Linlithgow.

Finally, Maxwell was found guilty of cruelty between March, 1971, and March, 1973, to another girl who was just seven or eight at the time.

The court heard that she suffered injuries when Maxwell poured boiling water between her legs as she sat in a basin and when he also held a bottle of steam against her skin.

The Garden City Telegram Online Edition - March 2nd 2002:

Man acquitted of molestation charges

BY JACLYN O'MALLEY

Date Posted on Saturday, March 2, 2002 10:05:50 AM

A 71-year-old Garden City man was acquitted Friday afternoon on charges he repeatedly sexually molested his young granddaughter and two great-granddaughters.

Arthur Cruz exchanged hearty handshakes and bear hugs with numerous family members who have been supporting him in the courtroom throughout the trial. When the not-guilty verdict on five counts of aggravated indecent liberties with a child was read, his supporters gasped with delight and shed tears of joy.

Meanwhile, Cruz's 15-year-old granddaughter sat with a relative and sobbed. The girl's companion cried and said she, too, had been victimized by Cruz and can't believe he was freed.

Cruz's twin 9-year-old great-granddaughters also had testified he sexually assaulted them numerous times when they were younger. They were not present for the verdict. Their mother was, and she celebrated the acquittal in the hallway with Cruz and his clan.

The 15-year-old came forward last summer. She said Cruz sexually molested her when she was a 10-year-old spending summer vacation at his home. The incidents surfaced when she reported another family member sexually abused her.

Around the same time, the twins confided in a fireman that they were being abused by Cruz.

Cruz's defense depended on the jurors finding the girls' testimony not credible enough to convict him. He countered their claims by saying the twins made it up because they were mad he took their pet dog, and saying that the 15-year-old wanted to use it to back up claims against another family member.

All three girls testified to similar events. They said Cruz assaulted them when no one else was around - usually when a family member was caring for Cruz's sick wife in another room. He tried to kiss them, would shove his hands down their pants and fondle their genitals, they testified.

They all claimed Cruz told them if they said anything about the fondling, no one would believe them.

In an interview after his arrest, Cruz told a detective he didn't know any of his grandchildren and was stunned anyone would put a Jehovah's Witness in jail.

This was a Letter sent to the Editor of an Arizona Newspaper around February 25th 2002:

To the Editor:

Survivors of sexual abuse need support and validation to heal. The cover-up in the Catholic Church of abuse of children by priests has no doubt further scarred the innocent victims.

Another religious group is soon to have their cover blown, the fallout from which will be the same as that experienced within the Catholic Churchshame, disbelief, denial, and disgust. The public has an absolute and undisputed right to know that a pedophile may be knocking at their door under the guise of religion.

Jehovahs Witnesses long standing policy, implemented by the governing body of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, of requiring two witnesses to a sin, combined with keeping essentially all problems within the congregation to protect their public image, has provided a haven for molesters of all types. Victims can even be disfellowshipped if they warn others in the congregation when the preposterous requirement of two witnesses has not been met.

Dateline will be offering an expose' of this scandal, possibly in March. A civil sexual abuse lawsuit was filed in Washington against the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society by Erica Rodriguez, whose victimizer is now in prison. The suit cites official Watchtower policy as contributing to the harm Erica endured. Other suits are pending. The Rodriguez story will be the main focus of the Dateline probe. Public relations appointees of the Society continue to confound questioners of policy with double-talk while offering no apology or words of comfort to the victims.

Just as those who have been molested in the Catholic Church have formed support groups among themselves, victims and supporters among Jehovahs Witnesses have formed a national alliance and can be reached at www.silentlambs.org.

Tribune-Courier Newspaper - February 13th 2002:

Former Jehovah's elder starts abuse Web site

By Bobbie Foust
Tribune-Courier Editor

William Bowen of Calvert City is continuing a campaign he started last year over policies within Congregation of the Jehovah's Witness church regarding alleged sexual abuse of children.

Bowen, a former church elder, resigned last year. Now he has started a support group called silentlambs Inc., a network for abuse victims. Its Web site, www.silentlambs.org, allows victims to share their stories.

James Bonnell, leader of the local Jehovah's Witness congregation in Draffenville, wouldn't comment on the issue. "This issue was brought up over a year ago, and Mr. Bowen has tried to keep it in the public eye," he said.

Bowen also has traveled to Washington State to support a victim, who he says was harassed, during two criminal trials of her abuser.

On Jan. 22, the woman, Erica Rodriguez, filed a federal lawsuit in the Eastern District of Washington, against Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Othello Spanish Congregation of Jehovahs Witnesses and Manuel Belizthe man convicted of abusing her as a child.

Bowen calls the lawsuit just the tip of the iceberg. He claims the church discourages victims from reporting abuse to authorities telling them instead to report it to church leaders.

Our denomination is now where the Catholic Church was 20 years ago right on the edge of a crisis," Bowen said.

Bowen recommends three things to stop abuse:

- # Victims should go to the police first.
- # The church should not put a known molester in a position of responsibility.
- # Stop child molesters from going door to door.

After resigning last year as presiding overseer of the local congregation, Bowen made accusations to

"push the denomination's leaders to respond more sympathetically" to abuse victims, a release said. He claims that "on a shoestring budget" in only few months he has contacted more than 1,000 victims.

Chicago Sun-Times - February 11th 2002:

Jehovah's Witness suit

A woman who said her family was shunned after reporting sexual abuse by a Jehovah's Witness leader claimed in a federal lawsuit this week that the denomination protects pedophiles.

The suit by Erica Rodriguez, 23, now of Sacramento, Calif., contends the religion's policy has given pedophiles "sanctuary, protection, sympathy and support" while blaming and shaming victims.

Rodriguez seeks undisclosed damages from the international Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, based in Brooklyn, N.Y., and Manuel Beliz, a former Jehovah's Witnesses leader in Othello, Wash., who was sentenced to 11 years in prison last year for molesting Rodriguez.

The Paducah Sun (Kentucky) Newspaper - February 8th 2002:

No silence of the Lambs

Web site for pedophile victims provides support, opportunity to share stories

By C.D. Bradley cbradley@paducahsun.com--270.575 (mailto:cbradley@paducahsun.com--270.575).8650

BENTON, Ky.--Bill Bowen, the former Jehovah's Witness elder who made news when he resigned last year and criticized the church for its position on pedophiles in the congregation, has started a support group for victims.

"Our purpose is to give a voice to those who have been silenced by the organization," Bowen said of his group, Silent Lambs. "We want to let them know they do have a place they can go to. We don't perform any miracles. We just give them resources and information, sources of counseling and help."

The nonprofit group's work centers around its Web site at www.silentlamb.org. The site, which Bowen said is visited by about 200 Internet surfers a day, provides a variety of information and resources.

It includes a place for victims to share their stories, often told in brutal detail. Bowen said the site now has about 400 stories split between a victims page and guestbook.

The page also keeps tabs on alleged Witness molesters in the news, provides tips on how to "pinpoint a pedophile," picks up church writings on the issue, and offers resources for victims who are looking for help.

"Only one out of five post their stories," Bowen said of the site's visitors. "Four remain silent. I tell the ones who do that they're really the heroes of the Web site. They are the ones that show that I'm not just some crazy guy in Kentucky who's made up a story.

"That's why I put up the elders' letters (outlining church policy). That way, they're not about taking my word for it. They can read it themselves."

Bowen said the church requires members to report anything, including molestation, to the congregation's elders, who then advise them what action to take. Church doctrine requires two witnesses for any type of disciplinary action, and there are generally not two witnesses to pedophilia. Church representatives have said they always follow the law, but Bowen said that does not go far enough. Only 16 states, including Kentucky, require clergy to report accusations of sexual abuse to authorities, and Bowen said elders in the other states generally choose not to report it.

Bowen has also posted audio from testimony by Erica Rodriguez, who said she was raped and molested by a church elder when she lived in Washington state from the age of four until her family moved when she was 11. Now 23 and living in Sacramento, Calif., she has sued the Brooklyn, N.Y.-based church headquarters the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society claiming church policy protects pedophiles.

Bowen said when Manuel Beliz, the former elder convicted last year of raping Rodriguez was sentenced a second time, 29 members of the church sent letters supporting him. He said Rodriguez and her family were shunned after she took the matter to legal authorities.

"Three simple things would make it a better organization," Bowen said. "One, if a child is molested, they should be required to go to the police first, not the elders. Two, if a child molester comes into the congregation, don't put him in a position of responsibility. Three, stop child molesters from going door to door."

The denomination is known for proselytizing by knocking on doors.

Bowen said he's not out to destroy the church, and is not making any profit from the support group, which he helps fund and run with the help of volunteers nationwide.

"It's a meaningful effort, and I'm glad for what it has been able to accomplish," he said. "If anything has been accomplished, it's a growing awareness among people at the Watchtower that they'd better do this right. They've been made aware they need to be careful, and if they mess up, we're going to find out about it and let everybody know."

The organization can also be reached at 1-877-WTABUSE.

U.S. Newswire - January 28th 2002:

More Sexual Abuse Suits Against Jehovah's Witnesses Will Follow, Predicts Ex-Church Elder & Legal Expert

Story Filed: Monday, January 28, 2002 6:52 PM EST

SPOKANE, Wash., Jan 28, 2002 (U.S. Newswire via COMTEX) -- A federal civil sexual abuse lawsuit filed last week in Spokane, Washington against the Brooklyn-based Jehovah's Witness organization is "just the tip of the iceberg," according to the leader of a new nationwide support group for church members who have been abused by Jehovah Witness members and leaders. A plaintiff's attorney who has represented more than 400 people who were molested by clergy agrees.

Dozens more victims of other abusive church leaders may file similar suits, they predict.

Last Tuesday, a 23-year-old Sacramento woman, Erica Rodriguez, sued the Jehovah's Witness minister who repeatedly abused her and the New York-based denomination which "routinely" gives pedophiles "sanctuary, protection, sympathy and support," the suit claims. Manuel Beliz of the Othello Washington Spanish Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses was convicted of raping and molesting Rodriguez during her childhood and sentenced to 11 years in prison.

The case is significant because it is one of a relatively small number filed against the Jehovah's Witnesses' national headquarters.

One of Rodriguez' attorney's in the case, Jeffrey Anderson of St. Paul Minnesota, has filed more sexual abuse suits against religious bodies than any other legal expert. "In my experience over the last 20 years, a handful of brave victims step forward in any denomination. Then, others who are hurting become inspired to seek healing too," he said.

"Our denomination is now where the Catholic Church was 20 years ago -- right on the edge of a crisis," said William H. Bowen of Calvert City, Kentucky. A former church elder in his local congregation and a Jehovah's Witness for 43 years, Bowen now heads "silentlambs," a new national self-help group for men and women molested by Jehovah's Witness members. (www.silentlambs.org, 1-877-WTABUSE) He resigned as Presiding Overseer last year to support victims and push the denomination's leaders to respond more sympathetically to abuse victims and turn over alleged molesters to the criminal justice system.

"In just a few months, with a shoestring budget and a volunteer staff, our group has been contacted by nearly 1,000 Witnesses and former Witnesses who have been raped or molested by church members," Bowen claimed. The alleged victims range in age from 2 to 15 from Maine to California and several foreign countries.

Repressive and insular church policies, a rigid hierarchy and a strong emphasis on obeying church authorities combine to "trap victims in a cult of silence," Bowen believes. Members of other faith groups who are abused are more apt to speak up and consult attorneys or turn to police, he feels.

"Both formally and informally, Witnesses are taught to take all matters, especially controversial matters,

to church leaders, and to avoid bringing shame on the church," said Barbara Anderson, another leader in "silentlamb." Anderson served for 10 years at "Bethel," the Brooklyn New York headquarters of the denomination. Like Bowen, she became disillusioned after being assigned as a researcher on how church leaders handled abuse accusations.

But that "cult of silence" is slowly changing, she believes. "More and more Witnesses realize that exposing sexual crimes is God's will. They recognize that getting rid of molesters is healthy for the church." Witnesses are "encouraged, even inspired" by the example of victims in Catholic and Protestant denominations who have sued their perpetrators with increasing success in recent years, she said.

"We find that the more conservative and controlling a church group is, the harder it is for someone who has been victimized to come forward," said attorney Timothy Kosnoff of Bellevue Washington. Kosnoff also represents Rodriguez and has handled sexual abuse claims against other religious organizations.

"That's why having a support group is so helpful, and that's why getting the police or a therapist or any outside professional involved is critical," he said.

While the Jehovah's Witnesses headquarters maintains extensive internal files on accused molesters within the church, they refuse to make public this information. In many cases, they do not report the crime to police, Bowen said. As a result, no solid figures exist on the number of Jehovah's Witnesses who have been accused of sexual molestation.

"Whatever that number is, you can be sure it's going to start growing quickly and dramatically," said Bowen. "Victims are starting to discover that the church can no longer bully them into silence."

The denomination has one million members in the United States and six million across the world.

Sacramento Bee (SacBee.com) News - January 26th 2002:

Woman sues Jehovah's Witnesses in sex abuse

By Jennifer Garza -- Bee Staff Writer - (Published January 26, 2002)

Claiming church policy protects child molesters, a Sacramento woman is suing the national headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses and a church elder convicted of raping her.

Erica Rodriguez, 23, says in a civil lawsuit filed earlier this week that church elders threatened her with expulsion if she told police that as a child she had been molested by a longtime congregant while living in the state of Washington.

Rodriguez and her mother were shunned by church members for reporting the abuse while the accused was given "sanctuary, protection, sympathy and support," according to the lawsuit.

Rodriguez is seeking undisclosed damages from Manuel Beliz; the Othello Spanish Jehovah's Witnesses Congregation in Othello, Wash.; and Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, the church's national governing body. The suit was filed in U.S. District Court in Spokane, Wash.

Church officials would not comment on Rodriguez's lawsuit, but did say they report crimes to the proper authorities.

"We have no objection to a crime being handled," said J.R. Brown, director of the Office of Public Information for the national organization. "In no way do we conflict with how police or other authorities handle these cases."

Beliz, 48, is a former church elder in Othello, about 100 miles southwest of Spokane. Last August, he was convicted of raping and molesting Rodriguez from the time she was 4 until she was 11, when her family moved from Washington to Sacramento, where Rodriguez still lives.

Beliz is serving an 11-year sentence in Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla.

Rodriguez said Friday that the molestation began when she visited the home of her best friend, Beliz's daughter. She said Beliz told her that if she reported the abuse he would make sure her family would face expulsion, or "disfellowship," from the Jehovah's Witnesses.

After Rodriguez's family moved to Sacramento, Rodriguez said she told church elders here about Beliz. They told her to let the church handle it, she said.

"We were loyal and devoted," Rodriguez said. "We trusted the church and thought they would do the

right thing."

Instead, she said, the church elders did nothing.

Eventually, Rodriguez went to Sacramento police. They contacted police in Othello, and Beliz was later arrested.

"Church policy requires that there be two witnesses, and as you know that doesn't happen in molestation cases," Rodriguez said.

Her attorney, Jeff Anderson of St. Paul, Minn., said the church policy makes it easier for predators to escape detection.

"Jehovah's Witnesses have been employing practices that don't protect children," said Anderson, who has filed more than 400 sexual-abuse cases against clergy across the country.

"They aren't entitled to operate above or below the law when it comes to a child's safety," he said.

But church officials strongly denied Anderson's allegation.

"The two-witnesses requirement applies to how we handle transgressions or sins as a church," Brown said. "It has nothing to do with how we handle a crime.

"We are a church made up of families ... We would not allow predators to get away with this," Brown said.

Rodriguez said the church failed her. Although she was never stripped of her church membership, she no longer belongs to a congregation.

"I don't believe in organized religion anymore," she said, "not after this."

The Guardian U.K. Newspaper - January 26th 2002:

Witness on the watchtower

Stephen Bates

Saturday January 26, 2002

The Guardian

The letter from JR Brown, director of the office of public information for Jehovah's Witnesses in New York, spoke fondly of the Guardian, pointing out that "our journals, Awake! and the Watchtower quote from it extensively." Sadly, his opinion had changed as a result of a four-paragraph article I had written last November.

The story was a particularly terrible one. Larry and Constance Slack, a devoutly religious couple from Chicago's south side, had been accused of beating their 12 year-old daughter Laree to death with a length of electric cable, 5ft long and almost an inch thick, after she could not find her mother's coat quickly enough for them go out on time one Saturday evening.

They had beaten her in accordance with Deuteronomy 25, verses 1-3, prescribing 40 lashes' chastisement, minus one, as authorised by Jewish tradition, but then zealously reproducing St Paul's punishment (Corinthians 2:11) by multiplying it three times. The child, whose mother Constance administered some of the lashes, died after being beaten 160 times. Mrs Slack is a nurse.

The couple's five other children - one of whom, an eight year-old boy, was also beaten for being unable to find the coat - were ordered to help hold Laree down. She was gagged with a towel to prevent her screams being heard.

But what disturbed JR Brown about the Guardian's report was not the shocking story itself but the fact that the Slacks were described as Jehovah's Witnesses. He helpfully appended a statement from Leon, Larry Slack's brother, insisting that the couple were not devout witnesses. Although baptised as JW's, "for the last 10 years they have not shared in our worship services, although there were a few relatively short time periods that they would sporadically show up at meetings.

"To physically harm, abuse or kill others is diametrically opposed to the Bible principles we believe in

and strive to practice... among the qualities we study about in the Bible... are.... love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness and self-control."

The Jehovah's Witnesses have reason to be nervous about this case. A series of court actions concerning child abuse are pending across the US, and the sect's guidelines are coming under scrutiny because they appear to hinder any investigation of allegations made by children. They recommend, for instance, that complaints be investigated only if abuse is observed by two independent witnesses, and that any documentation arising from an inquiry should be burned rather than shown to outsiders.

The Watchtower does not prescribe 117 lashes for children, but it certainly endorses Proverbs 23:14: "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die." Line four of song 164 in the Witnesses' hymn book, Children: Precious Gifts From God", chirrups: "He says 'Use the rod, yet with tenderness and loving care'."

The organisation has been in almost daily expectation of Armageddon since 1914, and keeps members in line by predicting a grim fate for non-believers - known privately as birdseed - since, in fulfilment of Ezekiel 39:18, their bones will be picked clean by crows. In particular, since September 11, they hope no one notices that their standard depiction of the onset of Armageddon is a jet plane crashing into a New York skyscraper.

The Watchtower holds that "theocratic war strategy" can justly be used to deceive outsiders: "In times of spiritual warfare, it is proper to mis-direct the enemy by hiding the truth. It is done unselfishly; it does no harm."

Presumably, this is JR Brown's precept in his letter. A trawl of Awake! and The Watchtower reveals few references to "the Manchester Guardian" in the last 20 years - certainly none current quoting from it extensively - and those there are appear to be distortions, or outright reversals, of what our articles said. As with the Bible, the interpretation is wrenched out of context.

But there's a deeper, nagging, thought here. Why is the Watchtower so keen to abandon the Slacks to their fate? Surely a Christian religion should not deny its followers, however repugnantly they have behaved? Did not the example of St Peter on Good Friday lay down a few guidelines here? It can't be, can it, that JR Brown believes that ordinary folk - birdseed, Guardian readers - might think that JW's' reading of the Bible allows such a misunderstanding?

We await his next response with interest.

Stephen Bates is the Guardian's religious affairs correspondent

Crosswalk.com News Channel - January 25th 2002:

Jehovah's Witness Church Accused of Hiding Sexual Abusers

**By Matt Pyeatt
CNS Staff Writer**

January 25, 2002

www.CNSNews.com -

The woman who was sexually abused by a leading elder in a Jehovah's Witness church in Washington State claims the church regularly hides illegal actions of its members and officials to protect its "image."

The elder, Manuel Beliz, was convicted of raping and molesting 23-year-old Erica Rodriguez and sentenced last August to 11 years in prison. Beliz now awaits the result of a civil suit filed by Rodriguez against him, the Othello Washington Spanish Jehovah's Witness congregation and the church's official national governing body, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York.

Rodriguez said Beliz "abused her approximately once a week" from the time she was four until she was 11, when she and her family moved to California. "The criminal case was to protect other kids from a dangerous molester," Rodriguez said. "This case [civil suit] is to protect many more kids from a dangerous denomination."

Rodriguez believes that "perhaps thousands" of youngsters are victims to the Jehovah's Witness

denomination because of what she alleges is the church's policy to allow known molesters to avoid detection and criminal prosecution.

Attorney Timothy Kosnoff stated that Rodriguez was pressured to remain silent about the issue and that church officials Carlos Chicas and Milton Malendez threatened her with "disfellowship" or ex-communication from the church if she spoke out.

"This pattern of forbidding abuse victims to contact police or outsiders is standard operating procedure all Jehovah's Witnesses must follow, by direction of the national organization in New York," Kosnoff said. "By failing to contact civil authorities, the Jehovah's Witness elders violated Washington's mandatory child abuse law."

Beliz is currently serving time in a Washington state prison in Walla Walla. Two separate juries found Beliz guilty of the crimes. The first conviction was overturned because the deputy prosecutor admitted to tampering with the jury by attempting to exclude younger women during jury selection. An appellate court ordered a mistrial and Beliz was convicted a second time.

Jehovah's Witness church officials in New York deny that the church hides criminal activity. "We have no such policy. Our policy allows for anyone who wishes to report the matter to the authorities to do so," J.R. Brown, national spokesman for the Jehovah's Witness organization, said. "We strictly comply. We are not in any way resistive to the proper authorities being notified."

Brown said that while he could not comment on the specifics of the case, the church typically follows general policy guidelines in such matters.

"We follow a general policy that we do not support legally any Jehovah's Witness charged with a crime. We do not use our donated resources to defend any Jehovah's Witness accused of a crime," Brown said.

Barrett said Rodriguez brought the civil suit to "bring attention to the fact that the Jehovah's Witness church has very regressive policies and she wants to see some changes."

"The Jehovah Witness church and the Watchtower Society must protect kids and not molesters. A lot of pain and suffering could be prevented if they would forget about the church's image, take sexual abuse seriously and start reaching out to the victims," Rodriguez said.

But Brown said the core issue is not the church's image.

"If someone were to feel that our concern for our resources were greater than that for innocent victims, that simply is not true," Brown said. "We are concerned, just as any other organization, about our public image. We are concerned about our resources because we are recipients of donated funds for non-profit charitable work. But we are primarily ministers who are concerned to act as shepherds in a protective and spiritual sense over the members of the congregation," he said.

"If anyone has been abused by anyone else in the congregation or whether that person is an appointed elder or not, we view this as a horrific crime to inflict on a child or anyone else," Brown said.

Tri-City Herald (Washington) News - January 23rd 2002:

Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Othello sued in sex abuse case

This story was published 1/23/2002

**By Shirley Wentworth
Herald Basin bureau**

OTHELLO -- A lawsuit was filed Tuesday against the Othello Spanish Jehovah's Witnesses congregation and its New York governing body, alleging they covered up the sexual abuse of a child.

The suit filed in U.S. District Court in Spokane by Erica Rodriguez, 23, now of Sacramento, Calif., also seeks unspecified damages from Manuel Beliz, the man who abused her, and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

Rodriguez, who testified in Adams County Superior Court that she was raped weekly between the ages of 4 and 11 by Beliz, won two criminal court trials. Beliz, 49, first was convicted in 1998, but that conviction was overturned. He was convicted a second time last year, and his 11-year sentence was

reinstated.

Although the Herald usually does not report the names of people who report sexual assaults, Rodriguez has gone public in her quest to save other children from pedophilia.

Rodriguez said after she moved to California at age 12, an elder in the church she attended there also began abusing her, which went on for four years. She said when she reported the abuse to church elders, the man was removed as an elder but not disfellowshipped from the church.

When she told the elder that she planned to go to the police, she was told she'd be disfellowshipped. She did contact Sacramento police, who contacted Othello police, who arrested Beliz. Rodriguez also has filed criminal charges against the Sacramento elder, but that case has not yet gone to court.

Although Beliz was disfellowshipped from the church, he was reinstated as an elder shortly before the trial. Rodriguez said she called the Watchtower legal department to ask why. "This guy said, 'It's none of your business, don't call again,' " she said.

Jeff Anderson of St. Paul, Minn., the lead attorney in Rodriguez's suit, said he has sued just about every church denomination for covering up child sex abuse over the last 20 years.

This is the second such suit he has filed against the Jehovah's Witnesses, with the other in New Hampshire.

"The vast majority have been Catholic; I stumbled over that phenomenon in the early 80s," Anderson said. He filed the first pedophile case against the Catholic Church in 1982.

Anderson said pedophilia is most likely to occur in "hierarchical, insular, religious organizations that are paternalistic and sexist and repress healthy sexuality."

"They are secret ... they are run by one male or a small group of men," he said.

Under Jehovah's Witness church policy, congregation members report transgressions of other members to a judicial committee made up of three or more church elders -- none of whom are women.

The committee decides what disciplinary action to mete out, often using disfellowshipping as punishment. Disfellowshipping means the congregation -- including family members and friends -- shuns the culprit, who becomes invisible to them.

When allegations of misbehavior are taken before the elders, at least two witnesses are required if the accused denies the charge -- which is particularly difficult to provide in accusations of sexual abuse.

Rodriguez's lawsuit alleges the elders tell the victim not to talk to other congregation members or to report the abuse to law enforcement authorities under pain of sanction or disfellowshipping.

However, Watchtower spokesman J.R. Brown, who had not yet seen the lawsuit and couldn't comment specifically, said the church does not interfere with the reporting of a crime.

He said church elders are supposed to contact headquarters if they have questions about a case.

"When we are contacted, we tell elders if they are in a state where (reporting pedophilia) is required," he said. "We want to make sure we are legally compliant."

Brown said he is aware that numerous cases have been posted on Internet sites such as www.silentlamb.org or www.freeminds.org detailing pedophilia within the Jehovah's Witnesses church.

But he maintains most of the stories were posted by people who underwent abuse back in the 1980s, when all of society was grappling with the issue.

"Regrettably, many children probably were molested," he said.

He said the church has made strong policy changes since then, including taking suspected or convicted pedophiles out of any position in the church, not allowing them to be alone with children and various other restrictions.

Newsday.com - January 23rd 2002:

Lawsuit claims Jehovah's Witness church protects pedophiles

By JOHN K. WILEY
Associated Press Writer

January 23, 2002, 1:05 AM EST

SPOKANE, Wash. -- A former Othello woman whose family was shunned after she reported sexual abuse by a Jehovah's Witness leader claims in a civil lawsuit that the denomination protects pedophiles.

The negligence lawsuit, filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court here on behalf of Erica Rodriguez, 23, contends the Brooklyn, N.Y.-based denomination has a policy that gives pedophiles "sanctuary, protection, sympathy and support," while blaming and shaming the victims.

She is seeking undisclosed damages from Manuel Beliz, the Othello Spanish Jehovah's Witness congregation and Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, the church's national governing body.

Beliz, a former church elder in Othello, was convicted last August of raping and molesting Rodriguez from the time she was 4 until her family moved to California when she was 11. Beliz is serving an 11-year sentence at the Washington State Penitentiary.

Rodriguez currently lives in Sacramento, Calif.

Othello is located about 100 miles southwest of here.

Rodriguez's lawsuit contends the church knew Beliz was a pedophile, yet made him a ministerial servant and elder, failing to prevent further abuse of children.

Rodriguez contends her family was shunned and threatened with excommunication after her mother reported the abuse to church elders in Sacramento, Calif., and Othello. Rodriguez eventually contacted Sacramento police, who contacted Othello police, leading to Beliz's prosecution.

"What's important to her is that they knew he was a pedophile and they didn't report him, as required under Washington's child abuse reporting statute," Timothy Kosnoff, a Bellevue lawyer representing Rodriguez, said in a telephone interview Tuesday.

"What gives this case broader significance is the practice within the Jehovah Witness church that, unless there are two witnesses to misconduct, it didn't happen," he said. "That's absurd, particularly in the context of child abuse, which is committed in secrecy."

Church spokesman J.R. Brown said he could not comment on Rodriguez's lawsuit because lawyers had not received paperwork.

But he said there is no policy preventing notification of civil authorities of a crime.

"What we handle is the transgression, or the sin, of child molestation. We distinguish that from the criminal aspect," Brown said. "Our view is, the church handles the sin, the secular authority * Caesar, if you will * handles the criminal activity."

The church * which has about 6 million members worldwide, including 1 million in the United States * requires two witnesses because the Bible requires it for establishing a sin, he said.

"Where the state requires that this be reported, we comply fully," he said. "We have designed a policy to protect the victim of child molestation; to protect innocent children and to not allow pedophiles to circulate among us."

Beliz, 48, was first convicted of two counts of first-degree child rape and two counts of first-degree child molestation in 1998 in the case of Rodriguez.

The Washington state Court of Appeals granted Beliz a new trial because a deputy prosecutor sought to exclude women from the jury panel.

Beliz was convicted of the same counts by an Adams County jury last August.

Rodriguez is also represented by Jeffrey Anderson of St. Paul, Minn., who has filed more than 400 sexual abuse lawsuits against clergy across the nation.

Rodriguez is supported by William Bowen, who resigned as an elder of a Kentucky Jehovah's Witness church last year over the denomination's handling of child sex abuse claims.

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Morons.org - January 23rd 2002:

Update on Jehovah's Witnesses Lawsuit

Posted by samrolken on Jan. 23, 2002

The Watchtower organization's authority structure is a safehaven for child molesters, and they need to be pressured to change their policies that harm children!

This article is an update on a previous article found here. (<http://web.morons.org/article.jsp?sectionid=6&id=1247>)

A civil suit was filed in Washington district courts this week aiming to change the policies of the Watchtower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses which protect child molesters. Erica Rodriguez was raped and abused on an almost weekly basis from age four to age eleven by an appointed congregation elder. She was threatened with disciplinary action from the congregation if she told anyone about the abuse.

I spoke briefly with the plaintiff in the case, Erica Rodriguez on Wednesday evening. She said that she wasn't aware of how much of a persistent problem sexual molestation within the congregation was because Witnesses aren't allowed to take in information from sources like the Internet. Erica said that she felt shocked and betrayed because the Watchtower headquarters, congregation elders, and dozens of congregation members showed up to support the convicted rapist. Erica went on to say that the elders felt that the disciplinary system set up within the church was enough to deal with the problem, and that it wasn't even necessary for the proper authorities to know about it, and deal with it.

Erica also spoke of the way the congregation authorities tried to protect Beliz, the rapist. They threatened not only her, but also her family, friends, and anyone who supported them with punishment if the police were informed. She was told to keep quiet, as was everyone who knew about it. Meanwhile, Manuel Beliz was allowed to continue in his role as a leader within the congregation.

Erica was quite expressive of the emotional toll taken by all this. She said that she felt guilty and horrible, not only because of the abuse, but because of the betrayal of trust brought on with the way the congregation authorities protected Beliz and suppressed the truth. She also lamented over the toll that it has taken on her family members, especially her mother. She felt that if she didn't tell others though, she would be partially at fault if Beliz were to molest other girls (Ezekiel 3:20). She was also shocked that dozens of Witnesses, instead of helping her, showed up at the trial in support of Beliz, and wrote letters claiming they trusted him enough that they would even let Beliz care for their kids.

Beliz has already been convicted of his crimes, and is currently in prison. This lawsuit is directed not only at him, but also at the central authority of Jehovah's Witnesses. Erica said that the criminal trial was her way to try to stop Beliz from further harming children, and this civil suit is her way of trying to change the policies of the Watchtower organization. I am sure we all hope she succeeds.

I was also able to speak to William Bowen, the founder of silentlambs.org, the first nonprofit organization founded to bring attention to the problem of child molestation within Jehovah's Witnesses, and to bring support to the victims of this problem. Bowen is in a position to know a great deal about this problem.

I have lived as a Jehovah's Witness for over 43 years and served in an appointed capacity for over 20+ years. I pioneered [served full-time in the door-to-door service], served at Bethel [the headquarters of the Watchtower Society], served as a ministerial servant, elder, taught elder schools, served on well over 100 judicial committees, worked in many administrative and managerial positions, given talks at circuit and district conventions.

He gave a little more details on the problem as a whole, and Erica's case in particular. Something he said that struck me as disturbing and hypocritical. He said that before the criminal trial, Beliz stood on the steps of the courthouse and read from the Bible about the trials of Jesus. He must have imagined that he was going through these trials for similar reasons Jesus went through his supposed trials, and equated himself to Jesus, elevating himself to the status of a persecuted hero. About 60 of his fellow witnesses were there, smiling up at him and supporting him. He also said the same thing Erica did about the elders testifying that the disciplinary actions of the congregation were enough, and that punishment by the criminal system wasn't necessary.

I hope that as more details come out about this, the Watchtower Society will change their rules regarding child molesters so that the system is no longer one that protects child molesters. Keep an eye out for the Dateline NBC airing about this situation, and if anyone would like to do anything, they can send letters to the Watchtower Society asking them to change their policy. I haven't detailed the specifics of this dangerous policy because Mr. Bowen has it outlined well on his site.

Further information is available at silentlambs.org. There you can find all sorts of information from an

authoritative source. They have court transcripts, audio segments, and many different features.
Silentlambs.org, its founders, and its purpose have the full endorsement and support of morons.org.

--Sam Kennedy

January 23rd 2002:

Jehovah Witness Coddle Pedophiles

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January 23, 2002 - Shirley Wentworth (Herald Basin bureau)

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Morons.org - January 22nd 2002:

Signs of Intelligence: Jehovah's Witnesses Sued For Harboring Sexual Abusers

Posted by Pleased samrolken on Jan. 22, 2002

Victim raped from age four to eleven on an almost weekly basis, and threatened by the congregation elders to ensure her silence...

A while back on morons.org, I wrote a few rants about how Jehovah's Witnesses are dangerous, and one area in which this is true is in the case of sexual molestation. The way the organization is set up, child molesters are protected. This lawsuit is an attempt to bring attention to this problem in order to change the harmful nature of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses.

I contacted the lawyer handling the case, Timothy Kosnoff. He send me a copy of the lawsuit that was filed. The lawsuit charges that the offender in this case, the (now convicted in a criminal trial) rapist Manuel Beliz was protected as a sexual molester. Beliz was promoted to the position of ministerial servant, then elder, the highest level of authority within the congregation. When the victim, Erica Rodriguez complained about the problem she was threatened with the shunning punishment of Jehovah's Witnesses to ensure her silence. The lawsuit also charges that the congregation failed to inform the proper authorities, such as law enforcement and child protection agencies.

I also was able to speak to Laura Barrett, of the Southern Midwest SNAP Regional Office (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests), who is also involved with the case. She said that this sort of problem is quite common within the Jehovah's Witnesses organization. Erica Rodriguez and her mother were shunned for reporting the abuse, says Barrett. Barret went on to explain how the Jehovah's Witnesses organization is closed and tightly controlled, which is no good for victims of sexual abuse.

This is a situation that is recieving national attention. It's estimated that thousands of children are put at risk because of this situation, and it's time that this problem gains wide-spread attention. Soon a segment about this problem with Jehovah's Witnesses will air on Dateline NBC. There is more information at Silent Lambs.

I am optimistic to be able to speak to the victim herself, Erica Rodriguez. If anyone has any questions they would like her to be asked when (and if) I am able to speak to her, post them below as comments, and I will report her answers in a follow-up story. I was told by her lawyers that she is available for interviews, but I have had some trouble getting ahold of her.

As expected, the Jehovah's Witnesses office of public information had nothing to say when I contacted them.

--Sam Kennedy

U.S. Newswire - January 22nd 2002:

Sexual Abuse Suit Filed Against Jehovah's Witness Leaders; Denomination's NY Headquarters Called 'Negligent'

Tue Jan 22,12:48 PM ET

To: National and State desk

Contact: Laura Barrett, 314-645-5915 or 314-443-5915 (cell) Jeff Anderson (attorney), 651-227-9990 or 612-817-8665 Timothy Kosnoff (attorney), 425-637-3070, or David Clohessy, 314-869-7436, ext. 2426, 314-903-3498 pager

RITZVILLE, Wash. Jan. 22 /U.S. Newswire/ -- Child molesters in the Brooklyn-based Jehovah's Witness church are "routinely given sanctuary, protection, sympathy and support" from church officials according to a new civil sexual abuse lawsuit filed today in Washington state. The leadership of the 1 million member denomination was charged with negligence in the suit.

A Sacramento woman is seeking damages from a Jehovah's Witness leader who repeatedly raped her during childhood and from the New York-based denomination.

Erica Rodriguez, 23 years old, is suing Manuel Beliz, the Othello Washington Spanish Jehovah's Witness congregation, and the church's official national governing body. Last August, Beliz was convicted of raping and molesting Rodriguez and was sentenced to 11 years in prison. Rodriguez says that Beliz abused her approximately once a week from the time she was four until she was 11, when her family moved to California.

The case is significant because it is one of a relatively small number filed against the Jehovah's Witnesses' national headquarters.

"The criminal case was to protect other kids from a dangerous molester," said Rodriguez. "This case is to protect many more kids from a dangerous denomination." She contends that "perhaps thousands" of youngsters are victimized because official Jehovah Witness policies enable known molesters to avoid detection and criminal prosecution.

During the three-day criminal trial last year, Rodriguez testified that she reported the abuse to two Jehovah's Witness elders in Sacramento, Carlos Chicas and Milton Malendez. The men pressured Rodriguez to keep quiet, threatened to "disfellowship" or excommunicate her, and promised "we will take care of it," the lawsuit indicates. Chicas contacted Othello elder John White but no action was taken.

After hearing Rodriguez' allegations, the Othello congregation protected Beliz as an elder within the church and shunned her family, Rodriguez said.

Eventually, Rodriguez contacted the Sacramento police and Beliz was questioned and later prosecuted.

"This pattern of forbidding abuse victims to contact police or 'outsiders' is standard operating procedure all Jehovah's Witnesses must follow, by direction of the national organization in New York," said Rodriguez' attorney, Timothy Kosnoff of Bellevue, Washington.

By failing to contact civil authorities, the Jehovah's Witness elders violated Washington's mandatory child abuse reporting law, Kosnoff said.

Rodriguez is also represented by Jeffrey Anderson of St. Paul, Minnesota, who has filed more than 400 cases of sexual abuse cases against clergy across the nation. Last summer, Anderson filed a civil suit against Jehovah's Witness leaders in New Hampshire for failing to report two women's abuse allegations to civil authorities.

"The Jehovah Witness church and the Watchtower Society must protect kids and not molesters," said Rodriguez. "A lot of pain and suffering could be prevented if they would forget about the church's image, take sexual abuse seriously and start reaching out to the victims."

Rodriguez believes Beliz molested other girls too and hopes her suit "will encourage them to seek justice and begin healing as I have."

Two juries found Beliz guilty of victimizing Rodriguez. His first conviction was overturned when the deputy prosecutor admitted trying to exclude younger women during jury selection. An appellate court then ordered a re-trial.

At both trials, dozens of Othello Jehovah's Witnesses and Beliz' family members spoke or wrote to the judge urging a lenient sentence. At the second trial, fifteen current and former Jehovah's Witnesses from across the country came to support Rodriguez and express their disapproval of the church's hierarchy.

Rodriguez' backers were led by church elder William Bowen of Calvert City, Kentucky, who quit his job last year to lobby for improvements in Witness policies towards abuse victims. Bowen heads "Silent Lambs," the only national support group for men and women abused by Jehovah's Witness officials (<http://www.silentlams.org> (<http://www.silentlams.org>), 1-800-WTABUSE).

"It took a lot of courage for Erica to overcome her trauma and speak out," said Bowen. "She should be praised for helping to save other children. Instead, her church has vilified her. Witnesses have treated other victims in the same way, and this 'shooting the messenger' has to stop."

Today's civil suit, filed in federal court in Washington's Eastern District, seeks unspecified monetary damages.

Beliz is now incarcerated at the Washington penal institution in Walla Walla.

There are approximately one million Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States and six million across the world.

<http://www.usnewswire.com> (<http://www.usnewswire.com/>)

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The Daily Record (U.K.) News - January 15th 2002:

DAD'S JEHOVAH WITNESSES DID NOTHING TO STOP MY SEX ABUSE NIGHTMARE

Victim's agony claims

A TEENAGE GIRL has told how Jehovah's Witness elders failed to help her nail her pervert father.

Tuesday, January 15, 2002 - Daily Record

Alison Cousins turned to the elders of her family's church after devout dad Ian abused her for three years.

The elders knew Cousins had preyed on another girl. He confessed to them two years earlier but police were not informed.

Alison said she was given no help or encouragement to get justice.

She recalled yesterday: "I was scared and confused. I needed courage to go to the police and I spoke to the elders hoping they would back me up.

"Instead, they brushed it under the carpet.

"I got no encouragement to go to the police, even though my dad had already told them what he did to the first girl.

"I will never have any faith at all in Jehovah's Witnesses."

Alison's abuse began when she was only 13 and continued until she was 16.

She went to the elders of the Kingdom Hall in Stevenston, Ayrshire, in November 1999.

Alison, now 18, later found her own strength to report her father. And Cousins, 43, was jailed for five years on Friday for indecent acts involving Alison and two other girls.

One elder admitted yesterday that Cousins told them about his perversion in 1997.

Colin McCreadie said: "We were informed by Ian Cousins what he had done with the first one. But he assured me that he did not do anything after that.

"We did discuss Alison's claims. But we decided we would stand back, we were not sure.

"You don't know a person's heart, you don't know what's in there. What is the truth?

"I believe Alison was informed by the elders that she should go to the police. I can't recollect who it was."

One former member of the congregation, Paul Wynn, said elders had tried to "whitewash" the issue.

And he told how he quit in disgust at being asked to forgive Ian Cousins.

Mr Wynn, 38, said: "Ian Cousins told elders in 1997 that he had abused the first girl. But no one did

anything about it, and because of this the abuse of Alison continued.

"I was told that I was not welcome at the Kingdom Hall unless I could embrace Ian Cousins as my brother.

"I could not even look at him, never mind embrace him, after the disgusting things he did.

"Elders Alex Stewart and Colin McCreadie were told of the two eldest victims but did nothing.

"All that happened was that Cousins was demoted from his rank as a Ministerial Servant, which is in effect a trainee elder."

Alison has waived her legal right to anonymity in the hope of saving other girls from abuse.

Asked about her case, elder Alex Stewart said: "I do not know the outcome of the court case so I cannot comment."

Since the police were told about Ian Cousins in February 2000, a senior Jehovah's Witness has arrived in Stevenston as Presiding Minister.

It's claimed Jonathan Briggs is a "troubleshooter" sent to bring stability back to the congregation.

Mr Briggs told the Record: "It is unfair to ask questions of the individual elders. This is something which needs a response from the church as a whole."

At the Jehovah's Witness Watchtower UK headquarters, spokesman Paul Gillies said: "We have strict procedures and guidelines that matters like this should go straight to the secular authorities.

"It is the role of the police to investigate. Our policies put the needs of victims first.

"There is already a new Presiding Minister at Stevenston. And if, as a result of this case, it becomes apparent that elders are in need of further direction, that will happen.

"The victims are in need of love and understanding and that is what we want to offer them."

Police said the Kingdom Hall in Stevenston is not the subject of any investigation.



(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped) *11 years ago*

This post has been rated for Restricted, click to view



(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped) *11 years ago*

TCPalm.com News - September 8th 2001:

Gregory Blackstock, 45, of Hollis, faces eight counts of rape, punishable by up to 20 years in prison. He is scheduled to be tried in late January.

Before then, however, Judge Bernard Hampsey must determine whether church elders who met with Blackstock to discuss the accusations involving the sisters can be made to testify about their conversations.

By court rules and state law, church ministers cant be made to disclose confessions.

Hillsborough County Attorney Roger Chadwick argues that Blackstocks discussions with the elders does not qualify under the confessional privilege, because the elders also discussed Blackstocks statements with the girls mother.

Blackstock and his lawyer, Richard Monteith, argue the meetings were confidential, and to intrude on that privacy violates his constitutional freedom to practice his religion.

"Our procedure is a biblical procedure, and its designed to keep the congregation clean and to bring the wrongdoers to repentance. It is the tenet of our beliefs that everything is held in the strictest confidence," said Joseph Fuoco, an elder who has been subpoenaed to testify.

The Telegraph (New Hampshire) News - September 7th 2001:

Meaning of girls privates disputed

By ANDREW WOLFE, Telegraph Staff
wolfea@telegraph-nh.com (mailto:wolfea@telegraph-nh.com)

NASHUA A Hollis man asked a judge Thursday to throw out his conviction for molesting twin sisters, arguing the 10-year-old girls werent specific enough when they testified that he touched their privates.

Gregory Blackstock, 45, formerly of 68 Flint Pond Drive, also argued that prosecutors failed to prove he acted with the purpose of sexual gratification.

Blackstock was found guilty of three counts of aggravated felonious sexual assault July 26 after a trial in Hillsborough County Superior Court.

If Judge William Groff upholds his conviction, Blackstock is scheduled to be sentenced Sept. 25. Groff did not immediately rule on the issue after hearing arguments Thursday.

If Groff overturns Blackstocks convictions, prosecutors could seek to appeal his ruling, or request a new trial. On the other hand, Blackstock could argue that the case should be dismissed, and that double jeopardy bars the state from trying him again.

Blackstock is currently serving a five- to 10-year prison sentence for sexually assaulting a 9-year-old East Kingston girl in that town. He also faces trial next month on charges that he sexually assaulted a Hollis girl, now 17, between 1989 and 1996.

Blackstock was convicted of molesting the twin girls between October 1998 and June 1999 at his mothers home in Hollis.

Blackstock met the girls and their family while living in East Kingston and attending the same Jehovahs Witness congregation as they. He became close with the family and lived with them for a time. The alleged assaults took place while the girls visited him in Hollis.

The girls, who are now 10, both testified during the trial that Blackstock had touched their privates. The girls drew circles on an anatomically correct drawing to indicate the area to which they were referring.

Blackstocks lawyer, Paul Garrity, argued that evidence wasnt enough to prove sexual contact with their genitalia.

They circled an area on the body that encompassed stomach, groin, legs and genitalia, Garrity said.

Assistant County Attorney Roger Chadwick disagreed, saying the drawings were somewhat more specific. In any case, he argued, the term privates is unambiguous.

Were dealing with a very specific term, commonly used to refer to the genitalia, Chadwick said.

Common sense seems to rule out any question as to where a 10-year-old girl . . . means when she says privates, Chadwick wrote in his response to Blackstocks motion. If you were to look up from this paper and see someone stumble into your room, bent at the waist and complaining of having been kicked in the privates, would you, could you, have any doubt as to where they had been harmed?

In making their arguments, Chadwick and Garrity cited two previous state Supreme Court rulings. In a 1997 case, the court upheld a conviction based in part on testimony by the victim, who said she was touched in her privates, and used a stuffed bunny to point out what she meant.

In a 1989 case, the Supreme Court upheld Groff's decision to overturn the sexual assault conviction of a Lowell, Mass., man, because the victim testified that the man stuck his fingers in my bum. The court found the word bum was too ambiguous to prove sexual penetration.

Garrity argued the situation in Blackstocks case was akin to the 1989 case, while Chadwick likened it to the more recent case.

Garrity also charged that prosecutors failed to prove that Blackstock acted for sexual gratification, as state law requires in such cases.

Prosecutors offered no evidence of the circumstances surrounding the alleged assaults not even whether they happened at the same or different times, Garrity said. For all the jury knew, Blackstock could have stumbled into the girls by accident, or touched them while he was sleeping, Garrity said.

You cant infer criminal intent from no evidence, Garrity said. They presented no evidence of the circumstances surrounding this touching.

Its like this hand in the Addams Family, floating in the ozone, he said.

Chadwick countered that the simple fact both girls were assaulted rules out an accident, and shows that the touching was purposeful.

Blackstocks case already has produced other noteworthy legal rulings.

Before the trial, Groff ruled that Blackstock couldnt be sentenced under the states three strikes rape law, because he committed all of the alleged offenses before he was charged with any of them. Some judges have interpreted the law differently, and the state Supreme Court has yet to decide the issue.

In another pretrial ruling, Groff found that elders in Blackstocks Jehovahs Witness congregation couldnt be made to testify about his statements to them because of the religious privilege rule, which holds that religious leaders cant be required to disclose a confession or other statements made in confidence in their capacity as spiritual advisers.

Andrew Wolfe can be reached at 594-6410.

<http://pages.globetrotter.net/mleblank/org/pedopointdevuea.html> (<http://pages.globetrotter.net/mleblank/org/pedopointdevuea.html>) - August 25th 2001:

JW Child Abuse: An Insider's Insight

Barbara Anderson

As a result of the newspaper report calling attention to my actions I feel compelled to provide further information that has come to light and deserves full exposure.

The Society is very much aware of my intentions, because of a private e-mail I innocently wrote someone was forwarded to the Society without my permission. You can read it in its entirety, below. I wish to provide some background first, as to the reason for writing in the first place.

I learned that a male Jehovahs Witness raped the daughter of a Witness friend when she was nine years old. Last year, the then 18-year-old victim pressed charges and in February 2001 the pedophile went to jail.

The case is typical. Years earlier when the mother of the victim found out about the rape, she went to the elders as she was instructed to do. As any good Witness would, she believed that they would do the right thing. Did they?

There is no record of a report by the elders to the authorities, even though the state they live in requires reporting molestation by anyone, including ministers. This lack of follow through served to protect the perpetrator, and he continued molesting before relatives of another victim notified the authorities.

Phoning my friend and hearing the whole sordid molestation story, I decided to break my long silence and told her of my decision to talk to NBC Dateline about pedophilia (child molestation or abuse) within the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses. Later, I decided to write an e-mail suggesting my friend to also speak to Dateline.

Soon after, our local circuit overseer was somehow informed of my involvement with Dateline. The CO called my husband, suggesting he stop me from talking to Dateline, clearly telling him that he would lose his position as an elder if he did not stop me.

Within a few weeks, my private e-mail was sent to the Service/Legal Department of the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, which problem previously would have been handled by the Watchtower Society of New York Inc. Without permission, a relative of my friend, an elder, had sent the Society, the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Patterson, NY, a copy of the e-mail. A full copy of that e-mail is reproduced below for you to see its contents.

The Society acted by means of the Christian Congregation. A copy of my e-mail and a letter of inquiry were sent to the congregation elders where my husband serves as an elder. The letter of inquiry asked the elders whether I had propagated my views locally. The only answer and reply from the body of elders had to be a very clear No.

Last week, when I was at Ericas trial, another letter arrived from the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses requesting that local elders arrange to meet with me. For the record, I refused that invitation. Also, my friend turned down the invitation to appear on Dateline.

Would you like to know what heresy could prompt such heavy-handed responses? Read for yourself. Publishing this once-private e-mail I hope will also be informative to others who have been injured by policies of Jehovah's Witnesses through their hierarchy of overseers and corporate entities such as the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Watch Tower Society of Pennsylvania and Watchtower Society of New York, whose inadequate and unenlightened sexual abuse policies result in the protection of pedophiles, even if unknown or not deliberately.

Its purpose is also to entreat individuals who have been harmed to come forward and demand change.

I urge you to write letters or make phone calls to the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, and to news media and to anybody who will listen, to protest the Watchtower policies which gravely injure children, their families and at the same time protect criminals.

I believe that Elders of Jehovah's Witnesses have no business deciding who is criminally guilty or not guilty of the charge of molestation, or to access the genuineness of a child's charge, or that of a family member in a child's behalf. They are simply not qualified, no matter how many counseling sessions they have had with their traveling overseers or in their training sessions.

The first order of business is the protection of children, not the purity of the congregation. The Society's press releases have called molestation a serious crime. They have not acted consistently with that clear recognition. Their actions belie their words. They must ACT accordingly. They must treat this matter as they do other serious crimes.

Crimes should be placed in the hands of Caesar, the Superior Authorities, of Romans 13:1-6. For it is God's minister for you. Secular authorities quite properly view it as their prerogative to examine charges and judge matters. Elders must not under any circumstance interfere with the absolute right of the family or family members to report to the proper authorities. Rather, they should proactively encourage such reporting. The Authority of Romans 13 could extend to the family physician, social services, school officials, health officials, including authorized mental health specialists and obviously the police.

I believe there are those at Bethel who have similar feelings but are afraid to speak up for fear of lack of support.

Herewith is the e-mail forwarded to the Society that prompted the actions above from the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. The text below is entirely unaltered from its original other than the names.

Dear -----,

Maybe you don't want to talk to me after reading the newspaper articles I e-mailed you. [About Bill Bowen's resignation as an elder because of disagreement with how Jehovah's Witnesses deal with the problem of pedophilia within its ranks.] Perhaps what I have embarked upon is frightening to you. After all, we were trained not to run ahead, or to criticize God's organization. The training was meant to control us, to think for us. Is this the theme of the Bible? Do we allow injustice because we are told that it is not for us to be involved in the fight for truth and righteousness. I can't help but remember what Jesus told the seven congregations in the beginning of the book of Revelation. He condemned some of the congregations for allowing wickedness to exist. He scolded, he berated Christians for their apathy. We have this example of how not to be, so it is time we stand up and be counted by Jehovah God as fighters for righteousness and for justice for his little ones.

Remember Matt. 18:1-6. Read those verses in different translations and the same thought comes through loud and clear: those who cause the little ones to stumble or sin will have a mill stone tied around their neck and be thrown into the sea. Children who are molested, who are raped, are stumbled. They have lost their innocence and it affects them for the rest of their life.

When I was fighting for a change in the WT's policy regarding molestation in the organization in 1991-92 in Bethel, your dear child was being molested by a man who would never have been trusted by you if the Watchtower's secret policy was not in existence.

I know that you and all the other JW's who might watch Dateline interview me will be shocked by what I have to say about the indifference and outright hostility by the leaders of Watchtower towards the victims of sexual abuse that I saw in Brooklyn. I can say before God that these men have blood on their hands for the misery and suicides that took place because of their protection of pedophile elders and ministerial servants.

I can prove what I say. If all of the details don't make it on Dateline, because there will be so many others speaking out, I guarantee you, my information will make it into Time or Newsweek. Watchtower

is in deep trouble and they were warned over and over that something like this would happen, but their arrogance knows no bounds.

They will reap what they have sown and they sowed a whirlwind that shortly will begin to blow back in their faces.

I gave your phone number to the Dateline producer who I'm working with. Please think how important it is for you to speak out about the damaging effects the policy of the WT caused in your family and all the other families in your town. I hope you read Silentlams.org. [site on the Internet.] When the camera crew from Dateline read the victims' stories, two of them cried.

The last thing in this world I wanted was to go public about the results of an awful policy that certainly God has to hate. I can't imagine a loving mediator, Christ Jesus, not caring what happens to the children all in the name of protecting God's organization from reproach.

If you decide to speak publicly about your girl's nightmare of a childhood, Dateline would accommodate you and hide your identity, if you desired. Here is your chance to expose horrific wrongs that were done by predators and some misguided people. Think of all of the children you will have helped if you speak out. If the elders had done the right thing so long ago; if they had obeyed State law and the law of the Bible in Titus 3:1 "Continue reminding them to be in subjection and be obedient to governments and authorities as rulers..." so many children in your congregation wouldn't have lost their innocence during the past ten years.

You're a gutsy gal. Stand up and be counted for your child's sake. If you don't, in the future you may live with regrets. Take the power and control in your hands that is offered you, which was taken away from your daughter, and talk to [producers name excised] from Dateline. His number is [name snipped for privacy].

I spoke up and I anticipate the loss of loved ones over this, but I'm doing it for the victims. I'm doing it for my grandson, xxxx. To think he is not safe from being molested by cunning predators within the organization is more than I can bear. I will not go to my grave knowing that I could have spoken up and saved more children from molestation, but didn't. I made my choice, now it's up to you to make one too.

My heart goes out to you and if I have put you in an awkward position, I apologize. But my Bible trained conscience made me do it.

Love,

Barb

AlanF says:

She was a primary research assistant to Karl Adams for the 1993 JW history book Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom (Adams has held a number of important positions in Bethel: head of Writing Dept. from early 1960s to about 1980, head of writing teams that produced Insight, Reasoning and Proclaimers books, currently a Gilead Instructor; see Crisis of Conscience for more details).

She was a research assistant to several other senior members of the Writing Dept., doing at times historical research, and research into complaints the Society received about its handling of child molestation and abuse of women by JW men.

Likely this research contributed to the Society's change of policy stated in the January 1, 1997 Watchtower, where they for the first time recognized that child molestation was a serious matter and decided that a 'known molester' could no longer serve a congregation in any position of responsibility, or be a pioneer, or serve in any other special, full-time service (of course, the Society still gets around this 'rule' by keeping the definition of "known molester" unclear; a man can be convicted in court of multiple molestations but if a group of elders decides that the evidence that led to conviction is not 'scripturally based', they can ignore the court's findings and still appoint such a molester to some "special privilege").

She wrote several articles that appeared in Awake!

Source: <http://www.jehovahs-witness.com/forum/thread.asp?site=3&id=10496&page=2> (/forum/thread.asp?site=3&id=10496&page=2)

Tri-City Herald (Washington) News - August 16th 2001:

Thursday-August 16, 2001

By Shirley Wentworth

RITZVILLE - Erica Rodriguez and her mother, Alejandra Garza, broke down and cried when the verdict came in.

It took slightly less than four hours for a seven-man, five-woman Adams County Superior Court jury to declare Manuel Beliz, 48, of Othello guilty of two counts of first-degree child rape and two counts of first-degree child molestation. They reached their verdict about 7:45 p.m.

"I'm thrilled," said Rodriguez after the victory. "I'm hoping the verdict will encourage another silent lamb to come forward and talk about (what happened to them). The best self-therapy you can have is to talk about it."

Rodriguez said she believed Beliz, a Jehovahs Witness elder, had also molested other girls and her whole purpose in coming forward was to keep him from doing it to someone else. She said that even though her church disfellowshipped Belizor removed him from the church--for six months, church elders pressured her not to report him to the police. Jehovah's Witnesses say a member cannot be disfellowshipped unless that member has admitted the offense or crime.

A jury convicted Beliz of two counts of first-degree child rape and two counts of first-degree child molestation in 1998. However, the state court of appeals granted Beliz the right to a new trial on the basis that then-deputy prosecutor Dennis Scott sought to exclude women from the jury panel. Security was tight in the courthouse because of death threats made against Rodriguez during the last trial.

Rodriguez, now 22, was best friends with Beliz's daughter. She testified how as a child he would signal to her with two thumps of his hand, which meant for her to go and sit beside him. He would then allegedly begin to touch her and take her hand to touch him-- she not understanding what he was doing. This took place on a weekly basis throughout her childhood, Beliz denied ever having raped Rodriguez, or having had repeated sexual contact with her. He admitted to having touched her "boobs" on one occasion, but couldn't remember when. He said that a statement he made recorded in two Othello police officers' reports about touching her vaginal area during the time she was in town for a funeral was incorrect.

Garza testified Tuesday her daughter first told her about Beliz in 1996. Garza also testified that Beliz had called her earlier in 1996 to apologize about what he had done to her daughter: He said, Im very sorry I have that problem, Im working on it.

Defense attorney Dennis Morgan repeatedly challenged the soundness of Rodriguez's memory and tried to prove a rape couldnt have happened by calling three of Beliz's children to the stand, all of whom presented a time frame of events that contradicted Rodriguez's story.

During closing arguments, Morgan tried to convince the jury of Belize's innocence because of holes in Rodriguez's memories. Adams County Prosecutor Gary Brueher, however, said memories aren't necessarily tied to specific dates and times.

Barbara Anderson, part of a group fighting clergy-based sex crimes, is one of about 20 advocates from around the country who traveled to Adams County for the trial to lend support to Rodriguez. Anderson previously worked as a research assistant in the Jehovah's Witnesses New York headquarters. She said she gave the Dateline news show, which had a crew covering the Beliz trial, documentation describing how the church's leadership is well aware of sexual child abuse within its organization and helps cover it up.

The Dateline show plans to air a program this fall detailing how the organization deals with child abuse.

* Reporter Shirley Wentworth can be reached at 509-488-0657 or via e-mail at swentworth@cbnn.net (<mailto:swentworth@cbnn.net>).

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Tri-City Herald - August 15th 2001:

Wednesday-August 15, 2001

By Shirley Wentworth

RITZVILLE - Fifteen advocates from across the United States and Canada traveled to Ritzville to lend support to a woman who claims she was sexually abused and raped as a child by a Jehovah's Witness elder.

A retrial began Tuesday in Adams County Superior Court. Members of the group say they are especially concerned with clergy-based sex crime.

Evidently anticipating problems, a number of Adams County sheriff's deputies were stationed to be alert for trouble and searched people for weapons before they entered the courtroom.

Manual L. Beliz, 49, was convicted by an Adams County Superior Court jury in 1998 for two counts of first-degree child rape and two counts of first-degree child molestation. The jury dismissed two other counts.

According to the Washington Appellate Reports, Beliz unsuccessfully challenged the state's jury challenges, calling them racially motivated. Then-deputy prosecutor, Dennis Scott, contended his challenges were not made to exclude Hispanics, but to exclude women. The state admitted it was looking for a predominantly older male jury. While the court of appeals did not find racial bias, it did find

that gender bias was grounds for a new trial.

On Tuesday Jury selection took most of the day, but by 3 p.m. Adams County Prosecutor Gary Brueher gave his opening remarks to what is this time an eight-man, four-woman jury.

Brueher told the jury that the most important testimony will be that of Erica Garza, now 22, who charges that Beliz molested and raped her on various occasions between the ages of 4 and 11. Brueher said she never came forward as a child because her family was close with the Beliz family and she was best friends with Beliz's daughter. Brueher also mentioned that both families belonged to a church that encouraged eldership.

"I encourage you to listen to the details," he said.

Defense attorney Dennis Morgan reserved his right to present an opening statement later.

Othello police officer Dave Rehaume was called to the stand to recount his interrogation of Beliz after the Othello Police Department was informed by police in Sacramento, Calif., in December 1996 that Rodriguez made a report about Beliz. The Rodriguez family had moved to California in 1990.

Rehaume said when he interviewed Beliz, Beliz first denied everything but later changed his story. Rehaume said he believed Beliz confessed to first-degree rape.

Rodriguez, who is expected to testify in court today, said in an earlier interview, that she was heavily pressured by Jehovah's Witnesses elders not to take her story to the police. She said she was told she would not only be considered a family wrecker, but also would be condemned by God.

Bill Bowen, a former Jehovah's Witness elder who traveled from Kentucky to Adams County for the trial, said he quit his job last year to devote his time to a campaign to change church policies. Bowen also says church leadership shields sex abusers and blames victims.

Bowen formerly led the congregation of a Draffenville, Ky., church. He has dedicated a Website to the problem, www.silentlambs.org

A lawsuit filed in New Hampshire last week claims the Jehovahs Witnesses church routinely encourages victims not to report sexual abuse because it would bring reproach to the organization.

*Reporter Shirley Wentworth can be reached at 509-488-0657 or via e-mail at swentworth@cbnn.net (<mailto:swentworth@cbnn.net>).

The Telegraph (New Hampshire) News - August 8th 2001:

Groups elders targeted in sex abuse case

ANDREW WOLFE, Telegraph Staff
wolfea@telegraph-nh.com (<mailto:wolfea@telegraph-nh.com>)

Two sisters charge that elders from their Jehovahs Witness congregation in Wilton ignored their mothers complaints that her husband was sexually abusing them, and thus allowed the abuse to continue.

A lawsuit on the womens behalf is expected to be filed today in Hillsborough County Superior Court in Manchester, lawyers in the case said.

The suit stems from the case of Paul Berry, 45, formerly of Greenville, who was convicted of 17 counts of aggravated felonious sexual assault after a trial last year in Hillsborough County Superior Court. Berry was sentenced to serve 56 to 112 years in prison.

Berry maintains his innocence, and the state Supreme Court agreed in March to hear his appeal, court records show.

Berry was convicted of assaulting his stepdaughter, Holly Berry, 22, of Berkeley, Calif., repeatedly while she was between 4 and 10.

The assaults included incidents where Berry hung her by her wrists from hooks on a barn wall and, on another occasion, tied her to a tree, according to court records.

Berry also was charged with assaulting his biological daughter, Heather Berry, 19, of Charlestown, N.H., on several occasions while she was between 3 and 6. Prosecutors dropped charges in that case, however, after Berrys conviction and sentence in the first case, court records show.

The sisters suit names Berry, the Wilton congregation of Jehovahs Witnesses and the national organization, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Brooklyn, N.Y.

Though The Telegraph ordinarily doesnt identify victims of sexual abuse, the Berry sisters chose to go public, according to their lawyer, Jeffrey Anderson of St. Paul, Minn.

This (case) is about truth-telling. This is about not keeping a secret, Anderson said Tuesday, adding, They bear no responsibility (for the abuse). They have no need to feel shame.

An elder of the Wilton Jehovahs Witness congregation, Jeff Wrona, declined to comment on the case Tuesday, and said the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society will be defending the suit.

No one returned a phone call to the societys public relations office Tuesday, but the group released a statement to The Associated Press condemning child abuse, and denying that the organization discourages people from reporting it.

Jehovahs Witnesses condemn child molestation, and they do not tolerate such activity within their membership, the group said. If there is sufficient evidence that someone has exploited children in this way, he may be disfellowshipped.

In at least one other local sexual assault case, Jehovahs Witness elders did report allegations of abuse to state authorities.

The Berry sisters mother repeatedly told three elders in her congregation Bob Ward, Jim Hilton and Robert Michalowski about the abuse, their suit charges.

Plaintiffs and their mother were taught to respect the teachings of the organization of Jehovahs Witnesses and to bring any problem with a fellow publisher (member) to the elders, the suit states.

Based on Jehovahs Witness policy, the suit claims, the elders told her to keep the matter within the congregation.

The elders told plaintiffs mother that she should be a better wife and that she should pray more about the situation, the suit states.

The suit charges the elders violated state law, which requires religious leaders and other people in positions of authority or who work with children to immediately report any allegations of abuse to state authorities.

The organizations long-standing policy and practice of minimizing, defending and tolerating abuse by congregation publishers (members) negligently permitted the abuse to occur and breached a legal duty to plaintiffs to protect them and prevent said abuse from occurring, the suit states.

Some 32 members of Berrys Jehovahs Witness congregation spoke on his behalf during his sentencing hearing.

Many said they had known him for more than a dozen years, and all expressed steadfast belief in his innocence.

In contrast, the suit claims, the sisters mother was punished by the congregation for reporting her suspicions of Berrys abuse.

I have seen a horrifying number of cases like this, said Anderson, a nationally known lawyer who has handled numerous other sexual-abuse lawsuits against churches.

This (case) is, to me, representative of a very serious problem in that church, in that they believe they are above the law, and the rules dont apply to them with respect to protecting children, he said.

When a member of a Jehovahs Witness congregation is accused of any sort of serious transgression, the elders convene a judicial committee to investigate the matter. By policy, however, unless there is a witness or evidence of the wrongdoing beyond the person complaining, the accused is considered innocent, the suit charges.

It is an institutional practice and a policy, Anderson said. They believe that if there is a report of child abuse, it didnt happen unless there is a witness to it, or the perpetrator confesses. If there is neither, they believe that it didnt happen.

I say when it comes to the protection of children, they can believe what they want, but they have to do what everyone else has to do, he said.

There have been a handful of similar cases filed against other Jehovahs Witness congregations around the country, Anderson said, but other cases havent dealt as directly with the duty to report abuse, he said.

Im not aware of any that are just like this (case), he said.

Nashua attorney Janine Gawryl is working with Anderson as local counsel on the Berrys case.

In another local case involving the Jehovahs Witnesses, a Hillsborough County Superior Court judge

ruled earlier this year that elders of a congregation can't be forced to testify about disclosures made during judicial committee investigations.

The accused in that case, Gregory Blackstock, 45, formerly of Hollis, was convicted last month and awaits sentencing. In that case, the elders of Blackstocks congregation reported the alleged abuse to the state Division of Children, Youth and Families.

Andrew Wolfe can be reached at 594-6410.

The Courier-Journal Newspaper - August 8th 2001:

Local/Regional News Item Wednesday, August 8, 2001

Jehovah's Witnesses shield sexual abusers, suit claims

**By Peter Smith
The Courier-Journal**

The Jehovah's Witnesses church has shielded sexual predators from the law and humiliated their victims, according to a lawsuit expected to be filed today that challenges the church's policy on sexual molestation.

Filed on behalf of an adult daughter and stepdaughter of Paul Berry, a Jehovah's Witness convicted last year of sexual assault, the lawsuit will name as defendants Berry, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York -- the religion's national organization -- and Berry's Wilton, N.H., congregation.

"The victim/accuser is routinely encouraged and required not to report suspected abuse by a (member) to the authorities . . . as it would bring reproach on God and the organization," the lawsuit, to be filed in Hillsborough County Superior Court in Manchester, N.H., alleges.

The lawsuit also alleges that church policies, practices and procedures -- enforced by elders -- have the effect of "blaming, humiliating and disciplining victims" instead of sexual predators.

The suit seeks unspecified monetary damages, but the plaintiffs also want the church to change its policies.

"I hope that it gets enough coverage that people know that the Jehovah's Witnesses made a huge mistake," said Heather Berry of Charlestown, N.H., who, along with her stepsister, Holly Berry, of Berkeley, Calif., agreed to speak publicly.

Church spokesman David Semonian defended the organization's policies.

"We do believe our principles and policies involved in the issue are very sound," he said, adding that church elders would never stop a member from going to the police.

"As elders, we're dealing with the sin," he said yesterday. "The authorities are dealing with the crime, so we're not going to get in the way of that."

The Courier-Journal reported in February that critics say the Jehovah's Witnesses' secretive disciplinary proceedings have allowed pedophiles to go unreported and put the public at risk -- charges that church leaders emphatically deny.

Jehovah's Witnesses leaders say they report allegations of child sexual abuse in states where the law requires it. In other states, they say they can better handle such allegations themselves and try not to violate what they say are confidential discussions between church members and their elders -- lay persons who lead local congregations.

But attorney Jeffrey Anderson, who will file the Berrys' suit, alleged the Jehovah's Witnesses have a "rigid patriarchal hierarchy that seems to believe it can operate above the law.

"This church is free to believe whatever they want, but this is about doing harm to children (and) giving sanctuary to pedophiles," said Anderson of St. Paul, Minn., whose firm has successfully sued the Roman Catholic Church and other religious organizations in cases of clergy sexual abuse nationwide.

William Bowen, a former Kentucky Jehovah's Witnesses elder, said the case "is simply about making Jehovah's Witnesses understand they have the same rules as everyone else." Bowen resigned Dec. 31 as leader of the Draffenville, Ky., congregation and is now campaigning to change church policies

on sexual abuse.

Jehovah's Witnesses, known for their door-to-door evangelism, have nearly 1 million American members and 6 million worldwide. The Brooklyn, N.Y.-based movement claims to teach the true version of Christianity.

In internal disciplinary hearings, church officials say they use a biblical burden of proof that considers the accused innocent unless he or she admits guilt or is accused by at least two witnesses.

The lawsuit argues that because sexual abuse usually happens in secret, "victims often cannot offer the required proof."

Semonian said elders investigate all allegations, even if there is only one witness.

Berry was convicted in July 2000 of repeatedly molesting his stepdaughter, Holly, from the time she was 4 through age 10. Among his offenses, Berry suspended her from hooks in a barn and strapped her to a tree during episodes of sexual abuse. He was sentenced to 56 years in prison.

Berry also faced charges that he molested Heather Berry, but prosecutors did not try that case because he already received such a severe sentence. Heather did give a victim's impact statement at her father's sentencing.

Twenty-nine elders and members of Berry's Wilton congregation proclaimed his innocence at his sentencing Oct. 31. Some said they would trust their children with him.

But Sara Poisson, Berry's former wife and an ex-Jehovah's Witness, said she had told elders that her husband was beating their children and possibly molesting one of them. Elders told her "be a better wife" and "pray more," she said.

There is no evidence the elders ever reported the suspected abuse, despite New Hampshire law requiring them to do so.

Roy King, an elder in the Wilton congregation, declined to comment, saying elders need to talk with church lawyers about the case.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials say members are free to go to police if they choose.

The lawsuit, however, said members would only do so on the guidance of their elders, who are considered "appointed by Holy Spirit" and "specially endowed with wisdom and understanding."

The lawsuit was served on Watchtower and Wilton congregation officials in recent days and was expected to be served on Berry yesterday. New Hampshire law requires defendants to be served with a lawsuit before it is filed with the court.

A Courier-Journal investigation earlier this year found other court challenges to Jehovah's Witnesses' handling of abuse cases.

For example, a Houston family settled a lawsuit in 1999 with the church over claims that elders failed to alert authorities after learning that a teen-age boy was molesting his younger sister. The teen has since been convicted.

In an Augusta, Maine, case, pretrial testimony indicated that elders secretly disciplined a molester but did not warn his congregation about him. The molester later abused an elder's stepson. The church, while not challenging any allegations in the victim's lawsuit, was cleared of legal liability in 1999 by the state's highest court.

The Courier-Journal (Louisville) Newspaper - August 7th 2001:

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES SHIELD SEXUAL ABUSERS, SUIT CLAIMS

By Peter Smith The Courier-Journal

The Jehovah's Witnesses church has shielded sexual predators from the law and humiliated their victims, according to a lawsuit expected to be filed today that challenges the church's policy on sexual molestation.

But attorney Jeffrey Anderson, who will file the Berrys' suit, alleged the Jehovah's Witnesses have a "rigid patriarchal hierarchy that seems to believe it can operate above the law. "This church is free to believe whatever they want, but this is about doing harm to children (and) giving sanctuary to

pedophiles," said Anderson of St. Paul, Minn., whose firm has successfully sued the Roman Catholic Church and other religious organizations in cases of clergy sexual abuse nationwide.

NorthJersey.com News - August 7th 2001:

Ringwood man held in killing of boy, 16

Tuesday, August 7, 2001

By JUSTO BAUTISTA and BARBARA WILLIAMS
Staff Writers

RINGWOOD -- A 16-year-old was stabbed to death early Monday during a fight with a 24-year-old Ringwood man who was charged with murder, authorities said.

The suspect, Cole Dykstra of Skyline Lake Drive, surrendered to Wanaque police early Monday following the fight, authorities said.

He was arraigned on murder and weapons charges in North Haledon Municipal Court on Monday night and was being held in the Passaic County Jail. Bail information was not available.

The name of the victim, who also lives on Skyline Lake Drive, was not released as of Monday evening, apparently because a close relative had yet to be notified. Residents said he was a student at Lakeland Regional High School.

Details of the slaying were incomplete Monday, including where the killing took place, and police said they were still investigating all aspects of the case.

Ringwood police refused to provide information and deferred to county authorities. Police learned of the stabbing at 3:30 a.m. Monday, said Detective Sgt. James Wood, supervisor of the Passaic County Prosecutor's Homicide Squad.

Wood said the fight was still under investigation to determine the motive and that a knife was recovered at the scene, which he would not pinpoint. He said the victim and the suspect were not related.

Neighbors gathered outside their homes on Skyline Lake Drive in shock.

"Things like that don't happen in this neighborhood. I'm just a little concerned," said one woman. "This is a very quiet, family-oriented neighborhood."

Mayor Allan Van Eck said the stabbing occurred in the Skyline Lakes area and that "I'm deeply troubled by these events, and my sympathy goes out to both families."

He said a crisis team will be available for Lakeland Regional students.

Wood said police from Ringwood, Wanaque, and the Passaic County sheriff's Identification Unit were sent to the scene early Monday.

Associated Press (AP) News - August 7th 2001:

New Hampshire women to file suit against Jehovahs Witnesses

By HARRY R. WEBER

Associated Press Writer

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) In a challenge to the Jehovahs Witnesses belief in shunning secular authority, two young New Hampshire women have accused the order of concealing their sexual abuse allegations.

A suit expected to be filed Wednesday in Hillsborough County Superior Court names as defendants the abuser, the Wilton congregation where they belonged and the religious orders governing body in New York City. It seeks unspecified damages.

"The organization of Jehovahs Witnesses has specifically developed policies, practices and procedures which dictate that the elders are the appropriate authorities to whom abuse by (members) is to be reported," the suit states.

"The victim and/or accuser is routinely encouraged and required not to report suspected abuse by a (member) to the authorities outside of the organization ... as it would bring reproach on God and the organization."

Jeff Anderson, a St. Paul, Minn., lawyer who is the plaintiffs lead counsel, said such allegations have been made against the Jehovahs Witnesses in 20 states. The order has about 5.5 million members worldwide.

"Whats more shocking is this is a practice that is employed throughout the church," Anderson said. "They have a practice of giving a sanctuary to known pedophiles."

In a statement from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, which oversees Jehovahs Witness congregations nationwide, the group said it does not condone sexual abuse.

"Jehovahs Witnesses condemn child molestation, and they do not tolerate such activity within their membership," the group said. "If there is sufficient evidence that someone has exploited children in this way, he may be disfellowshipped."

The group said it does not interfere in victims rights to report incidents of sexual abuse to police.

Jehovahs Witnesses are taught the faith is the authority and the only way to salvation. They are to bring all problems to their religious leaders first.

Members refuse to bear arms, salute the flag or participate in secular government. They also refuse to accept blood transfusions.

The New Hampshire suit involves the case of Paul Berry, who was charged with molesting two girls during a six-year period in the 1980s when one was as young as 3 years old. Berry was convicted of molesting one of the girls and sentenced to 56 years in prison.

The girls now are 22 and 19.

Andersons office said the girls waited until the completion of the criminal case before pursuing their civil suit.

The abuser and the girls belonged to a Jehovahs Witness congregation in Wilton, a town of 3,300 in southern New Hampshire.

The suit said the girls mother repeatedly told Jehovahs Witness elders of the abuse. The elders in turn told the mother to keep the issue within the organization and that she should "be a better wife" and that she should "pray more about the situation," the suit said.

"Plaintiffs mother was a devout Jehovahs Witness and was taught to respect the word of the elders as the word of Jehovah or God and follow the directions, guidance, policies and practices of the organization," the suit stated.

The beliefs of the order have had consequences at other Jehovahs Witness congregations throughout the country.

Late last year, William Bowen resigned as an elder at a western Kentucky congregation to protest how the denomination handles accusations of child molestation.

Bowen said a Jehovahs Witnesses policy requiring two people to witness wrongdoing before it is acknowledged by leaders makes it nearly impossible to prove child molestation occurs.

In New Jersey, a couple left the order after their 12-year-old daughter told them she was being molested by her grandfather, who also was a member of the faith. The daughter won a multimillion-dollar lawsuit last year against the grandfathers insurance company.

Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) News - August 7th 2001:

Two Women Sue Jehovah's Witnesses Over Sexual Abuse

Charge That National Church Policies "Protect" Predators**New York Headquarters, Local Congregation and Convicted Molester Named As Defendants****SOURCE: Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests****MANCHESTER, N.H., Aug. 7 /PRNewswire/ --**

The official policies and practices of the Jehovah's Witnesses church violate New Hampshire's mandatory child abuse reporting laws and led to the sexual molestation of at least two girls, according to a civil lawsuit to be filed tomorrow in Hillsborough County Superior Court in Manchester NH.

Holly and Heather Berry allege that their father sexually abused them for six years in the 1980s when they were between three and ten years old. Their mother, a devout Jehovah's Witness, brought her suspicions/concerns about the molestation to three church leaders, but was told to "pray more about the situation" and "become a better wife," according to the lawsuit. No church official contacted state authorities about the allegation, in violation of New Hampshire's requirement that law enforcement agencies be notified of suspected child abuse.

Defendants in the litigation include the denomination itself (officially known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.), a local church (the Wilton Congregation in Wilton, NH), and the girls' father, Paul Berry, who was convicted of sexual abuse in October of last year and is currently serving a 56-year sentence at the Northern Correctional Facility in Berlin, NH.

"No organization, not even a religious one, is above the law," said David Clohessy of St. Louis, director of SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, a national support group. "This is a potentially far-reaching case. Simply put, the question is whether society must tolerate so-called 'religious practices' that enable molesters to hurt kids, hamstring police, and violate our most sacred laws."

"Like teachers, social workers and others in leadership positions, church figures must protect kids and help police stop predators," Clohessy maintained.

According to the lawsuit, official Jehovah's Witness "policies and practices" require that any accusations against church members be reported to church leaders, not civil authorities. In child abuse allegations, those policies also require two eyewitnesses. Yet, church elders "have no experience or training in child abuse investigations," the suit contends. As a result, the suit alleges that Jehovah Witness leaders "failed to take reasonable steps" to protect the Berrys and other youngsters.

The suit blasts the denomination for its alleged "minimizing, defending and tolerating abuse by (Jehovah's Witnesses)" and claims that Witnesses accused of molestation "are routinely given sanctuary, protection, sympathy and support from the organization." Church leaders and members, for example, spoke in support of Paul Berry at his criminal sentencing hearing.

In addition to "failure to report suspected child abuse," the defendants are also charged with deceit, battery, negligence, and breach of fiduciary duty. The suit seeks unspecified monetary damages.

Three elders of the Wilton congregation, Bob Ward, Jim Hilton and Robert Michalowski, are mentioned in the legal complaint. Sarah Poisson, the Berry girls' mother, allegedly talked several times with the men, explaining her fears about her husband's abusive behavior. "None of the elders reported the suspected abuse...to any designated authority," claims the lawsuit.

The Berry sisters "continue to suffer extreme, permanent emotional distress and psychological harm with accompanying physical manifestations," their attorneys say. Because they felt "shame, guilt, and depression" and doubted whether they would be believed, the two were "unable or unwilling" to report their abuse sooner, according to the lawsuit.

Holly Berry, now 22, is a student in Berkeley, CA and Heather Berry, now 18, lives in Charlestown, NH.

Attorneys Janine Gawryl of Nashua, N.H. and Jeffrey Anderson of St. Paul, Minn., represent the sisters. Anderson has handled more than 400 cases of abuse by religious figures across the countries.

While virtually every faith group has experienced similar abuse litigation, this is believed to be one of only a handful against the Jehovah's Witnesses.

A support group for men and women victimized by Jehovah's Witness members and leaders is being formed and can be reached at silentlamb, inc, PO Box 311, Calvert City, Kentucky 42029 (Telephone:

270-527-5350 or 270-559-5345).



(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped) 11 years ago

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(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped) 11 years ago**ThisIsDerbyshire.co.uk News - April 30th 2001:**

OAP made threats before raping girl

This history from the newspaper This Is Derbyshire shows how horrible the JW children are brought up. It's a guilt-trip nobody can believe!

by Mark Prissell

A 72 year old man raped a teenage girl after threatening to "crush her neck" if she resisted, a court heard.

Father-of-two Edward Reitzer, of Hillcrest Road, Chaddesden, had subjected the girl to months of sexual abuse before raping her, Derby Crown Court was told yesterday.

The girl, who wept while giving evidence, said that grey-haired Reitzer vowed to tell everyone it was her fault if she did not submit.

The girl is a devout Jehovah's Witness and she feared being banished from her church and losing her friends if Reitzer's allegations were believed.

Reitzer, who uses a walking cane, is alleged to have indecently assaulted the girl between September, 1995, and November, 1996, when she was aged 14 and 15.

The prosecution said that Reitzer he raped the girl between November, 1996, and July, 1998, after she had turned 16.

While giving evidence, the girl, who cannot be named for legal reasons, said Reitzer had touched her and frequently got her to perform sex acts on him before committing the rapes.

She said that the threats gradually got worse and he threatened to shoot her cat and take her computer away if she did not continue doing what he wanted.

The girl told the court that Reitzer had guns in his bedroom and had claimed that he had shot someone at point-blank range.

She said: "I didn't know what to do. I didn't see that I had a choice. I didn't want anyone to know."

The girl said Reitzer then wanted to have full sex when she turned 16.

She told the court that he vowed to crush her neck with his bare hands if she did not do what he wanted or made him upset.

She said: "I said it wasn't right. He said that, in God's eyes, we were already married."

Reitzer also threatened to "put it in the papers" that she wanted and instigated sex with him.

She said that, as a Jehovah's Witnesses, sex was banned before marriage.

She feared this would mean that, if her fellow church members thought she had instigated sex, they would not be allowed to talk to her.

The girl told the court that Reitzer did not wear a condom the first time she was raped.

The attack happened when she was a virgin.

Reitzer denies three charges of indecent assault and four of rape.

Adrian Reynolds, prosecuting, told the court that the girl said there were more than seven incidents of sexual behaviour between her and Reitzer.

The trial continues.

SeattleWeekly.com News - April 25th 2001:

Skeletons in the closet

Catholics aren't the only ones with something to hide.

BY RICK ANDERSON

ERICA RODRIGUEZ, now 23, was 4 years old when her Eastern Washington church leader, Manuel Beliz, began abusing her. She says she was molested or raped once a week until she was 11.

When a teenage girl asked her bishop to stop her stepfather's sexual attacks, the church in Federal Way allegedly refused to help or call police.

Jeremiah Scott was in grade school when he was first molested by Franklin Curtis, an elderly man placed in his home by a Portland church despite allegations that he was a pedophile.

None of the above is Roman Catholic.

"It's not just the Catholic Church in crisis," says attorney Timothy Kosnoff, who represents the aforementioned claimants in their lawsuits--Rodriguez's is against the Brooklyn-based Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc. (Jehovah's Witnesses) and both Jane Doe's and Scott's are against the Salt Lake City- based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church). "Abuse can be widespread regardless of denomination."

Kosnoff, a Bellevue attorney, has been working with lawyers across the U.S. for the past two years, targeting Protestant church leaders and even members with abuse claims. He represents more than a dozen non-Catholic plaintiffs in current suits, with more to come.

"We have probably three or four cases in various stages of preparation we'll file in Oregon in the next 60 days and up to a dozen cases involving multiple victims we'll file in Utah, both against the Mormons," Kosnoff said last week. In January, he filed one of his largest suits, seeking \$120 million from the Mormon Church for 12 people who claim that Franklin Curtis molested them in the late '70s and '80s.

The Mormon Church paid \$3 million to Jeremiah Scott last September. Scott claimed that church officials knew that Curtis was a pedophile when they arranged for him to move into Scott's home with the then-grade-schooler and his mother. Curtis was later convicted of repeatedly sexually abusing Scott, now 22.

Officials of the 11 million-member Mormon Church admitted no wrongdoing and insist they have no Catholic-sized abuse problem. As in the Catholic scandal, reputations and millions of dollars in potential settlements are at stake for Protestant institutions as more claims emerge. The potential liability they face is also shifting. In the Scott case, a federal court in Portland decided that the Mormon Church could be held responsible for the actions of not just church officials but its membership. It was the first such ruling in the U.S., and the Mormon Church said it settled to head off a possibly larger jury award.

IN THIS CLIMATE, almost all denominations are thought to be consulting with attorneys as a precaution. According to The Boston Globe, some Hare Krishna temples have gone so far as to file for bankruptcy in anticipation of facing sizable abuse claims.

Though rabbis, ministers, and religious gurus have all been charged with molesting congregation members in recent years, the Globe said there's likely no equivalent to the Catholic Church's scandal. After all, an estimated 2,000 U.S. priests have been accused of abuse in the past half-century.

But one of Kosnoff's fellow attorneys, Jeffrey Anderson of St. Paul, who has filed more than 400 sexual abuse cases against mostly Catholic clergy in the U.S. since the 1980s, says his targets are increasingly non-Catholic institutions and predicts a tide of Protestant victims is about to sweep in.

An example, he says, is the Jane Does case Kosnoff recently filed here against a Mormon ward in Federal Way. The victims, two sisters, have asked that their names not be publicly known.

The older girl endured years of molestation by her stepfather (now in prison for the attacks). When the younger sister was attacked, she sought the help of a Mormon bishop, according to the suit. The

bishop allegedly neither alerted authorities nor informed the girls' mother, who was also a church member, and the abuse continued. The church is contesting the allegations.

Erica Rodriguez's Spokane lawsuit against the 6 million-member Jehovah's Witnesses breaks new ground, says Kosnoff, as one of the first abuse cases filed against that church. Rodriguez sued after Manuel Beliz, an elder of the Spanish-speaking congregation in Othello, was convicted last year of raping and molesting the girl and sentenced to 11 years in prison.

Her seven years of abuse ended only when her family moved away, says Rodriguez, who now lives in Sacramento. Rodriguez says she reported the abuse to church elders in California but was pressured to remain silent under threat of "disfellowship" (excommunication). The Othello congregation eventually heard of the accusations against Beliz but protected him, her lawsuit claims (several members testified about Beliz's good character during his criminal trial).

Bill Bowen, a former Witnesses elder who resigned last year after criticizing the church for covering up what he called its pedophilia problem, says Rodriguez "should be praised for helping to save other children. Instead, her church has vilified her." He offers advice and support on a new Web site (silentlambs.org); he says he has already had 1,000 inquiries from possible victims. "Our denomination is now where the Catholic Church was 20 years ago," says Bowen, "right on the edge of a crisis."

randerson@seattleweekly.com (<mailto:randerson@seattleweekly.com>)

The Express Newspaper - March 25th 2001 - Page 25:

"Ten-year sex ordeal of silent Witnesses "

- Evil father abused his 3 children

The children of an evil Jehovah's Witness told yesterday how they each submitted to 10 years of sexual abuse to protect the others.

By day, Dennis Atwell, 58, posed as a family man who preached Christian values. But by night he used his son and two daughters as his "personal playthings".

Each of the children endured this, believing they were protecting the others. The full story only emerged as the result of a chance comment at a family get-together last September.

Eldest daughter, Kathy May, now 35, was just six when the abuse began. By the time she was 11, Atwell was having full sex with her. He kept her silent by threatening to abuse the others.

Kathy, sister Annette Manlow, 29, and brother William, 24, were in court on Friday as their father was jailed for eight years.

The minister's servant [sic - ministerial servant?] from Burham-on-Sea, Somerset, admitted 12 counts of indecent assault, indecency with a child, incest and another serious sexual offence.

Annette was seven when Atwell forced her into his bed for full sex.

"I kept asking Dad why he was doing this to me when we were taught in [the congregation] that sex outside marriage was wrong," she said.

"But Dad just twisted it around saying that in the Bible Lot had sex with his daughters when his wife died, so it was allowed."

Atwell admitted the offences as soon as his children told the police. His wife was not in court - she claims to her children that she didn't know what was happening."

Murray Ledger Newspaper - March 12th 2001:

Bowen criticizes Church's policies

After being the focus of articles published in Christianity Today, on the MSNBC Internet site and across the Associated Press wire, it might seem as if William H. Bowen, a former elder in the Jehovahs Witness church, is everywhere.

By EDWARD SHERIDAN
Staff Writer

And that is exactly where he wants to be - everywhere.

Bowen resigned from his position as presiding overseer (chief elder) at the Draffenville Congregation of Jehovahs Witnesses Dec. 31 over what he called a pedophile refuge mentality in the church. He said his resignation was meant to stir the Jehovahs Witness denomination to action.

Their response to me was, We accept your resignation, he said. At that point, they forced my hand, which was to go public with the matter.

I want the whole world to know what these people are doing to children.

Bowen, who moved to Draffenville from Seattle in 1994 with his wife, Sheila, and two children, Rex, 8, and Jessica, 13, is a lifetime Jehovahs Witness.

He attained the status of elder at the age of 28, a rarity since most are at least 30 before they attain the position. Since that time, he has served as presiding overseer in two different congregations, including the one in Draffenville.

During his time as an elder, Bowen said he became aware of several instances of child sexual abuse within the church, but did not question the churchs policy, which is set forth by the Brooklyn-based Watchtower Society, until becoming involved with a case in Draffenville.

Although Bowen will not divulge details of the incident he became involved with in Draffenville, he will say that began to become increasingly disturbed by the Watchtower Societys policies on dealing with pedophiliacs.

Its something thats completely protective of the pedophile, Bowen said. Once I discovered what the policy was, I could no longer remain silent. I could not live with myself as an elder and know that I was supporting or condoning such a stance.

Particularly at issue with Bowen was that there had been occurrences of child molestation being reported to the elders of the church, but that the information was never passed on to law enforcement authorities.

Under the Jehovahs Witness system, there must be two eyewitnesses to an offense before a complaint is considered valid. Even though the policy states that the two witnesses do not have to have witnessed the same event at the same time in cases of child molestation, Bowen said it places the burden of proof squarely on the shoulders of the victim.

How can there be supporting evidence of child molestation when 90 percent of the time the crime is reported weeks or sometimes years later? he said. How many pedophiles will tell the truth, knowing if they do they could go to jail?

Bowen said in many instances where the accused will not confess to church elders, crimes go unreported because of the churchs policy of not wishing to slander an innocent person.

In many cases, accused pedophiles remain in positions of responsibility within the church, while their victims are threatened and told to suffer in silence or face church sanctions, he said. As it stands now, if my child were to accuse a Jehovahs Witness of molestation, all he or she would have to do is deny it.

If the molester repents in private to church elders, the victim or the family of the victim is not encouraged to report the molestation to the police. If not reported, then church authorities demand the victim remain silent.

Jeff Steen, an elder in the Murray denomination of Jehovahs Witnesses, spent several years as a deputy sheriff. He still does not consider himself an expert on state laws concerning sexual crimes against children, though.

Every state has a little nuance on how these things are handled, Steen said. Because this is such a rare occurrence, this is not the type of thing that Im up on. Its not the kind of thing we handle on a regular basis. Its not an every day or week or year occurrence.

As a result, Steen is thankful for the services of Watchtower Legal Services, which also operates out of the organizations Brooklyn headquarters.

According to Jehovahs Witness policy, any time a legitimate instance of child sexual abuse is reported to a church elder, that elder is required to consult Watchtower Legal on what the state laws are on reporting such offenders.

Kentucky, for example, requires its citizens to report suspected child abuse, but allows exceptions for clergy-penitent and attorney-client privilege. In contrast, Indiana allows no exceptions.

A recent press release from the Watchtower Society stated, If child abuse becomes known to our church elders, they strictly comply with applicable child abuse reporting laws. Furthermore, we do not

prohibit or discourage the victim or the victims parents from reporting child abuse to the authorities even if the alleged perpetrator is one of Jehovahs Witnesses.

Usually, were made aware of the situation by a guardian or parent, Steen said. Its their legal responsibility to make that information known and not necessarily the church elders. Were not law enforcement.

Steen said those who come to church elders with an issue are given confidentiality in much the same way a Catholic priest ensures confidentiality during confession. That policy, he said, can sometimes lead to some gray areas.

You have a boy whos 18 and hes dating a girl whos 17-years-old, so now you have an adult whos dating a minor, he said. Lets say they go out and he gives her a kiss on the doorstep. If mom wants to report that to the authorities, Im not going to stop her but Im not going to report that.

There are documented cases of Jehovahs Witnesses being convicted for child molestation in instances where the behavior was not reported to the authorities by church elders. Some of those cases include:

A teen-age boy in Maine who was molested between 1989 and 1992 by a church member after elders disciplined the offender secretly for molesting another boy. The law did not require child abuse to be reported. The second victim told a therapist, who notified authorities.

A man in New Hampshire who was given a 56-year prison sentence for physically abusing children. Elders did not report the abuse to the authorities, even after an accusation by the mans wife. New Hampshire law, however, required clergy to report suspicions of abuse.

Although more documented court cases exist, Bowen said there are literally hundreds of similar cases that never see the light of day in a court of law.

I posted my letter (of resignation) to the Watchtower Society on the Internet on one forum, he said. In two days, I had 15 pages of victims who wrote me. Each day, I receive new calls from victims.

My religion has become saturated with pedophiles holding positions from top to bottom. In my 40-plus years as a member, I have yet to find one church among Jehovahs Witnesses that does not have problems with child molestation.

While court documents are public, however, instances in which the Jehovahs Witness policy of turning to an elder for help worked will never be known because of the ecclesiastic privilege, according to Steen.

We have a million people, approximately, in the United States, he said. We have, literally, thousands of congregations. Because you have a million people in our organization, it would be prudent to have some policy for dealing with people if child abuse were to happen.

In the end, Steen said, instances in which elders mishandled matters come down to the basis of relying on a religion itself - imperfection.

Im here to tell you were not perfect human beings.

To be disfellowshipped is to cast your lot with the world and die, according to Jehovahs Witness doctrine.

Those who are disfellowshipped are not allowed to communicate with their former church members or vice versa. They are not allowed to attend meetings. The excommunicated apostate is told he or she will not rise from the grave on Judgment Day.

According to Bowen, it is this fear that keeps many victims of child abuse from coming forward in the church.

Every breath we take operates under the eye of the Watchtower organization, he said. The function and purpose of Watchtower Legal is not to protect children. Its to avoid lawsuits.

Still, Bowen considers himself a Jehovahs Witness today. His recent declarations have come with a price, however.

I have no intention of being disfellowshipped because I am telling the truth, he said. I have been completely ostracized by my local congregation. Most members now shun me. They cannot excommunicate me for telling the truth.

In the end, Bowen and Steen want the same thing - the protection of the victim - and while they seem to differ on the Watchtower Societys policies, they both place a strong emphasis on involving law enforcement authorities in all cases of alleged abuse.

My recommendation is to first go to the police, Bowen said. Its not the elders business to investigate.

They have no training in this area.

We dont block or delay in any way the investigation of legal authorities, Steen said. Within the congregation, we dont protect (the accused) from the police at all. There is a confidentiality that exists, but we make sure that if a child is being abused, we make sure the authorities know about it.

While Steen still supports Watchtower Society policies, however, Bowen remains on his mission to force the organization to revamp its position on the issue.

The overall point is this: Not once have they acknowledged that they have made a mistake, Bowen said. Children are being hurt, and they should come out a do whats right for the children.

Daily Collegian (Pennsylvania State U.) Newspaper - February 27th 2001:

COLUMN: Religion used as hurtful tool in some cases

(U-WIRE) UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. -- Last week I read an article on MSNBC's Web site about a major conflict that has emerged among Jehovah's Witnesses. An elder of the church in western Kentucky has criticized the way that the problems of pedophilia and sexual molestation have been handled. One of the basic tenets of the faith is the need to shun the outside world, and therefore, secular law. Rather, they are dealt with internally, and this disturbed the elder. He said publicly that many do not wish to recognize that sexual crimes against children exist, and thus, many go unpunished. Having gone public with this criticism, this man has been ostracized by those he might call friends, because he broke a rule of his religion.

By Tom Lazzeri
Daily Collegian (Pennsylvania State U.)

02/27/2001

This really got me thinking of the problems that religion brings to this country. It appears to me that religion is used just as much as a tool to hurt people as it is a means of spiritual enrichment. Now, I do recognize the positive aspects of organized religion. Much of the charity that goes on in this country does so through religious channels. And if people derive comfort from their respective religions, that's fine. However, there seems to be more and more religion jammed down our throats in the public arena and this is creating more conflict than calmness.

The first issue that I find bothersome is school prayer. It was our third president, Thomas Jefferson, who said, "I have considered (religion) as a matter between every man and his Maker in which no other, and far less the public, had a right to intermeddle." Jefferson's idea that religion means the most when it is kept private is a powerful one. Can anyone justify for me the need to make one's religion public? Does faith mean more if you choose to burden other people with it? Being raised as a Roman Catholic, it has always been my belief that faith means more if it can be something special between an individual and his god. Sharing religion with people who could probably care less is simply a means of maintaining the status quo. Throughout history, humans, particularly men, have lusted for power. Once power has been attained, tools such as religion have been used to keep rulers in power. And this is all that school prayer is meant to accomplish when you get down to it. It is a method of indoctrination so that wealthy white people can get everyone believing the same things and maintain control over this country's political and commercial institutions.

This constant debate over the morality of society has also wasted everyone's time. Certain kinds of television shows, movies, art, etc. have all been labeled as immoral by the religious establishment in this country. It is outrageous that in a country with explicit freedom of speech and implicit freedom of expression that censorship exists because small groups of people find certain items offensive. Morality is a standard that varies from person to person and cannot be used legitimately as a tool to suppress certain unpopular ideas. And the fact that religious leaders have any opinion about the influence of violence on children is laughable. For centuries, wars have been fought based on religious hatred (do the Crusades ring a bell?). This debate over the morality or immorality of sex and violence is simply another way of infecting people's minds with the idea that they are evil or wrong and should not be what they choose to be, but rather what Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson wants them to be. For a closer example, look at what's going on in Harrisburg.

This is a clear illustration of what generalized morals that are derived from religion can do to people. Some idiot named John Lawless has decided he was offended by the Sex Faire event that went on at Penn State a couple of weeks ago. So now, because of an isolated incident, he is going to go before the Appropriations Committee and tell them that Penn State should receive a cut in funding. Religion is

not something that should be outlawed. It does some wonderful things for our society, and I would be a hypocrite if I told people that they were wrong for what they believe.

But religion is dangerous when brought to the public stage. It is used as a tool to persecute certain people because they happen to disagree.

And we Americans must reverse this tide of public censorship and intimidation. We must take more responsibility for the choices we make and be willing to defend those choices so that narrow-minded people cannot exert authority over us. We must stop looking to books that were written thousands of years ago for a moral compass. Instead, you should be your own moral authority. If you don't like something, don't pay it any attention. Don't let your children have anything to do with it. And most importantly, we should not let these people who claim to be moral authorities damage your life because of their beliefs.

NotWithMyChild.com News - February 13th 2001:

The Maine Supreme Court has rejected an appeal by a Portland man

The Maine Supreme Court has rejected an appeal by a Portland man who wanted the Jehovah's Witnesses held responsible for sexual abuse committed by one of their members. Bryan Rees already won a judgement against the man who abused him while he was a teenager, but he sued the Augusta church and three of its elders, as well as the New York-based "Watchtower Bible and Tract Society." The suit claimed the church failed to protect its members from a known pedophile. Rees says he will now appeal the case to the U-S Supreme Court.

The Paducah Sun (Kentucky) Newspaper - February 12th 2001:

Are pedophiles protected by policy of Jehovah's Witnesses?

Letters to editor page

Paducah Sun 2-12-01

EDITOR:

Letters to editor page

Are pedophiles protected by policy of Jehovah's Witnesses?

I was recently mentioned in the public media as a minister who resigned because of not condoning the church policy of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society which, in my opinion, protects pedophiles within the organization. Local Watchtower officials have chosen to respond to local congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses with a local needs talk that basically requires the following of its members:

1. Forbidding church members to speak with me about this matter.
2. Forbidding me to speak with anyone within the church with the threat of disfellowshipment.
3. Telling church members I have been untruthful about the facts.
4. Instructing church members to tell anyone they meet in door-to-door witnessing work that I have lied about Watchtower policy with regard to pedophiles.

The question that begs to be answered is, who is telling the truth? Does the Watchtower organization really protect pedophiles? I would like to offer you, the public, five simple questions to ask any Jehovah's Witness you meet to define what the truth is.

1. If a pedophile were to move into your congregation, would you be informed?

2. If a pedophile molested your child, would you be allowed to warn other parents in your congregation?
3. If a pedophile denied he molested your child, and you could not produce two witnesses to the act of molestation, would the church discipline him/her in any way?
4. If the state where you reside does not require reporting a pedophile who has molested a minor, will church officials report it?
5. If, as an adult, you charge a pedophile with molesting you when you were a child and he denies it, would he discontinue serving as an elder?

The truthful answers to the above questions are no, on each account. If any Jehovah's Witness says otherwise, he is not being truthful.

I base the answers to the questions above not on my opinion, but my personal experience with Watchtower Legal Department, Watchtower Service Department, letters to body of elders and the personal experience of those whose children have been molested within the Watchtower organization.

If this is the reality for Jehovah's Witness congregations, then I ask you, the public, are pedophiles protected within the Watchtower organization?

WILLIAM BOWEN

Benton

Protection of children priority in Watchtower organization

EDITOR:

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is a response to the Bowen letter by J.R. Brown, director, Public Affairs Office of the Jehovah's Witnesses, located in Brooklyn, N.Y.

We are writing regarding allegations made concerning our policy about handling accusations of child molestation. Some of these allegations have been reported in the media.

We were very surprised to see that these statements were made, and we noted how inaccurate they are. Our position on pedophilia has been well-publicized for decades. Back in 1985, the Jan. 22 issue of *Awake!* devoted several pages to the subject and stated that the priority was protection of the child. It stated:

"First, the child and other children too must be protected from any further abuse. This must be done, whatever the cost. In many cases the accused molester will have to be confronted. But whatever it takes, it is important that the child should feel confident that the molester will never be able to get at her (or him) again."

Our Oct. 8, 1993, issue of *Awake!* featured a cover series of 14 pages entitled, "Protect Your Children!" In part it stated:

"If your child discloses sexual abuse, you will no doubt feel shattered ... Praise the child for being so brave as to tell you what happened. Repeatedly reassure the child that you will do your best to provide protection; that the abuse was the abuser's fault, not the child's; that the child is not bad; that you love the child.

"Some legal experts advise reporting the abuse to the authorities as soon as possible. In some lands the legal system may require this.

"Parents must therefore make every reasonable effort to protect their children! Many responsible parents choose to seek out professional help for an abused child. Just as you would with a medical doctor, make sure that any such professional will respect your religious views. Help your child rebuild his or her shattered self-esteem through a steady outpouring of parental love."

Following are excerpts from the Jan. 1, 1997, issue of *The Watchtower*:

"Depending on the law of the land where he lives, the molester may well have to serve a prison term or face other sanctions from the state. The congregation will not protect him from this."

"A child molester is subject to severe congregational discipline and restrictions."

"For the protection of our children, a man known to have been a child molester does not qualify for a responsible position in the congregation."

In conclusion, we reiterate that Jehovah's Witnesses do not shy away from informing people about pedophilia. We abhor the practice and actively work to keep our congregations free from such harmful influences. Millions of copies of our journals, which contain numerous articles that decry child abuse in any form and instead promote safe, trusting, and strong family relationships, have been read by our members and distributed to the public internationally. (Currently, The Watchtower has a circulation of more than 23 million copies per issue, and for Awake! it is more than 20 million.) Through these magazines and in other ways, Jehovah's Witnesses strive to contribute to the safety of children and to the building of strong families in the community.

J.R. BROWN

Director, Public Affairs Office

Jehovah's Witnesses



(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

11 years ago

Associated Press (AP) News - February 11th 2001:

Elder resigns, protests faith's policy on abuse charges

Jehovah's Witness: Child abuse claims can go unreported

11 February 2001

By Kimberly Hefling

Associated Press

BENTON -- As a boy, William Bowen sat quietly in his seat while his classmates recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

As a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, he spent years going door-to-door evangelizing and serving the denomination. In time, he became an elder, a position of authority, in his western Kentucky congregation.

But as an elder, he was privy to information that caused him to question the Jehovah's Witnesses faith -- and to question it publicly, an ultimate transgression in the denomination.

In a letter dated Dec. 31, Bowen resigned as an elder, in protest of how the denomination, a society that shuns the outside world, handles accusations of child molestation. His claim is that in such a culture, accusations of child sex abuse can go unreported to secular authorities by Jehovah's Witnesses members who don't want to go against their faith. The claims of abuse victims are discredited, he said.

"They want to act like pedophilia doesn't exist. Shame on them," Bowen, 43, said in an interview from his Draffenville home where he runs a candlemaking business with his wife, Sheila.

Though Bowen expects to be kicked out of Jehovah's Witnesses -- or disfellowshipped -- for speaking out, no disciplinary action has been taken by his congregation. Still, some members refuse to shake his hand or associate with him outside the church.

"They treat us like we have the plague," Sheila Bowen said. "You don't go against God, and they think the organization is God."

Bowen's decision to resign has made him a hero among the denomination's dissidents.

"People have been intimidated into not saying anything. There are pieces of this all over the country where one person has a piece of evidence and another has a piece of evidence, but they're scared to bring it up because they'll be disfellowshipped," Bowen said. "So these people stay silent and they think, 'I'm the only one.'"

A person who is disfellowshipped is considered invisible by denomination members and may even be shunned by members of his own family.

"It's not just being out of a health club," said Steve Hassan, a former Unification Church member who is now a therapist and author. "It's losing your connection to God and members of your family inside the group."

Bowen chose to speak out anyway, and his story has appeared in religious publications and the secular media. In Kentucky, The Paducah Sun and WPSD-TV covered it. The (Louisville) Courier-Journal published a story in which it examined court records in seven child molestation cases around the nation involving members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Bowen said a Jehovah's Witnesses policy requiring two people to witness wrongdoing before it is acknowledged by leaders makes it nearly impossible to prove child molestation occurs. Victims who do come forward confident they will receive help from church leaders are often left feeling betrayed, Bowen said.

Bowen said he became interested a couple of years ago after reading a confidential file alleging a member had molested a child in the early 1980s. He said he disapproved of the way the case was handled by church officials even after he spoke up about it.

J.R. Brown, spokesman at the Jehovah's Witnesses' headquarters in the New York City borough of Brooklyn, said he believes Bowen does not have a full understanding of church policies.

Members are free at all times to report abuse to secular authorities, Brown said. "This is a personal decision on how you want to handle this," he said.

What is revealed to church leaders is generally kept confidential unless state law requires that allegations of abuse be turned over to police, he said.

"We deal with sin, and law enforcement deals with crime," Brown said.

In some cases, however, the matter is turned over to secular authorities regardless of the law, Brown said.

Of Bowen, he said: "He's concerned about victims of child abuse, and we are, too."

Brown said the faith does require at least two witnesses to prove any kind of wrongdoing -- including child molestation -- because that is what is taught in the Bible. But corroborating evidence can be used instead of a second witness to prove wrongdoing, Brown said.

James Bonnell, an elder in Bowen's congregation, said the faith reaches out and helps people in need. It is not controlling, he said.

"It's a free choice," said Bonnell, of nearby Gilbertsville. "Everything you do is based on love of God and your neighbor."

'An identity thing'

The Jehovah's Witnesses denomination has 89,985 congregations and 5.5 million members worldwide, according to its Web site. It was founded in Pittsburgh in 1872 by Charles Taze Russell, a former Congregationalist layman.

Members refuse to bear arms, salute the flag or participate in secular government. They also refuse to accept blood transfusions. They reject a number of doctrines taught by traditional Christianity, including the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Jehovah's Witnesses are taught that the faith is the authority and the only way to salvation. They are to bring all problems to their religious leaders first.

Members attend numerous meetings, do Bible lessons and go door-to-door to evangelize, and some who have left the faith say that schedule leaves little time to think individually.

"It's like an identity thing," said Marilyn Zweifel, an ex-Jehovah's Witness in New Berlin, Wis., who runs a telephone helpline for current members. "Somewhere along the way, you lose your identity."

Debbie Shard, an ex-member who also operates a helpline from Ocoee, Fla., said members are told going outside the religion could hurt the faith's image and make it difficult to recruit and retain new members.

"If there's a fire, you'd call the fire department," Shard said. "If it's something that's not a life-threatening emergency, then the elders would be the first line of defense."

She agreed with Bowen, saying: "If you go to the elders, they will generally discourage you from going to (secular) authorities because it will bring reproach on the organization."

A former elder agreed. "Denial and secrecy are elemental to the way the society operates," said Mike Terry, of Conway, Ark.

Raymond Franz, a high-ranking Jehovah's Witness who was disfellowshipped and then wrote two books about the inner workings of the faith, said he doesn't believe cases of pedophilia are any more prevalent in the denomination than in others. But the religion's insularity leads to problems, he said.

"The thing is to keep everything within the system," Franz said. "That's a natural reaction for Witnesses because they are essentially a closed community . . ."

Paducah, Kentucky News Channel 6 Report - February 10th 2001:

Jehovahs witnesses, resigned pastor draw battle line over child molestation coverup charges

Last month, Bill Bowen not only resigned as presiding overseer of Jehovahs Witnesses at Draffenville. Bowen charged his denomination with a national policy of elders not reporting confessions made by child molesters to police.

Jehovahs Witnesses, officially called the Watchtower Bible Tract Society, have been drawing battle lines to counter Bowens charges. Bowen is also gearing up for the fight.

Bowen resigned, saying he wanted to expose a dirty little secret about Jehovahs witnesses, their silence when child molesters confess. He held up a church directive on the subject, saying Not one word is said in this entire article about going to the authorities.

Silent at first about Bowens charges, Jehovahs Witnesses later publicly denied shielding offenders. Church leader Tom Carrothers says its okay for a parent to inform police if their child is molested. But as far as the local elders, it would depend on what the legal department suggested.

Carrothers referred to the legal department at Watch Tower headquarters in New York City. Bowen says officials at legal only tell elders whether their state requires reporting molesters. Watch Tower says local leaders are then told to follow the law.

Word of Bowens charges brought messages of support by E-mail from around the nation. One thanked NewsChannel 6 for exposing the Witnesses policy, claiming many in the church were sexually abused. One stated an elders son was caught with his hand in the panties of an 8-year old girl.

One E-mail came from a woman who claimed her husband, a Jehovahs Witness elder, didnt turn a child abuser in. Another woman wrote that when her child was victimized, elders told her to wait on Jehovah rather to inform police.

When Jehovahs Witnesses decided to refute Bowens charges, they produced a videotape featuring denials. Cape Girardeau business leader Earl Norman appears on the tape.

Norman, an elder who says he has been a Witness for 50 years, says, Ive not at any time ever dealt with, or handled a matter like this. And to be accused of this being prevalent is ridiculous.

Also from Cape Girardeau, police Lt. Carl Kinnison is seen on tape saying, I have never known any Jehovahs Witnesses or anyh group that has ever attempted to cover up.

Jehovahs Witness officials telephoned NewsChannel 6 asking when excerpts of their videotape would be aired. Meanwhile, Bowens supporters sent more E-mail messages. With each side trying to get the last word, its like a ping-pong match with the media as the table.

The nation may hear more of Bill Bowens charges. Bowen says NBCs Dateline will start interviewing people for a report.

Associated Press (AP) News - February 10th 2001:

Crisis of faith

Elder resigns to protest Jehovah's Witnesses policies on child molesting reports

By KIMBERLY HEFLING
Associated Press

BENTON, Ky. -- As a boy, William Bowen sat quietly in his seat while his classmates recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

As a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, he spent years going door-to-door evangelizing and serving the

denomination. In time, he became an elder, a position of authority, in his western Kentucky congregation.

But as an elder, he was privy to information that caused him to question the Jehovah's Witnesses faith -- and to question it publicly, an ultimate transgression in the denomination.

In a letter dated Dec. 31, Bowen resigned as an elder, in protest of how the denomination, a society that shuns the outside world, handles accusations of child molestation. His claim is that in such a culture, accusations of child sex abuse can go unreported to secular authorities by Jehovah's Witnesses members who don't want to go against their faith. The claims of abuse victims are discredited, he said.

"They want to act like pedophilia doesn't exist. Shame on them," said Bowen, 43, in an interview from his home in Draffenville where he runs a candlemaking business with his wife, Sheila.

Though Bowen expects to be kicked out of Jehovah's Witnesses -- or disfellowshipped -- for speaking out, no disciplinary action has been taken by his congregation. Still, some members refuse to shake his hand or associate with him outside the church.

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"People have been intimidated into not saying anything. There are pieces of this all over the country where one person has a piece of evidence and another has a piece of evidence, but they're scared to bring it up because they'll be disfellowshipped" Bowen said. "So these people stay silent and they think, 'I'm the only one.'"

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"The thing is to keep everything within the system," Franz said. "That's a natural reaction for Witnesses because they are essentially a closed community..."

It took several years before Carl and Barbara Pandelo of New Jersey left Jehovah's Witnesses.

In 1988, their 12-year-old daughter told them she was being molested by her grandfather, Clement Pandelo of Paramus, N.J., who was also a member of the faith.

As part of a plea agreement, Clement Pandelo pleaded guilty to two counts of endangering the welfare of a child and one count of criminal sexual conduct. Court documents reveal Clement Pandelo admitted to having fondled girls for 40 years.

He was placed on five years' probation. He did not return phone messages seeking comment.

Carl and Barbara Pandelo said they wish they had pushed the case more so he served prison time, but they decided to allow the plea bargain because church leaders told them to do so -- a claim disputed by Anthony Valenti, an elder in the Hackensack, N.J., congregation.

Despite the denomination's opposition to suing other members, the couple later decided to sue the grandfather's homeowner's insurance policy for funds to help pay for the daughter's therapy. A multimillion-dollar verdict was returned last year to the daughter, now Corinne Pandelo-Holloway. It is being appealed.

She and her parents are angry that Clement Pandelo -- after being disfellowshipped at least once -- is now a member of a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Hawthorne, N.J., and is allowed to evangelize door-to-door.

"It really does anger me," said Pandelo-Holloway, now 24 and married. "People don't know what he is, and I think they should be warned he's a convicted pedophile in your neighborhood."

The Courier-Journal Newspaper - February 4th 2001:

Jehovah's Witnesses Accused of Harboring Abusers

Those door-to-door missionaries may have a hidden history

The Jehovah's Witnesses organization is under growing attack by some of its members for policies

world," wrote Bowen in his letter of resignation.

"Criminals should be ousted, identified and punished to protect the innocent and give closure to the victim."

Elders Approached

Woman felt punished for accusing husband

Sara Poisson of Claremont, N.H., said she never considered turning to anyone but her church elders when then-husband Paul Berry began physically abusing some of her children. Berry would eventually receive a 56-year prison term.

"Whatever issues might arise that required guidance were to be handled within the congregation by the body of elders," Poisson said at her ex-husband's sentencing for molestation on Oct. 31, 2000.

Bowen said members of the Jehovah's Witnesses are continually told that if they have any problems within the family, they are to go to the elders for help.

"You have to understand the Jehovah's Witnesses organization," Bowen said. "Their life revolves around following the direction of what the local elders and the organization say."

But Sam Neal, an elder in the congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Jeffersonstown, Ky., said church members are not sheltered.

"All of us have access to all of the things in the community," said Neal, retired associate dean of the University of Louisville's School of Social Work. "Whatever we need, we know where to go."

Church attorney Moreno said church members know they can go to the authorities on a matter of abuse. "They haven't committed a sin by turning in a Jehovah's Witness to the authorities," he said. "It's a very personal decision."

But Poisson said in Hillsborough County Superior Court at her ex-husband's sentencing that when she went to elders with her concerns, they repeatedly told her that she "needed to be a better wife" and "needed to pray more."

"Each time I spoke to the elders I was sanctioned in some way," Poisson told the court. "Some privilege was removed because I had dared to usurp the authority of my husband." Poisson later told a reporter she was barred from speaking at some meetings and restricted in the amount of door-to-door evangelism she could do.

New Hampshire law since the late 1970s has said that any "person having reason to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected shall report the same."

There is no evidence in court records or elders' public comments that the church reported Poisson's allegations.

Poisson said in court that while she did not know of Berry's sexual abuse, she knew of and didn't report the physical abuse, and "this I have to live with for the rest of my life."

Authorities found out, Poisson said, when her son went to school one day with the imprint of a fly swatter on his leg.

Poisson said a social worker gave her an ultimatum: Have Berry leave the house or lose custody of their children. She chose the former and said the congregation shunned her.

Some time later, one of Poisson's daughters ran away. She returned 18 months later, frail and sick, with the words, "Why did you let that happen?" Poisson said in court. The girl informed her mother that Berry had sexually abused her from age 4 to 10.

Mother and daughter went to police to launch the sexual abuse investigation.

Berry was arrested and in July 2000 was convicted of 17 counts of sexual assault. Among his offenses, Berry suspended one of his daughters from hooks in a barn and strapped her to a tree during episodes of sexual abuse.

When Berry showed up for sentencing, so did 29 members of his Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Wilton, N.H., all of whom spoke in his favor, often in glowing terms, according to court records.

"Whatever charges that have been brought against him have been somehow misconstrued," said Robert Michalowski, a former Wilton elder. "Elders in the congregation would have picked up on (sexual abuse) in a minute."

In sentencing Berry, Judge Arthur Brennan said the church might have done more to help the victim.

"The church didn't help her and the state didn't help her," Brennan said. ". . . Perhaps if somebody had

spoken years ago, if somebody had inquired, instead of relying perhaps on Jehovah . . . maybe it would have been . . . a lot less cruel for that child."

Brennan said he was "not talking against anybody's religion. I'm saying I've seen this happen in any number of different congregations."

The victim, Holly Brewer, of Berkeley, Calif., agreed to have her story told.

Berry maintains his innocence and is appealing the conviction, his lawyer, Mark Sisti, said.

Moreno would not comment on whether elders violated the law in this case but said, "Once in a while, in a small minority cases, elders screw up. They screw up because they don't call here (the Watch Tower legal department). When they call here, they don't screw up."

The Hillsborough County attorney's office said it did not investigate whether elders broke the law by failing to report the suspected physical abuse. By the time prosecutors investigated, more than one year had passed since the elders' involvement, beyond the statute of limitations for prosecuting a misdemeanor such as failing to report.

Three years ago, similar questions about elders' actions arose in a Texas case.

When a family in the Houston-area church reported that a teen-age son was molesting his younger sister, elders visited the home, counseled the family and received the boy's assurance he would stop, according to allegations in the family's lawsuit against the church.

Instead, the abuse continued, the lawsuit said. A criminal court jury in 1997 convicted the then-22-year-old for abuse committed as an adult. He was given a 40-year sentence for aggravated sexual assault.

"The elders sat at that kitchen table and listened to her tell what her brother had done," said Kelly Siegler, an assistant district attorney for Harris County. "All they did is tell him to stop and they prayed about it. They just blew it off. No one ever told the police."

Siegler said she would have prosecuted elders for failing to report abuse if the two-year statute of limitations hadn't expired.

The family sued the church in civil court and in 1999 reached a settlement that bars both sides from discussing the case.

Houston lawyer Jeffrey Parsons, who represented the Jehovah's Witnesses, said he was convinced the church conducted itself properly. "It was really an unfortunate circumstance, but (the family's lawsuit) was not a well-founded case."

Church Process

Strict burden of proof needed for discipline

Taking a sexual abuse complaint to Jehovah's Witnesses church elders puts members in contact with a secretive church process that has a burden of proof that is much greater than in a civil court.

If a church member is accused of any offense, elders follow a strict biblical standard. They require either the member's confession or the testimony of at least two witnesses, including the accuser, to prove the member's guilt, according to church attorney Moreno and church publications.

This applies even in cases of sexual abuse, when there often are no "outside" witnesses.

For victims who can't produce witnesses or persuade the accused person to confess, elders are instructed to "explain to the accuser that nothing more can be done in a judicial (church disciplinary) way," according to a 1995 article in the Jehovah's Witnesses' Watchtower - a magazine with a circulation of 22 million in 132 languages.

"And the congregation will continue to view the one accused as an innocent person," the article continued.

The article offers one other avenue of justice: "The question of his guilt or innocence can be safely left in Jehovah's (God's) hands."

Moreno said that eventually, the truth comes out. "Somebody else comes out of the woodwork and now you can take action," he said. Moreno said two separate accusers would count as two witnesses when making a sexual abuse accusation.

Church policy neither encourages nor discourages members to report suspected or admitted sexual abuse to police, Moreno said. Elders are instructed to always call the central legal department of the church in Carmel, N.Y., upon receiving an accusation.

When elders call, church lawyers tell them whether state law requires them to report abuse to police,

Moreno said. A still-valid 1989 church memo also tells elders to call for legal advice before being interviewed by police, responding to a subpoena or voluntarily turning over confidential church records, unless police have a search warrant.

Moreno said church lawyers might advise elders to refer victims to police or other outside help. "That's a personal decision."

If elders suspect sexual abuse has occurred, they can begin church disciplinary hearings, in which what is said and written is held confidential. No one but elders may take notes, which are collected and kept in a secure place, according to the 1989 memo.

It is a process intended to safeguard reputations and protect the church against lawsuits, according to the memo. The church memo warns of lawsuits by "vindictive or disgruntled ones" and "some who oppose the Kingdom preaching work" if accusations are leaked.

No tape recordings of these proceedings are permitted.

A Jan. 2 statement from J.R. Brown, director of public affairs for the Jehovah's Witnesses, said church elders "encourage the wrongdoers to do everything they can to set the matter straight with the authorities."

But the strict rules of confidentiality - in which elders are warned not to tell even their own family about disciplinary proceedings - can leave a molester's identity shielded from those not involved.

Bryan Rees, formerly of Augusta, Maine, said in a lawsuit that his stepfather, Alan Ayers, never warned him to stay clear of his next-door neighbor, church member Larry Baker. Baker had confessed to Ayers and other elders that he had molested another boy.

The elders had secretly disciplined Baker, giving him "some real strict, severe counsel . . . and that was essentially it," Baker later testified.

Maine didn't require church officials to notify authorities and the elders in Augusta never informed police or anyone else. Though they warned Baker to stay away from children, the molester testified that elders knew he was going door to door with Rees.

"I'm sure they must have known," Baker testified. "There wasn't anything secret about it."

Baker went on to molest Rees at least 30 times by his own admission between 1989 and 1992. He was convicted of unlawful contact with a minor and served about a 90-day jail term.

Rees, who could not be reached for comment, won a \$1.2 million judgment

Rees later went public with his story after suing the Jehovah's Witnesses unsuccessfully in 1998. He alleged the church breached its fiduciary responsibility when it failed to warn him about Baker and when it failed to exert some type of control over Baker's actions.

But Maine's highest court rejected such arguments in 1999.

"The mere fact that one individual knows that a third party is or could be dangerous to others does not make that individual responsible for controlling the third party," the Supreme Judicial Court ruled.

Ayers, Rees' stepfather, declined to comment, but church lawyer Moreno applauded the decision.

"There is no duty to announce to people that 'John Brown' is a child abuser," he said. If the court had ruled otherwise, he said, it "would basically discourage people from going to their ministers and getting help."

"If people could not count on confidentiality when they go and confess to a Catholic priest, there's going to be quite a chilling effect on religion," he said.

The Jehovah's Witnesses say the privilege of clergy confidentiality applies to any confidential communication with members, including disciplinary hearings that involve multiple elders and witnesses.

A prosecutor in Hillsborough County, N.H., is currently seeking to force an elder to testify to what Gregory Blackstock, already convicted in one child molestation case, confessed to elders in the case of two other girls who were allegedly molested. The congregation involved was not the same as the one in the Paul Berry case.

Assistant County Attorney Roger Chadwick said because more than one elder was involved, and one elder regularly phoned the alleged victims' mother with updates, the church couldn't claim exemption under the state's confidentiality law.

"Simply put, (church) judicial investigations and telephone timeouts to confirm confessional details were not the types of speech that (clergy confidentiality laws) intended to protect," Chadwick said in a written brief filed in Hillsborough County Superior Court.

But Attorney Paul Garrity, representing Blackstock, argued that just because Jehovah's Witnesses don't use the one-on-one confessional process of other religions, the state can't strip its right to confidentiality based on "theological differences as to how reconciliation with God is to be achieved."

The case is pending.

An Elder Protests

It was the church's focus on the letter of the law that led elder and presiding overseer Bowen to publicly resign his church position in the Marshall County town of Draffenville, Kentucky.

William Bowen had been alerted to possible sexual abuse involving a family in his area. When he called the church's legal department, as required, lawyers told him Kentucky law did not require him to report the suspected abuse.

After hearing details of the allegations, a separate church department then advised against a disciplinary hearing, Bowen said.

He said elders go against such advice at the risk of losing their position. After he resigned, he said he reported the allegations of abuse to police. Bowen said he was told by police the case is under investigation.

Bowen said a Jehovah's Witnesses policy requiring two people to witness wrongdoing before it is acknowledged by leaders makes it nearly impossible to prove child molestation occurs. Victims who do come forward confident they will receive help from church leaders are often left feeling betrayed, he said.

Bowen is still technically a member. Thomas Carrothers, the Jehovah's Witnesses' city overseer for nearby Paducah, said he saw no grounds for expelling Bowen. "People are allowed to express their points of view," he said.

In a talk to the congregation about Bowen's criticism of church policies, Carrothers urged church members to respond with love to "opposers" and "the slanderous statements of lying apostates."

Carrothers said he wasn't referring to Bowen.

"I was quoting from Watchtower articles. I wasn't accusing him of it," he said.

Bowen's father, Bill J. Bowen, denounced his son's actions in a videotaped interview produced and distributed by the church.

"What (my son) is saying is just absurd," the older Bowen, a longtime church member, said. "I've got to hope that my son will turn around, change his mind."

Elder David King of Edmonds, Wash., said he also resigned his church position in 1997, partly because of his disillusionment with the church's attention to "legal ramifications."

When investigating an allegation of sexual abuse several years ago, King said, elders called a lawyer at church headquarters.

"The moment we identified who we were, he immediately knew state law (in Washington) and said we didn't have to report it," King said. "That was almost the first thing he said.

"At the time, I was a true believer, but it shook me to think they were more concerned about legal ramifications than getting some kind of healthy recovery."

The victims' parents later called police. King said he gradually stopped attending the church.
Outside Help

Church writings say members are allowed to seek outside help when they suspect abuse, but members say church discouraged efforts.

Some members, such as Poisson, say they were intimidated by elders when they tried.

In Keene, N.H., the guardian of a 15-year-old girl sued a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in 1987, alleging that elders threatened the girl's parents with "religious excommunication and eternal damnation" if they sought police intervention or counseling for their daughter, who was sexually abused from 1975 to 1985.

The lawsuit was settled, and the girl's lawyer, Charles Donahue, said he could not comment on it. The abuser - the girl's father - was later sentenced to three to eight years in prison in 1986 after pleading guilty to two counts of aggravated felonious sexual assault, according to records in Cheshire County Superior Court.

Church lawyer Moreno said it would be "ridiculous" for any elder to make such a threat, and if one did, it would contradict church policy.

"That's not scriptural," he said. "We teach the Scriptures. The Scriptures don't say, 'If you file criminal charges against an abuser you're going to have eternal damnation.' The one in danger of eternal damnation is the abuser."

Church literature also says victims and other church members can seek professional therapy, as long as the counselor respects their beliefs and victims don't reveal names of alleged abusers in group therapy.

But former Jehovah's Witnesses elder J. Michael Terry, of Conway, Ark., said his experience didn't match the policy.

He said that about three or four years ago, he steered the mother of an abuse victim to a therapist, who then reported the crime. "I got jumped on pretty bad" by two fellow elders, Terry said.

"I did what my conscience told me to do," said Terry, who is no longer active in the church. "They said I should have done nothing but listen."

Arkansas law does not require clergy to report abuse to authorities but it does require social workers to. Terry is a social worker.

He said the incident soured his working relationship with elders, and about three years later he was stripped of his elder's position for being uncooperative.

One of the elders whom Terry said had criticized his actions declined to comment on his dealings with Terry.

Range of Penalties

Repentant molesters can go door to door

Watch Tower officials are not consistent on how the church punishes child molesters. In a Jan. 2 statement, church public affairs director Brown Church said that child abusers are "disfellowshipped," or expelled from the congregation. Later, he acknowledged the church can use less severe penalties.

He defended his original statement, saying that for "mass consumption it conveys the thought (that elders) do institute this discipline. They're not soft on abusers."

But an Aug. 1, 1995, church memo shows that repentant pedophiles can avoid excommunication and remain church members, as happened with Baker.

The document also says elders can restore church memberships to pedophiles who convince elders they have repented.

That's what happened in the case of Clement Pandelo of Paramus, N.J.

In fact, Pandelo, who admitted to police he had molested young girls for 40 years, was twice disfellowshipped and twice reinstated, according to court documents. Pandelo pleaded guilty in 1988 to molesting his 12-year-old granddaughter and two other girls.

His granddaughter, Corinne Holloway, now 24, said Pandelo's reinstatements compounded her physical and psychological trauma.

Church elders "validated the perpetrator rather than the victim," said Holloway, of Spring Lake Park, N.J. "He had the privileges (of membership) and we were in this long, drawn-out process."

Said Moreno: "I wouldn't be too happy myself if somebody abused my child and was reinstated. The bottom line is if an elder determines a former child abuser has demonstrated repentance, (he has) a scriptural obligation to reinstate him."

Church policy permits Pandelo, as a member in good standing, to go door to door, spreading the Jehovah's Witnesses' message.

Barbara Pandelo, Holloway's mother, said she finds that policy potentially harmful.

"These perverts are still allowed to go door to door to unknowing householders," said Barbara Pandelo, of Belmar, N.J. "The Watch Tower Society doesn't make itself bothered with the danger it exposes families (to)."

Brown said pedophiles are restricted from working with minors and must also be with a well-respected church member when they go door to door.

Pedophiles also might not be sent into neighborhoods where they might be recognized as molesters, Brown said.

Church memos tell elders that molesters who remain in the church should be warned not to touch children or be alone with them.

But David Richart, of the National Institute on Children, said a strictly spiritual approach to child

molestation is inadequate.

"The whole idea of child sexual abuse is that it generally is an invisible kind of crime and it generally doesn't go away without in some cases treatment and in other cases imprisonment," said Richart, who reviewed Jehovah's Witnesses literature on the subject at The Courier-Journal's request.

"The whole idea implicit in their response is that somebody can be persuaded or guilt-tripped into changing their behavior. It's generally a much more sophisticated problem than that.

"Prayer can do a lot of things, and in the case of child sexual abuse it can be a powerful instrument for change, but it's no substitute for a societal intervention."

Richart said he believes other religious groups have similar problems.

"A lot of churches deal internally with allegations of child sexual abuse and refer to Scripture in ways which seem to encourage the children to be compliant."

Some victims and their advocates want Jehovah's Witnesses to do what civil society has done - adopt so-called "Megan's Laws," named for the New Jersey murder victim of a neighbor who had two previous sexual-abuse convictions.

Such laws establish sexual-offender registries enabling the public to learn if their neighbors are pedophiles, though few churches of any denomination have such a policy.

"People in the church have the right to know (a member is) a pedophile," said Carl Pandelo of Belmar, N.J., son of Clement Pandelo.

Attorney Waxman, who represented molestation victim Rees in the Maine lawsuit, agreed.

"The churches are going to say one of their main tenets is forgiveness," he said. "Let's assume there is a real, direct confrontation between a church's ideals and the state's interest in protecting kids from being abused. In my view, the kids win."

Neal, the social worker and elder of the Jeffersontown Jehovah's Witnesses congregation, said if a member confessed to child molestation, he would tell the full body of elders and was confident the board would make members aware.

"Nobody has a right to keep matters that really put other folks at risk secret," he said. "We're concerned about every member of the organization, and their best interest, their welfare, their security and safety are matters of concern.

"We don't feel we would be discharging our spiritual responsibility if we held something secret that has a direct impact on the safety and welfare of others."

Telling authorities

When Jehovah's Witnesses elders call the central legal office, lawyers advise them on their state's reporting laws. Some states, like Kentucky, require citizens to report suspicions of abuse but provide exceptions for clergy-penitent conversations. Other states, like Indiana, allow no exceptions. Still others only require professionals in certain fields, mainly those dealing with children, to report abuse.

In Boulder, Colo., in December 1991, elders in a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation publicly reprimanded member Leland Elwyn Davies after finding that he had fondled several teen-age girls, according to a report filed by the Boulder County sheriff's office, which investigated after the mother of three victims had alerted police.

One victim, who spoke to police in Jan. 1992, said she was "displeased that the behavior had not been reported by the elders to the authorities," according to the police report.

Police contacted an elder in the congregation who said he could not give out confidential information from the disciplinary process. Colorado does not mandate that clergy give out such information.

Police arrested Davies in July 1992 - about six months after the church imposed discipline. He pleaded guilty to two counts of third-degree sexual assault and was placed on probation, according to the criminal court clerk in Colorado's 20th Judicial District. Davies died in August 2000.

According to church lawyer Moreno, the system worked. Elders did their job, and victims and police did theirs, he said.

"What was the harm?" Moreno said. "The report got made.

"You've got a teen, who has been molested, upset at the elders for not calling the police?" he said. "You can call the police. You're the one injured.

"Who makes the laws? Not us. Don't blame us for the laws, please. Talk to the state legislators of Colorado."



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11 years ago

The Courier-Journal Newspaper - February 4th 2001:

News Items on Pedophiles inside the Watchtower

News Item Sunday, February 4, 2001

Jehovah's Witnesses' policy on child molesters attacked

Church says it follows laws on reporting suspected abuse

By PETER SMITH, The Courier-Journal

New Jersey residents Barbara Pandelo, left, and daughter Corinne Holloway are unhappy that Holloway's grandfather, who sexually abused her, was reinstated twice after being expelled by Jehovah's Witnesses' congregations. Church policy also allows him to go door to door as an evangelist.

BY PETER ACKERMAN,
ASBURY PARK PRESS

In Focus

Molestation victim, parents think church elders let them down
Policies on reporting abuse allegations vary among religious denominations

The Jehovah's Witnesses church is under growing attack by some of its members for policies they say can allow child molesters to go unreported, putting church members and the public at increased risk.

Church officials say elders alert authorities to suspected abuse in states that require reporting. But in other states they prefer to take steps to protect children that don't breach what they see as confidential communication between elders and members.

Church policy also allows some confessed molesters -- whose offenses are usually kept secret -- to stay in the church community, sometimes with tragic results.

An examination by The Courier-Journal of court cases involving church members in Maine, New Hampshire and Texas showed that the confidential church disciplinary process was blamed by some victims for allowing molestation to continue.

Among the cases:

In Maine, a teen-age boy was molested between 1989 and 1992 by a church member after church elders disciplined the offender secretly for molesting another boy.

Elders did not report the first case to authorities, and the law did not require them to. The second victim told a therapist, who notified authorities.

In New Hampshire, a former church member said elders failed to act when she told them her husband was physically abusing their children. The man received a 56-year prison sentence in October 2000 for sexual abuse that continued years after the woman went to elders. New Hampshire law required clergy to report suspicions of abuse.

In Texas, a prosecutor said church elders told a teen-age boy to stop molesting his younger sister in 1992 but failed to report it to police in apparent violation of state law. The boy later molested a second sister and in 1997 was sentenced to a 40-year prison term. Police were alerted when one victim reported the abuse to hospital staff following a suicide attempt.

Church policy also allows molesters who are deemed repentant to

continue evangelizing door to door -- accompanied by another member -- bringing them into contact with unsuspecting households that don't have the church's knowledge that a child molester is at their door.

The church's policies on sexual abuse have come under scrutiny following the resignation of a Western Kentucky church elder who objected to them.

The court cases have played out against the backdrop of a growing national consensus that all suspected child abuse must be reported and known molesters aggressively identified.

A lawyer for the Jehovah's Witnesses church, which has nearly 1 million members nationally and 6 million worldwide, said it complies with those state laws that require church elders to report abuse.

"If there is a law that mandates reporting, that takes precedent over any confidentiality, whether in church policy or statute," said Mario Moreno, associate general counsel for the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, a legal corporation of the church.

"I refuse to support a pedophile refuge mentality."

William H. Bowen in his letter resigning his church leadership post in Draffenville, Ky.

"In states where there is no reporting requirement, it's a different scenario," Moreno said.

Elders might have the victim relocated away from the abuser or have the parent or guardian of the victim, or even the accused person, report the abuse to police, he said.

"The laws of this country, as well as people's moral values, tell you there are some things that should be kept private. That's why laws protect confidential communications between clergy and their flock."

But Moreno said elders who contact the church's legal department with cases of suspected sexual abuse -- as they must do -- are often advised to refer victims to police or other outside help, even if the law doesn't require it.

Victims and their parents are free, Moreno said, to seek help from police or therapists and should not blame the church if they choose not to do so.

"Parents are encouraged to do whatever they need to do to protect their child," said Moreno.

However, some abuse victims and their advocates, in lawsuits and in interviews, said that fear of reprisals by church leaders, coupled with the importance of the church in their lives, made them reluctant to report abuse outside the church.

William H. Bowen resigned Dec. 31 as presiding overseer (chief elder) of the Draffenville congregation near Paducah, saying he could no longer support church policies that he felt allowed child molesters to go undetected.

"I refuse to support a pedophile refuge mentality that is promoted among bodies of elders around the world," wrote Bowen in his letter of resignation.

"Criminals should be ousted, identified and punished to protect the innocent and give closure to the victim."

ELDERS APPROACHED

Woman felt punished for accusing husband

Sara Poisson of Claremont, N.H., said she never considered turning to anyone but her church elders when then-husband Paul Berry began physically abusing some of her children. Berry would eventually receive a 56-year prison term.

"Whatever issues might arise that required guidance were to be handled within the congregation by the body of elders," Poisson said at her ex-husband's sentencing for molestation on Oct. 31, 2000.

Bowen said members of the Jehovah's Witnesses are continually told that if they have any problems within the family, they are to go to the elders for help.

"You have to understand the Jehovah's Witnesses organization," Bowen said. "Their life revolves around following the direction of what the local elders and the organization say."

But Sam Neal, an elder in the congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Jeffersonstown, Ky., said church members are not sheltered.

"All of us have access to all of the things in the community," said Neal, retired associate dean of the University of Louisville's School of Social Work. "Whatever we need, we know where to go."

Church attorney Moreno said church members know they can go to the authorities on a matter of abuse. "They haven't committed a sin by turning in a Jehovah's Witness to the authorities," he said.

"It's a very personal decision."

But Poisson said in Hillsborough County Superior Court at her ex-husband's sentencing that when she went to elders with her concerns, they repeatedly told her that she "needed to be a better wife" and "needed to pray more."

"Each time I spoke to the elders I was sanctioned in some way," Poisson told the court. "Some privilege was removed because I had dared to usurp the authority of my husband." Poisson later told a reporter she was barred from speaking at some meetings and restricted in the amount of door-to-door evangelism she could do.

New Hampshire law since the late 1970s has said that any "person having reason to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected shall report the same."

There is no evidence in court records or elders' public comments that the church reported Poisson's allegations.

Poisson said in court that while she did not know of Berry's sexual abuse, she knew of and didn't report the physical abuse, and "this I have to live with for the rest of my life."

Authorities found out, Poisson said, when her son went to school one day with the imprint of a fly swatter on his leg.

Poisson said a social worker gave her an ultimatum: Have Berry leave the house or lose custody of their children. She chose the former and said the congregation shunned her.

Some time later, one of Poisson's daughters ran away. She returned 18 months later, frail and sick, with the words, "Why did you let that happen?" Poisson said in court. The girl informed her mother that Berry had sexually abused her from age 4 to 10.

Mother and daughter went to police to launch the sexual abuse investigation.

Berry was arrested and in July 2000 was convicted of 17 counts of sexual assault. Among his offenses, Berry suspended one of his daughters from hooks in a barn and strapped her to a tree during episodes of sexual abuse.

When Berry showed up for sentencing, so did 29 members of his Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Wilton, N.H., all of whom spoke in his favor, often in glowing terms, according to court records.

"Whatever charges that have been brought against him have been somehow misconstrued," said Robert Michalowski, a former Wilton elder. "Elders in the congregation would have picked up on (sexual abuse) in a minute."

In sentencing Berry, Judge Arthur Brennan said the church might have done more to help the victim.

"The church didn't help her and the state didn't help her," Brennan said. "... Perhaps if somebody had spoken years ago, if somebody had inquired, instead of relying perhaps on Jehovah... maybe it would have been... a lot less cruel for that child."

Brennan said he was "not talking against anybody's religion. I'm saying I've seen this happen in any number of different congregations."

The victim, Holly Brewer, of Berkeley, Calif., agreed to have her story told.

Berry maintains his innocence and is appealing the conviction, his lawyer, Mark Sisti, said.

Moreno would not comment on whether elders violated the law in this case but said, "Once in a while, in a small minority cases, elders screw up. They screw up because they don't call here (the Watch Tower legal department). When they call here, they don't screw up."

The Hillsborough County attorney's office said it did not investigate whether elders broke the law by failing to report the suspected physical abuse. By the time prosecutors investigated, more than one year had passed since the elders' involvement, beyond the statute of limitations for prosecuting a misdemeanor such as failing to report.

Three years ago, similar questions about elders' actions arose in a Texas case.

When a family in the Houston-area church reported that a teen-age son was molesting his younger sister, elders visited the home, counseled the family and received the boy's assurance he would stop, according to allegations in the family's lawsuit against the church.

Instead, the abuse continued, the lawsuit said. A criminal court jury in 1997 convicted the then-22-year-old for abuse committed as an adult. He was given a 40-year sentence for aggravated sexual assault.

"The elders sat at that kitchen table and listened to her tell what her brother had done," said Kelly

Siegler, an assistant district attorney for Harris County. "All they did is tell him to stop and they prayed about it. They just blew it off. No one ever told the police."

Siegler said she would have prosecuted elders for failing to report abuse if the two-year statute of limitations hadn't expired.

The family sued the church in civil court and in 1999 reached a settlement that bars both sides from discussing the case.

Houston lawyer Jeffrey Parsons, who represented the Jehovah's Witnesses, said he was convinced the church conducted itself properly. "It was really an unfortunate circumstance, but (the family's lawsuit) was not a well-founded case."

CHURCH PROCESS

Strict burden of proof needed for discipline

Taking a sexual abuse complaint to Jehovah's Witnesses church elders puts members in contact with a secretive church process that has a burden of proof that is much greater than in a civil court.

If a church member is accused of any offense, elders follow a strict biblical standard. They require either the member's confession or the testimony of at least two witnesses, including the accuser, to prove the member's guilt, according to church attorney Moreno and church publications.

This applies even in cases of sexual abuse, when there often are no "outside" witnesses.

For victims who can't produce witnesses or persuade the accused person to confess, elders are instructed to "explain to the accuser that nothing more can be done in a judicial (church disciplinary) way," according to a 1995 article in the Jehovah's Witnesses' Watchtower -- a magazine with a circulation of 22 million in 132 languages.

"And the congregation will continue to view the one accused as an innocent person," the article continued.

The article offers one other avenue of justice: "The question of his guilt or innocence can be safely left in Jehovah's (God's) hands."

Moreno said that eventually, the truth comes out. "Somebody else comes out of the woodwork and now you can take action," he said. Moreno said two separate accusers would count as two witnesses when making a sexual abuse accusation.

Church policy neither encourages nor discourages members to report suspected or admitted sexual abuse to police, Moreno said. Elders are instructed to always call the central legal department of the church in Carmel, N.Y., upon receiving an accusation.

When elders call, church lawyers tell them whether state law requires them to report abuse to police, Moreno said. A still-valid 1989 church memo also tells elders to call for legal advice before being interviewed by police, responding to a subpoena or voluntarily turning over confidential church records, unless police have a search warrant.

Moreno said church lawyers might advise elders to refer victims to police or other outside help. "That's a personal decision."

If elders suspect sexual abuse has occurred, they can begin church disciplinary hearings, in which what is said and written is held confidential. No one but elders may take notes, which are collected and kept in a secure place, according to the 1989 memo.

It is a process intended to safeguard reputations and protect the church against lawsuits, according to the memo. The church memo warns of lawsuits by "vindictive or disgruntled ones" and "some who oppose the Kingdom preaching work" if accusations are leaked.

No tape recordings of these proceedings are permitted.

A Jan. 2 statement from J.R. Brown, director of public affairs for the Jehovah's Witnesses, said church elders "encourage the wrongdoers to do everything they can to set the matter straight with the authorities."

But the strict rules of confidentiality -- in which elders are warned not to tell even their own family about disciplinary proceedings -- can leave a molester's identity shielded from those not involved.

Bryan Rees, formerly of Augusta, Maine, said in a lawsuit that his stepfather, Alan Ayers, never warned him to stay clear of his next-door neighbor, church member Larry Baker. Baker had confessed to Ayers and other elders that he had molested another boy.

The elders had secretly disciplined Baker, giving him "some real strict, severe counsel . . . and that was

essentially it," Baker later testified.

Maine didn't require church officials to notify authorities and the elders in Augusta never informed police or anyone else. Though they warned Baker to stay away from children, the molester testified that elders knew he was going door to door with Rees.

"I'm sure they must have known," Baker testified. "There wasn't anything secret about it."

Baker went on to molest Rees at least 30 times by his own admission between 1989 and 1992. He was convicted of unlawful contact with a minor and served about a 90-day jail term.

Rees, who could not be reached for comment, won a \$1.2 million judgment against Baker but has not been able to collect, according to Rees' lawyer, Michael Waxman.

Rees later went public with his story after suing the Jehovah's Witnesses unsuccessfully in 1998. He alleged the church breached its fiduciary responsibility when it failed to warn him about Baker and when it failed to exert some type of control over Baker's actions.

But Maine's highest court rejected such arguments in 1999.

"The mere fact that one individual knows that a third party is or could be dangerous to others does not make that individual responsible for controlling the third party," the Supreme Judicial Court ruled.

Ayers, Rees' stepfather, declined to comment, but church lawyer Moreno applauded the decision.

"There is no duty to announce to people that 'John Brown' is a child abuser," he said. If the court had ruled otherwise, he said, it "would basically discourage people from going to their ministers and getting help."

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But Attorney Paul Garrity, representing Blackstock, argued that just because Jehovah's Witnesses don't use the one-on-one confessional process of other religions, the state can't strip its right to confidentiality based on "theological differences as to how reconciliation with God is to be achieved."

The case is pending.

AN ELDER PROTESTS

Kentuckian resigns over how suspicions handled

The Jehovah's Witnesses, whose organization was founded in the 19th century, part company with traditional Christian groups on some key doctrines.

They are best known for their door-to-door evangelism and their expectation that Jesus will soon establish the kingdom of God.

They do not serve in the military or pledge allegiance to political symbols -- facts that have brought them persecution here and abroad -- though they preach obedience to the law.

And it was the church's focus on the letter of the law that led elder and presiding overseer Bowen to publicly resign his church position in the Marshall County town of Draffenville.

Bowen had been alerted to possible sexual abuse involving a family in his area. When he called the church's legal department, as required, lawyers told him Kentucky law did not require him to report the suspected abuse.

After hearing details of the allegations, a separate church department then advised against a disciplinary hearing, Bowen said.

He said elders go against such advice at the risk of losing their position. After he resigned, he said he reported the allegations of abuse to police. Bowen said he was told by police the case is under investigation.

Bowen is still technically a member. Thomas Carrothers, the Jehovah's Witnesses' city overseer for nearby Paducah, said last month he saw no grounds for expelling Bowen. "People are allowed to express their points of view," he said.

In a talk to the congregation about Bowen's criticism of church policies, Carrothers urged church members to respond with love to "opposers" and "the slanderous statements of lying apostates."

Carrothers said he wasn't referring to Bowen.

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Bowen's father, Bill J. Bowen, denounced his son's actions in a videotaped interview produced and distributed by the church.

"What (my son) is saying is just absurd," the older Bowen, a longtime church member, said. "I've got to hope that my son will turn around, change his mind."

Elder David King of Edmonds, Wash., said he also resigned his church position in 1997, partly because of his disillusionment with the church's attention to "legal ramifications."

When investigating an allegation of sexual abuse several years ago, King said, elders called a lawyer at church headquarters.

"The moment we identified who we were, he immediately knew state law (in Washington) and said we didn't have to report it," King said. "That was almost the first thing he said."

"At the time, I was a true believer, but it shook me to think they were more concerned about legal ramifications than getting some kind of healthy recovery."

The victims' parents later called police. King said he gradually stopped attending the church.

OUTSIDE HELP

Members say church discouraged efforts

Church writings say members are allowed to seek outside help when they suspect abuse.

Some members, such as Poisson, say they were intimidated by elders when they tried.

In Keene, N.H., the guardian of a 15-year-old girl sued a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in 1987, alleging that elders threatened the girl's parents with "religious excommunication and eternal damnation" if they sought police intervention or counseling for their daughter, who was sexually abused from 1975 to 1985.

The lawsuit was settled, and the girl's lawyer, Charles Donahue, said he could not comment on it. The abuser -- the girl's father -- was later sentenced to three to eight years in prison in 1986 after pleading guilty to two counts of aggravated felonious sexual assault, according to records in Cheshire County Superior Court.

Church lawyer Moreno said it would be "ridiculous" for any elder to make such a threat, and if one did, it would contradict church policy.

"That's not scriptural," he said. "We teach the Scriptures. The Scriptures don't say, 'If you file criminal charges against an abuser you're going to have eternal damnation.' The one in danger of eternal damnation is the abuser."

Church literature also says victims and other church members can seek professional therapy, as long as the counselor respects their beliefs and victims don't reveal names of alleged abusers in group therapy.

But former Jehovah's Witnesses elder J. Michael Terry, of Conway, Ark., said his experience didn't match the policy.

He said that about three or four years ago, he steered the mother of an abuse victim to a therapist, who then reported the crime. "I got jumped on pretty bad" by two fellow elders, Terry said.

"I did what my conscience told me to do," said Terry, who is no longer active in the church. "They said I should have done nothing but listen."

Arkansas law does not require clergy to report abuse to authorities but it does require social workers to. Terry is a social worker.

He said the incident soured his working relationship with elders, and about three years later he was

stripped of his elder's position for being uncooperative.

One of the elders whom Terry said had criticized his actions declined to comment on his dealings with Terry.

RANGE OF PENALTIES

Repentant molesters can go door to door

Watch Tower officials are not consistent on how the church punishes child molesters.

In a Jan. 2 statement, church public affairs director Brown Church said that child abusers are "disfellowshipped," or expelled from the congregation. Later, he acknowledged the church can use less severe penalties.

He defended his original statement, saying that for "mass consumption it conveys the thought (that elders) do institute this discipline. They're not soft on abusers."

But an Aug. 1, 1995, church memo shows that repentant pedophiles can avoid excommunication and remain church members, as happened with Baker.

The document also says elders can restore church memberships to pedophiles who convince elders they have repented.

That's what happened in the case of Clement Pandelo of Paramus, N.J.

In fact, Pandelo, who admitted to police he had molested young girls for 40 years, was twice disfellowshipped and twice reinstated, according to court documents. Pandelo pleaded guilty in 1988 to molesting his 12-year-old granddaughter and two other girls.

His granddaughter, Corinne Holloway, now 24, said Pandelo's reinstatements compounded her physical and psychological trauma.

Church elders "validated the perpetrator rather than the victim," said Holloway, of Spring Lake Park, N.J. "He had the privileges (of membership) and we were in this long, drawn-out process."

Said Moreno: "I wouldn't be too happy myself if somebody abused my child and was reinstated. The bottom line is if an elder determines a former child abuser has demonstrated repentance, (he has) a scriptural obligation to reinstate him."

Church policy permits Pandelo, as a member in good standing, to go door to door, spreading the Jehovah's Witnesses' message.

Barbara Pandelo, Holloway's mother, said she finds that policy potentially harmful.

"These perverts are still allowed to go door to door to unknowing householders," said Barbara Pandelo, of Belmar, N.J. "The Watch Tower Society doesn't make itself bothered with the danger it exposes families (to)."

Brown said pedophiles are restricted from working with minors and must also be with a well-respected church member when they go door to door.

Pedophiles also might not be sent into neighborhoods where they might be recognized as molesters, Brown said.

Church memos tell elders that molesters who remain in the church should be warned not to touch children or be alone with them.

But David Richart, of the National Institute on Children, said a strictly spiritual approach to child molestation is inadequate.

"The whole idea of child sexual abuse is that it generally is an invisible kind of crime and it generally doesn't go away without in some cases treatment and in other cases imprisonment," said Richart, who reviewed Jehovah's Witnesses literature on the subject at The Courier-Journal's request.

"The whole idea implicit in their response is that somebody can be persuaded or guilt-tripped into changing their behavior. It's generally a much more sophisticated problem than that.

"Prayer can do a lot of things, and in the case of child sexual abuse it can be a powerful instrument for change, but it's no substitute for a societal intervention."

Richart said he believes other religious groups have similar problems.

"A lot of churches deal internally with allegations of child sexual abuse and refer to Scripture in ways which seem to encourage the children to be compliant."

Some victims and their advocates want Jehovah's Witnesses to do what civil society has done --

adopt so-called "Megan's Laws," named for the New Jersey murder victim of a neighbor who had two previous sexual-abuse convictions.

Such laws establish sexual-offender registries enabling the public to learn if their neighbors are pedophiles, though few churches of any denomination have such a policy.

"People in the church have the right to know (a member is) a pedophile," said Carl Pandelo of Belmar, N.J., son of Clement Pandelo.

Attorney Waxman, who represented molestation victim Rees in the Maine lawsuit, agreed.

"The churches are going to say one of their main tenets is forgiveness," he said. "Let's assume there is a real, direct confrontation between a church's ideals and the state's interest in protecting kids from being abused. In my view, the kids win."

Neal, the social worker and elder of the Jeffersontown Jehovah's Witnesses congregation, said if a member confessed to child molestation, he would tell the full body of elders and was confident the board would make members aware.

"Nobody has a right to keep matters that really put other folks at risk secret," he said. "We're concerned about every member of the organization, and their best interest, their welfare, their security and safety are matters of concern.

"We don't feel we would be discharging our spiritual responsibility if we held something secret that has a direct impact on the safety and welfare of others."

TELLING AUTHORITIES

Rule is to report cases when states require it

When Jehovah's Witnesses elders call the central legal office, lawyers advise them on their state's reporting laws.

Some states, like Kentucky, require citizens to report suspicions of abuse but provide exceptions for clergy-penitent conversations. Other states, like Indiana, allow no exceptions. Still others only require professionals in certain fields, mainly those dealing with children, to report abuse.

In Boulder, Colo., in December 1991, elders in a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation publicly reprimanded member Leland Elwyn Davies after finding that he had fondled several teen-age girls, according to a report filed by the Boulder County sheriff's office, which investigated after the mother of three victims had alerted police.

One victim, who spoke to police in January 1992, said she was "displeased that the behavior had not been reported by the elders to the authorities," according to the police report.

Police contacted an elder in the congregation who said he could not give out confidential information from the disciplinary process. Colorado does not mandate that clergy give out such information.

Police arrested Davies in July 1992 -- about six months after the church imposed discipline. He pleaded guilty to two counts of third-degree sexual assault and was placed on probation, according to the criminal court clerk in Colorado's 20th Judicial District. Davies died in August 2000.

According to church lawyer Moreno, the system worked. Elders did their job, and victims and police did theirs, he said.

"What was the harm?" Moreno said. "The report got made.

"You've got a teen, who has been molested, upset at the elders for not calling the police?" he said. "You can call the police. You're the one injured.

"Who makes the laws? Not us. Don't blame us for the laws, please. Talk to the state legislators of Colorado."

News Item Sunday, February 4, 2001

Policies on reporting abuse allegations vary among religious denominations

By PETER SMITH, The Courier-Journal

Like the Jehovah's Witnesses, seven other religious denominations surveyed by The Courier-Journal expect their clergy to report all suspected child abuse in states where they are required to by law.

The approach among religions varies in states that do not mandate reporting.

Even in reporting states, variations are possible. For example, Kentucky and Indiana require citizens to report suspected child abuse. Indiana allows no exceptions. Kentucky allows exceptions for clergy-penitent and attorney-client privilege.

Roman Catholic Church: Policies vary by diocese. The archdioceses of Louisville and Indianapolis require priests to report suspected child abuse in all circumstances except when they learn of it in confession. Even in that setting, priests can counsel someone confessing a crime to go to a counselor or police. Archdiocese of Indianapolis spokeswoman Susan Schramm knew of no instance where that exception conflicted with Indiana law.

Southern Baptist Convention: Churches are self-governing, so regional bodies do not dictate policies. However, the Kentucky Baptist Convention trains staff and volunteers to recognize and report suspected child abuse to authorities, according to Wendy Dever, preschool and children's associate for the convention.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Policies vary by regional governing body but are often shaped to follow state law. Pastors in the Louisville-based denomination are forbidden to reveal anything told them in confidence. The church does not make an explicit exception for suspected child abuse but pastors can violate confidentiality when there is a "risk of imminent bodily harm to any person."

Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative Judaism): Congregations are self-governing, but rabbis are expected to do everything to protect an abuse victim, including calling authorities. "One doesn't need a specific secular mandate that says protect somebody in trouble," said Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Assembly.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Policies are determined by regional governing bodies but often follow state law on who is required to report, according to the Rev. Lowell Almen, secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

United Methodist Church: The church does not have a policy that requires clergy to report suspicions of child abuse, but clergy training emphasizes that laws often mandate reporting. If a pastor learns of abuse in a confidential setting such as a counseling session, "that's a decision a pastor would make on a case-by-case basis," Robert Kohler, assistant general secretary of the Division of Ordained Ministry.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons): Church leaders are instructed to call a denominational help line if abuse issues arise in the congregation. Those staffing the phone lines include professional counselors as well as lawyers who advise local ministers on their state's laws. "The law of the land must be obeyed," said a statement from the Latter-day Saints public affairs department. "If a report is required, help line personnel assist the local church leader . . . as who should make the report -- whether . . . a family member, whether the perpetrator can be persuaded to self-report, etc."

No religious denomination contacted has even considered what some Jehovah's Witnesses are demanding of their church: that congregations be told of pedophiles in their midst.

But many churches bar sex offenders from working with children, according to Dever of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

And they increasingly conduct criminal background checks of potential pastors, youth workers and other volunteers.

"Small churches have a hard time with that, because they know everybody," Dever said. "But we really don't know everybody. We live in 2001. We have to be concerned about this."

Staff writer Megan Woolhouse contributed to this story.

News Item Sunday, February 4, 2001

Molestation victim, parents think church elders let them down

By PETER SMITH, The Courier-Journal

In Focus

Jehovah's Witnesses' policy on child molesters attacked

Policies on reporting abuse allegations vary among religious denominations

When Corinne Pandelo was 12, court records show, she told her parents that her grandfather had molested her during a visit to his home in Paramus, N.J., in August 1988.

That episode launched a chain of events that ultimately alienated Corinne and her parents from the

church to which they had been devoted.

Carl and Barbara Pandelo, now of Belmar, N.J., went to the elders in their Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Fair Lawn, N.J., with their daughter's accusation, according to court records.

New Jersey law required clergy to report suspected child abuse. Elders told Carl Pandelo's father, Clement Pandelo, to turn himself in to authorities, Carl Pandelo said. Clement Pandelo confessed the molestation to police on Aug. 24, 1988.

But Carl and Barbara Pandelo said local elders also urged them to agree to a plea bargain for Clement Pandelo, saying they wanted to spare Corinne the trauma of a trial. The Pandelos agreed.

Anthony Valenti of Maywood, N.J., who was an elder in the Fair Lawn congregation at the time, said in an interview that was not his recollection. "To my knowledge, we did not advise them that way," he said.

Clement Pandelo was placed on probation after pleading guilty in February 1989 in Superior Court in Bergen County, N.J., to molesting Corinne and two other girls. Now 75 and a member of the Hawthorne, N.J., congregation, Pandelo told The Courier-Journal he had no comment.

The Fair Lawn congregation expelled Clement Pandelo after a disciplinary hearing and reinstated him about 18 months later, court records show. Carl Pandelo said the reinstatement followed a letter of apology to him, not his daughter, from his father.

Carl and Barbara Pandelo said it was bad enough that the family saw Corinne's attacker at church meetings. They also became upset when members and an elder warned they would not "make it through Armageddon" unless they renewed ties with Clement Pandelo, Carl Pandelo said.

Corinne was by then preparing to be baptized and had recurring nightmares of encountering her grandfather in the baptismal pool, according to court documents.

"I can understand how the Pandelos might feel," Valenti said, adding that a person is only reinstated after a three-man committee deems him or her repentant. "It would be better if they could forgive (Clement Pandelo), but circumstances are what they are."

Eventually, Corinne's parents took her to a therapist. Corinne said she began to unlock memories of being molested by her grandfather over several years, court documents said. To help guide her therapist, Corinne's parents said they obtained the police report and were shocked to read Clement Pandelo had confessed to fondling girls for 40 years.

The parents said they went to church elders asking for any details Clement might have confessed to them and were told that the confession was confidential.

"As parents, we feel we have the legal right to know what he did actually confess to," Carl Pandelo said in a Jan. 21, 1993, letter to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, a legal corporation of the church.

Valenti said the Pandelos were involved in discussions among elders that pertained to their daughter. He declined to say what elders discussed with Clement Pandelo on other occasions.

Clement Pandelo did not face any other criminal charges, but his Hawthorne congregation expelled him in 1992, according to court documents. Four years later it reinstated him, according to a letter from the Pandelos to the Watch Tower Society.

When Carl and Barbara Pandelo prepared to sue Clement Pandelo in 1993 to recover costs for Corinne's therapy, Valenti said he told them the Bible held that Christians shouldn't sue each other.

Valenti said the church allows members to sue to collect insurance payments -- Clement Pandelo would be paying out of homeowner's liability insurance -- but that elders tried to mediate the conflict outside of court.

Carl and Barbara Pandelo appealed to the Jehovah's Witnesses' headquarters, which eventually gave them the green light to sue, according to a church letter.

Corinne Holloway, now 24, married and living in Spring Lake Park, N.J., won \$1.8 million in compensatory damages against Clement Pandelo in Bergen County Superior Court in 1999 after other women testified he molested them when they were girls.

Clement Pandelo also was ordered to pay \$500,000 in punitive damages. But the jury deducted 40 percent of Holloway's original \$3 million compensatory-damage award, judging her parents 40 percent responsible for leaving her in her grandfather's care.

The jury heard testimony that a relative had told Carl Pandelo that his father had molested a girl years before. Carl Pandelo said in an interview that he was told by Valenti that at least one elder had investigated Clement Pandelo for suspected sexual abuse and found it to be untrue.

Valenti, in a pretrial deposition, confirmed that he had been told by an elder that an investigation had

found no evidence Clement Pandelo committed sexual abuse.

Valenti, who did not testify in court because of clergy confidentiality, declined to comment.

Holloway is appealing the jury decision

Christianity Today - February 2nd 2001:

Witness Leaders Accused of Shielding Molesters

Former and current Jehovah Witnesses question a policy they say discourages leaders from reporting abuse.

A candle-maker in the cozy western Kentucky town of Draffenville, Bill Bowen has been a devoted Jehovah's Witness all his life. For nearly seven years, he has served as an elder in his local Kingdom Hall. As part of his job, he maintained confidential files for the 50-person group. The recent discovery of one file left Bowen stunned. "I came across some information that raised questions as to whether or not a child was molested," he says.

By Corrie Cutrer | posted 2/2/01

Christianity Today

Yet Bowen says when he approached his fellow elders about the situation, they turned a blind eye toward the evidence and did little to help the victim. "I discovered how corrupt this organization was in terms of hurting children," Bowen says. In protest to the elders' response, Bowen, 43, resigned his position as an elder. He is part of a growing group of former and current Jehovah's Witnesses speaking out against a policy they claim is protecting child molesters in Jehovah's Witness circles nationwide.

A reluctance to report

Bowen says that to avoid embarrassment or shame, Witness leaders discourage followers from reporting any incident of sexual misconduct to authorities, even if the law requires it, citing the November 1995 issue of the organization's magazine, *The Watchtower*. The publication says that Witnesses must follow the biblical standard of finding two or three eye-witnesses to verify a claim before making an accusation of abuse (referencing 2 Cor. 13:1 and 1 Tim. 5:19).

Otherwise, it says, the matter should be dropped, and the accused should be treated as innocent. For those who recall repressed memories of sexual abuse, *The Watchtower* statement said, "The nature of these recalls is just too uncertain to base judicial decisions on them without other supporting evidence."

J. R. Brown, director of the public affairs office of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTBTS) in Brooklyn, says he shares Bowen's concern. "We abhor what [molestation] does to children," he tells *Christianity Today*.

Critics, however, say that the Witness organization uses the policy for all abuse cases, whether they deal with repressed memories or not. Most abuse situations rarely have multiple witnesses, critics argue, adding that local leaders are not appropriately handling alleged abuse and have a bias toward protecting their congregations.

Jim Whitney, 49, formerly a Witness elder, says he discovered meeting notes from other elders regarding abuse cases at a Kingdom Hall in California where he had been active. He said none of these cases were ever turned over to the police.

When he began attending another Kingdom Hall in Oregon, he discovered a similar pattern. "They shield the organization," he says. "They will do anything to protect Jehovah's Witnesses."

Paul Carden, executive director for the Centers for Apologetics Research in San Juan Capistrano, California, says this protective attitude is prevalent in the WTBTS. "There is a fortress mentality," Carden says. "The Watchtower Society is loath to admit wrongdoing of any sort. Because they portray themselves as being Jehovah's sole mouthpiece to mankind, they have sought to present themselves as being above question."

Whitney believes many child molesters make their way into Witness congregations. "It's a fertile ground," he says. "Pedophiles know that any confession they make is concealed. The Witnesses don't want to bring shame to their name."

Witness spokesman Brown says that the incidence of pedophilia is no worse in his religion than in others, but he admits that some elders have not reported suspicions of abuse. In 38 states, the law requires clergy and other professionals to report physical and sexual abuse of children. Some critics

argue that even in the 22 states that do not require clergy members to report, Witness elders do not qualify for such a privilege because most are neither professionally trained nor paid employees of the organization.

Internal policies vary among American religious groups. While the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) says it complies with all government reporting laws, some incidents may be handled in house, according to Zane Bruyton, the denomination's manager of judicial process. "You have to take it seriously," Bruyton says. "But we cannot bring charges in every case."

Although the Book of Discipline for the United Methodist Church outlines abuse procedures, local pastors often determine how to handle the specifics of a case. "We generally report it to the authorities while also conducting an in-house investigation," says Scott Field, senior pastor at Wheatland Salem United Methodist Church in Naperville, Illinois. "At the very least, we would remove the alleged perpetrator from [his or her] area of responsibility until the investigation is resolved."

Broken families

Dozens of court cases, both national and international, have surfaced in recent years that shed light on how seriously many people have been affected by the Watchtower's instruction regarding abuse. In lengthy interviews with Christianity Today, two former Witness families described how sexual abuse has shattered their lives. Don and Kim Clemens of Mount Shasta, California, say that in 1996 their son accused his babysitter, Alizum Variuma neighbor and a fellow Witness of molesting him frequently for six years, beginning when he was 5 years old.

The family informed local Witness leaders. "It was my son's words against her words," Kim Clemens remembers. "The elders filed it away and said there's nothing they can do."

When the Clemens family saw Varium volunteering at a daycare center, they hired a private investigator to gather information. "Our goal is to keep her completely away from all kids," Kim Clemens says. "If there are more children who come out of there having been abused, I don't want to say 15 or 20 years down the road that I didn't say anything."

Varium refused to speak with CT about the case and faces no official charges in connection with the abuse allegation.

Jeff Tucker, one of the Mount Shasta Kingdom Hall elders, says there were not enough eye-witnesses to go to the police. Tucker believes the family is just trying to cause trouble. "They were disfellowshipped," Tucker says. "They're just trying to create problems and bring reproach on Jehovah's name and his organization."

Although Witnesses comply with secular laws when necessary, Witness spokesman Brown says, the group prefers to deal with such matters spiritually. "We handle wrongdoing, sin, and transgression," he says. "This is what a religious organization is supposed to do. We're not getting into law enforcement. We're just going to handle the repentance."

In another instance, Sabrina Montgomery, a 37-year-old former Witness in Brigham City, Utah, alleges that her father, John Bohman, sexually abused her from when she was 14 until she was 19. When Witness elders found out, she says, Bohman simply resigned his position as an elder, and no further action was taken. Montgomery has asked local authorities to prevent any contact between her three daughters and Bohman. Montgomery's former husband is still a Witness, and maintains regular contact with Bohman. Bohman did not respond to CT's requests for an interview.

After resigning as an elder at his Kentucky congregation, Bowen hopes to motivate Jehovah's Witness leaders to change their policies. "I want all confidential files to be opened and any information that involves pedophiles to be given to the police," Bowen said. "Children are being molested. They are a flock of little sheep who are afraid to speak out. God doesn't want that."

The Paducah Sun (Kentucky) Newspaper - January 28th 2001:

Jehovah's Witnesses' handling of child sexual abuse criticized

The cases aren't reported by police, and elders may allow violators to remain, critics say.

Carl and Barbara Pandelo, as devout Jehovah's Witnesses, did what they thought was right when their 12-year-old daughter came to them and told them her grandfather had molested her: They went to the elders of the church. Thirteen years later, they are no longer Witnesses, their case remains in court, and Carl Pandelo now believes "that organization is as corrupt as any other."

By C.D. Bradley cbradley@paducahsun.com (mailto:cbradley@paducahsun.com)--270.575.8650

Mario Moreno, associate general counsel at the church's New York headquarters, said when church policy is applied to child molesters, "as a parent, an attorney and an elder, I'm comfortable with our policy."

William Bowen, 43, of Marshall County was raised a Witness and served as an elder in his Draffenville congregation for nearly two decades, along with service throughout the region and the country for the church, also known as the Watchtower Society.

Last month, Bowen resigned his leadership position in the church because of a policy he claims "has harmed thousands, is leaving many unprotected, and provides refuge to outright criminals."

Since Bowen's resignation, the Sun has been contacted by several current and former Witnesses with concerns about the church's policy regarding child molesters, or who say they themselves have been victims.

Moreno said while he believes in the church's policy, he knows that some members have been hurt, and "my heart goes out to them." But he said that some elders don't follow the policy as they should, and that's where trouble begins.

Carl Pandelo, of Hackensack, N.J., was naturally shocked when his daughter came to him and his wife in 1988 and told them she had been molested by his father. What he would later find would shock him even more.

At the time, Pandelo's daughter told her parents that her grandfather, Clement, had molested her once. They took the matter to the elders, who in turn questioned Clement, and he confessed. The elders advised him to turn himself in, which he did. He was removed from the fellowship shortly thereafter.

The elders also advised Carl and his wife not to pursue prosecution but to settle for a plea bargain because going to court would only worsen the girl's mental state. They agreed, and in 1989 Clement Pandelo was ordered to undergo counseling and given five years probation, according to court documents.

"We thought we would never have to see him again," Barbara Pandelo remembers. "But we saw him the next day at Kingdom Hall."

"He continued going and sitting right behind us like nothing was wrong," Carl Pandelo added.

Clement Pandelo was reinstated as a member 18 months later. To do so, he had to show repentance and admit his wrongdoing, as well as being judged by the elders to be ready to be accepted back into the congregation.

By that time, the Pandelos had their daughter in therapy.

"The wall of denial and secrecy began to come down," Carl Pandelo said. "When she began talking about the extent of the abuse, it became clear he had been molesting her every time she was in her grandparents' care since she was a couple of years old."

Barbara Pandelo said one of the first things the therapist asked was what Clement had admitted to the prosecutor. The Pandelos hadn't been aware they were privy to that information, but they soon obtained it.

When he turned himself in, Clement Pandelo told a prosecutor's investigator that he had molested Carl and Barbara's daughter as well as their niece, according to a transcript of the interview. He also admitted that he had been fondling young girls for four decades. Investigators' reports note that he was investigated in 1986 for fondling his female teen-age neighbor, but her mother declined to press charges.

The Pandelos requested information from the elders about their investigation, but were refused.

"We were told, 'That's all confidential,'" Barbara Pandelo said.

Other people began to come forward, and Clement Pandelo was dropped from the fellowship a second time in 1994.

The Pandelos filed a lawsuit against Clement, seeking compensation for the therapy, for which Carl and Barbara had been paying. Clement filed a countersuit, later dismissed, charging that they had been at fault because they had let their daughter come to his house. While the suit was still being litigated, Clement was again reinstated in the church in 1996.

"He has the freedom to go door to door and minister," Carl Pandelo said, referring to the faith's practice of public ministry.

During a deposition in the civil lawsuit, Anthony Valenti, an elder in the Pandelos' congregation, said he

had discouraged them from pursuing the investigation against Carl's father based on a scriptural encouragement against taking another brother to court, according to a transcript of the deposition. During the course of the civil case, several Witnesses claimed that Clement Pandelo had molested them as well, and they waived ecclesiastical privilege so the elders could testify to what they had been told, Carl Pandelo said. The elders, citing ecclesiastical privilege, refused to testify.

In December 1999, the civil case was decided against Clement Pandelo, and his son and daughter-in-law were awarded nearly \$1.8 million, plus \$500,000 in punitive damages. Clement's wife, Olga Pandelo, was dismissed from the suit, and with her went the insurance company that would have been able to pay the decision.

Carl and Barbara are arguing on appeal that the Witnesses' elders cannot claim ecclesiastical privilege because they are volunteer, thus unpaid, clergy. They are also trying to have Olga Pandelo reinstated. A hearing is scheduled Feb. 26 in New Jersey Appellate Court.

"They're harboring criminals at the risk of families in the neighborhood," Barbara Pandelo said of the church.

Moreno said when a Witness goes to an elder with an accusation of abuse, the first step the elders should take is calling the church's legal department.

He said there are then three factors considered: protecting the child, complying with the law, and protecting minister-adherent confidentiality, with the last receiving the least weight.

The legal department will then advise the elders what is required by law. Twenty-two states, including Illinois and the District of Columbia, do not require clergy to report accusations of child abuse. In those states, Moreno said, the legal department generally advises the elders not to report the matter to law enforcement authorities.

J.R. Brown, public affairs director for the church, said the reason for this is "we do not think, as an ecclesiastical authority, we should run ahead of Caesar's laws," using a biblical reference to secular authority. "Even if secular authority does not require it, generally we have endeavoured to be more zealous for enforcing and seeing that these laws are complied with. If Caesar has a law, and it does not conflict with God's law, we follow it."

Brown said the church does not necessarily equate reporting the matter to law enforcement to protecting the child because "not all the time does government authority provide the protection the child needs. We don't say automatically that, but unfortunately too many reports show that's the case. You can be sure they're going to take what action is necessary to see that the child is protected."

Both Brown and Moreno said that the elders, who volunteer and are essentially untrained clergy, might err in their application of a policy both believe puts protecting children first.

"It's a matter of trying to balance confidentiality and protecting the child," Brown said. "It's not always easy. Have mistakes been made? Very likely, they have. We're trying to see that everyone is educated to what needs to be done to see that innocent children are not victimized."

Moreno agrees with Bowen's claim that no investigation is initiated in the church if there is only one witness and the accused denies the charge, but he said elders have the responsibility to watch the accused more closely. He added that elders sometimes advise the accused to not put himself or herself in suspicious situations.

He also said that when members are disfellowshipped, the congregation is told but no reason is given in order to protect confidentiality. When asked if the parents of the victim would be allowed to tell fellow congregates why a member is disfellowshipped, Moreno replied, "That would be their choice. We don't tell them that, but it would be their choice. Is that encouraged? No."

He agreed with Bowen's charge that a congregation would also not be told if a pedophile had joined the flock. But he said because of the church's structure, the fact that such a member, if male, who would have fewer rights in the congregation, would not be serving in a leadership role would alert members that "he obviously lacks spiritual maturity."

Moreno said he believes that while some of the church's critics on this topic have legitimate concerns, most "have a problem with pride" and "want the organization to change for them. We go by what we believe the Bible says, and we don't change for anybody."

He also said he feels the church is "being picked on" and added that he would be willing to put the church's policy up against any other.

The church's critics believe that it is the church, not children, that the policy is designed to protect.

Mike Terry, a therapist and a former elder in Arkansas, said there are many parallels between sexual abuse and spiritual abuse. He said he had seen a disproportionately large number of abusers and

abused Witnesses for years in his work, which has centered on treating sex offenders.

Bob Smith, a former elder in the Northeast, said part of the problem is that the victims, usually female, have to go before three elders, always male.

"It's a repetition of the same sort of abuse," he said.

Smith said both his wife and daughter remain Witnesses, which is why he asked that his hometown not be disclosed.

"I try to appreciate the fact that my wife likes that comfort" that comes from the faith, he said. "She respects that I've made some changes. We talk about it, and she, like many other Witnesses, quietly questions some of it. But when someone asks questions like that, they always say, 'Where else is there to go?'"

Steve Hassan, who operates the Resource Center For Freedom of Mind and is an author who has written several books on mind control and cultlike organizations, said he has seen several patients who were former Witnesses who had been abused "who tried to speak out and were disfellowshipped."

He said the Witnesses controlled the flow of information to their members by demanding that members not read or view anything that disagrees with the teachings of the church.

When the church allows its members to view such information without the fear of punishment, "they'll start looking less like a destructive cult and more like a benign denomination. Judaism and Christianity are based on free will."

He said that when speaking to former Witnesses, he will describe the factors at play in a cult organization, and they will invariably reply, "That's the Watchtower."

Associated Press (AP) News - January 16th 2001:

Ore. Slay Suspect Known As Con Man

By JEFF BARNARD

.c The Associated Press

NEWPORT, Ore. (AP) - By the time Christian Longo reached the Oregon coast last fall with his wife and three children, he had left a trail of bad checks, fraud and theft charges stretching clear back to Michigan. But all those troubles never seemed to bother him.

Though his job brewing lattes at the local Starbucks couldn't begin to pay the rent on his luxury waterfront condo or the big sport utility vehicles he liked to drive, he came off as a nice-looking guy who was charming, a good dresser, sweet with his wife and kids, and possessed of plenty of money.

By the time Longo left town around Christmas, it was clear that things were not as they seemed: Longo, 27, was at best a con man with a taste for the good things in life, at worst a murderer.

Over the weekend, Longo was captured in Mexico and brought back to the United States to face charges he murdered his wife and children and dumped their bodies in Oregon's coastal waters. Investigators have not said how they were killed or why.

Sheri Johansen, who used to trade jokes with Longo when he worked at the espresso stand, said she is not ready to believe any of the bad stuff until she hears him confess.

"He just seemed so happy-go-lucky," Johansen said. "He seemed like he had a lot of money. And oh, God, cute kids. Adorable kids."

The bodies of Zachary Michael, 5, and Sadie Ann, 3, were found days before Christmas in an Oregon backwater. Then, two days after the holiday, police divers found the body of his wife, Mary Jane, and youngest daughter, 2-year-old Madison, stuffed under a dock behind his condo.

By the time authorities identified the youngsters and began searching for Longo, he was gone, like so many other times in his life.

The Longos were married in 1993 and lived in Ypsilanti, Mich. They took regular vacations to nice places, particularly Mexico, said Mary Jane's sister, Penny Dupuie of South Boardman, Mich. Dupuie said she always kind of wondered where the money came from.

"He always liked the best," Dupuie said. "They drove nice cars. Liked nice things. One of those guys who goes out and gets a \$30 haircut. I just think he wanted to live beyond his means, but didn't want to work for it."

James Baker, Mary Jane's father, a janitor in Traverse City, Mich., said people liked Longo instantly: "I thought it was a natural charm, a sincere honest charm that he had. At some point, apparently, he took this charm and used it to defraud people."

Baker said the financial problems began in 1998. The Longos couldn't make their mortgage payments. Longo ran up credit card debts and was prone to mood swings. Once he came home with two snowmobiles, telling his wife he won them in a raffle. There was a boat in the yard.

Longo started a construction cleaning business in 2000 but it wasn't paying the bills. He pleaded guilty to using his laptop computer to print counterfeit checks worth nearly \$30,000. He was sentenced to three months' probation and ordered to pay \$32,000, but soon fell behind in the payments.

After his conviction, the Jehovah's Witnesses elders excluded Longo from the church, though his wife and children continued to attend.

"A person isn't excluded from fellowship simply because they do something wrong," said Chad Onufer, a minister in the church. "They have to be unrepentant"

Changing his ways wasn't Longo's way.

The Ann Arbor News fired him from his job dropping off bundles of newspapers last summer after he apparently cashed two counterfeit checks for more than \$800 each, said circulation manager Fred Jahnke.

State police were investigating claims Longo wrote bad checks to pay employees of his cleaning company when the family left town. Over the summer, the Longos surfaced in Toledo, Ohio. Longo was gone again before police there charged him with receiving stolen construction equipment and passing bad checks.

In Oregon, Longo rented a \$1,500-a-month condo with a view of sailboats and cabin cruisers. He claimed to work for a telephone company and told condo staff members he would pay them as soon as his check came through.

Then on Dec. 17, he told people his family was flying home to Michigan for a visit. Two days later, the bodies started showing up, and Longo was gone again. He flew to Mexico on stolen ID.

Tourists in Tulum, Mexico, where he was arrested while living in a beach shack, said he told them he was a travel writer for The New York Times working on a story, and had divorced his wife because she cheated on him.

Baker said his son-in-law was never abusive toward his wife. And Dupue said she, too, is at a loss to explain it all.

"I could only think that Mary Jane possibly wanted to leave him, or Chris was sick enough that he thought his family couldn't live without him and he thought he was doing them a favor," she said.

Paducah Kentucky News Channel 6 - January 5th 2001:

Watchtower Society PR Statement

If child abuse becomes known to our church elders, they strictly comply with applicable child abuse reporting laws. We also encourage the wrongdoers to do everything they can to set the matter straight with the authorities. Furthermore, we do not prohibit or discourage the victim or the victim's parents from reporting child abuse to the authorities even if the alleged perpetrator is one of Jehovah's Witnesses. If you would like to receive more information on how we report such matters, please contact Mario Moreno, Watchtower Legal Department. (845) 509-0416 or (845) 306-1000. A primary focus of Jehovah's Witnesses is to elevate the Bible's strong family values in all communities and to help willing ones come to know and serve God acceptably.

The Paducah Sun (Kentucky) Newspaper - January 5th 2001:

JW elder steps down over concealed child/sexual abuse in WT

By C.D. Bradley cbradley@paducahsun.com (mailto:cbradley@paducahsun.com)~270.575.8650

DRAFFENVILLE, Ky. --An elder in a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation at Draffenville has resigned his leadership position because of a policy he claims "has harmed thousands, is leaving many unprotected, and provides refuge to outright criminals."

The elder, William Bowen, resigned last week from his position as an elder and presiding overseer, the rough equivalent to a pastor in other Protestant denominations. In doing so he cited the church's policy regarding the reporting of suspected child abusers to law enforcement authorities. Bowen said the policy, which requires accusers to report alleged abuse to church elders rather than to legal authorities, lets "literally thousands" of pedophiles go unpunished.

"I am referring to Watch Tower policy to keep information about pedophiles confidential," Bowen wrote in his resignation letter. "Pedophiles are protected by a code of silence and in many cases remain (in leadership positions or as members in good standing) while their victims suffer in silence or face sanctions. This policy is unethical and immoral in my opinion."

A spokesman at the church's headquarters in New York said there is no prohibition or discouragement in going to legal authorities in the event of child abuse.

Bowen, 43, who has served in various leadership capacities in the church for about two decades, said he has seen multiple similar cases in his visits to various congregations. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society is a not-for-profit entity the church uses to publish literature, supervise global evangelizing and organize conventions and schools for the ministry of Witnesses. Bowen said he grew up in the faith and by resigning, "I'm basically throwing away 40 years in the organization." Still, it was something Bowen felt he had to do because he doubts that the policy will change unless public pressure mounts, he said.

"I have fretted with this for two or three years, but this is wrong and it has to be stopped," he said. "This is not something where I can allow myself to look the other way anymore."

J.R. Brown, public affairs director for Jehovah's Witnesses at the church's headquarters in Brooklyn, N.Y., said in a statement that the members of the faith "abhor all forms of wickedness, including child abuse. "If child abuse becomes known to our church elders, they strictly comply with applicable child abuse reporting laws. We also encourage the wrongdoers to do everything they can to set the matter straight with the authorities. Furthermore, we do not prohibit or discourage the victim or the victim's parents from reporting child abuse to the authorities even if the alleged perpetrator is one of Jehovah's Witnesses." Bowen said church policy calls for the elders to question the accused in private, and if the charge is denied, the burden of proof then falls on the accuser to prove the allegations. If the accuser cannot do so and two witnesses are required the matter is dropped, he said. Confidentiality is paramount throughout the process, Bowen said, and not even the spouse of the accused or the parents of children who are in contact with the accused are told of the accusations. "As an elder, I am instructed if it is one person's word against another, and not two witnesses to the wrong, no action would be taken and no authorities would be notified," Bowen wrote. "The victim? Cautioned to keep silent or face discipline within the congregation that could go as far as being disfellowshipped for slander." James Bonnell, another elder in the Draffenville congregation, calling child molestation "a terrible thing," said the church "in no way condones that at all." According to the church's Web site, the faith has nearly 6 million practicing members in almost 90,000 congregations worldwide. The Draffenville congregation has approximately 50 members, Bowen said.

Louisville Courier-Journal Newspaper - January 4th 2001:

Church officials say elders alert authorities to suspected abuse in states that require reporting. But in other states they prefer to take steps to protect children that don't breach what they see as confidential communication between elders and members.

A lawyer for the Jehovah's Witnesses church, which has nearly 1 million members nationally and 6 million worldwide, said it complies with those state laws that require church elders to report abuse.

"If there is a law that mandates reporting, that takes precedent over any confidentiality, whether in church policy or statute," said Mario Moreno, associate general counsel for the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, a legal corporation of the church.

"In states where there is no reporting requirement, it's a different scenario," Moreno said.

Elders might have the victim relocated away from the abuser or have the parent or guardian of the victim, or even the accused person, report the abuse to police, he said.

"The laws of this country, as well as people's moral values, tell you there are some things that should be kept private. That's why laws protect confidential communications between clergy and their flock."

But Moreno said elders who contact the church's legal department with cases of suspected sexual

abuse -- as they must do -- are often advised to refer victims to police or other outside help, even if the law doesn't require it.

Victims and their parents are free, Moreno said, to seek help from police or therapists and should not blame the church if they choose not to do so.

"Parents are encouraged to do whatever they need to do to protect their child," said Moreno.

Church attorney Moreno said church members know they can go to the authorities on a matter of abuse. "They haven't committed a sin by turning in a Jehovah's Witness to the authorities," he said. "It's a very personal decision."

Moreno would not comment on whether elders violated the law in this case but said, "Once in a while, in a small minority cases, elders screw up. They screw up because they don't call here (the Watch Tower legal department). When they call here, they don't screw up."

Moreno said that eventually, the truth comes out. "Somebody else comes out of the woodwork and now you can take action," he said. Moreno said two separate accusers would count as two witnesses when making a sexual abuse accusation.

Church policy neither encourages nor discourages members to report suspected or admitted sexual abuse to police, Moreno said. Elders are instructed to always call the central legal department of the church in Carmel, N.Y., upon receiving an accusation.

When elders call, church lawyers tell them whether state law requires them to report abuse to police, Moreno said. A still-valid 1989 church memo also tells elders to call for legal advice before being interviewed by police, responding to a subpoena or voluntarily turning over confidential church records, unless police have a search warrant.

Moreno said church lawyers might advise elders to refer victims to police or other outside help. "That's a personal decision."

A Jan. 2 statement from J.R. Brown, director of public affairs for the Jehovah's Witnesses, said church elders "encourage the wrongdoers to do everything they can to set the matter straight with the authorities."

Ayers, Rees' stepfather, declined to comment, but church lawyer Moreno applauded the decision.

"There is no duty to announce to people that 'John Brown' is a child abuser," he said. If the court had ruled otherwise, he said, it "would basically discourage people from going to their ministers and getting help."

"If people could not count on confidentiality when they go and confess to a Catholic priest, there's going to be quite a chilling effect on religion," he said.

Church lawyer Moreno said it would be "ridiculous" for any elder to make such a threat, and if one did, it would contradict church policy.

"That's not scriptural," he said. "We teach the Scriptures. The Scriptures don't say, 'If you file criminal charges against an abuser you're going to have eternal damnation.' The one in danger of eternal damnation is the abuser."

Watch Tower officials are not consistent on how the church punishes child molesters.

In a Jan. 2 statement, church public affairs director Brown said that child abusers are "disfellowshipped," or expelled from the congregation. Later, he acknowledged the church can use less severe penalties.

He defended his original statement, saying that for "mass consumption it conveys the thought (that elders) do institute this discipline. They're not soft on abusers."

Said Moreno: "I wouldn't be too happy myself if somebody abused my child and was reinstated. The bottom line is if an elder determines a former child abuser has demonstrated repentance, (he has) a scriptural obligation to reinstate him."

Brown said pedophiles are restricted from working with minors and must also be with a well-respected church member when they go door to door.

Pedophiles also might not be sent into neighborhoods where they might be recognized as molesters, Brown said.

According to church lawyer Moreno, the system worked. Elders did their job, and victims and police did theirs, he said.

"What was the harm?" Moreno said. "The report got made."

"You've got a teen, who has been molested, upset at the elders for not calling the police?" he said. "You can call the police. You're the one injured.

"Who makes the laws? Not us. Don't blame us for the laws, please. Talk to the state legislators of Colorado."

 Edited by - UnDisfellowshipped on 23 October 2002 3:32:3



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11 years ago

The Dallas Observer - December 7th 2000:

Sects and Lies

Did the isolated, unhappy life of an Arlington family of Jehovah's Witnesses breed false charges of sexual abuse? Absolutely, says a family member who never got a chance to tell her side of the story.

By Thomas Korosec

His looks could not have helped.

That's the first thing you think as you watch Edward Lee Stevenson lower his large, lumpy frame onto a visiting-room stool. His face appears narrow and squirrel-like, compressed as it is by goggle-size bifocals and limp, gray-black hair. His teeth, noticeably misaligned and punctuated by a scattering of gold crowns, are arranged into a pronounced overbite, which slurs his diction ever so slightly. His breath has the unpleasant scent of problem gums, or maybe tooth decay.

Stevenson's oldest daughter, who once thought the idea of his being imprisoned too far-fetched to consider, believes his appearance--the teeth, the glasses, the eccentric manner--helped put him where he is. "He's a weird, ugly guy," she says. "If he looked like Robert Redford, nobody would have believed these things against him."

And even in prison, there are few offenses greater than being convicted of "these things."

"Nobody in here admits they're a sex offender," Stevenson says from the prison visiting room in his slightly hurried way. "There's probably a lot here, but everybody makes up stories. They're drunk drivers or drug dealers. They'll say they were caught with an illegal gun." On his days out on the "field force," hoeing, planting, harvesting, or plucking weeds from cracks in a nearby airstrip, he mainly hopes nobody will ask. "People in here aren't violent," he says. "They're scared."

Stevenson's words, his story of being falsely accused of unforgivable crimes, would be easier to follow if Lupe Miranda, the guard just outside the steel-plate door, would stop shaking his keys.

Tink...tink...tink... Like a watch ticking away the man's sentence, the sound pings down the linoleum floors of this minimum-security compound in Cuero, Texas, which for the next 16 years could be Stevenson's home. Tink...tink...tink...

Located on the edge of a small county seat--a collection of turn-of-the-century storefronts and supply stores southeast of San Antonio--the prison has surroundings that are almost picturesque. Brahma cattle, big-humped and beige, graze in an adjacent field. Stands of oaks and pecans hang across the farm-to-market road. For Stevenson, life inside the fences and metal-sided buildings is almost pleasant compared with his most unhappy home, he says. He reads his science-fiction novels and his Travis McGee mysteries in his two-man cell. No nonstop domestic strife. No waiting for the multiples in his wife's multiple personality to, as he puts it, "clash."

Two years ago, as Stevenson complained in vain that he was the victim of a mentally unstable and vindictive ex-wife, a Tarrant County jury heard three family members--his ex-wife, a daughter, and a son--accuse the 56-year-old Vietnam vet of fondling his 16-year-old

daughter and routinely masturbating in front of her in their Arlington home. Amending her story later, the daughter said he raped her too.

Stevenson, who could not afford a lawyer and foolishly chose to represent himself, let prosecutor Lisa Callaghan, a veteran of the Crimes Against Children Unit, pick the jury. He called no witnesses in the guilt-innocence portion of the trial. And as jurors now relate, he never could make a clear point as he attempted to cross-examine his family, those accusing him of the crime.

"The prosecution lined up witnesses who testified to the facts. He did nothing, absolutely nothing, to discredit those facts," recalls juror Douglas Free.

The results for Stevenson were disastrous.

Instead of casting doubt on a case built on delayed outcries, recovered memories, and a complete lack of physical evidence, he landed an 18-year sentence and a trial record almost entirely devoid of legal objections on which to base future appeals.

Too bad, one could say. He made his own dumb mistakes. "The jury heard the witnesses, saw the witnesses," says Callaghan, who maintains she brought a solid case. "They saw stuff [in the way the witnesses gave their accounts] you can't see now...There is a quality when people are telling the truth you can see and hear."

Stevenson's story would have ended with that had three people not come forward in recent months insisting his case deserves another look. They are his oldest daughter, Sheila Lott, who is estranged from the entire family but has now given a detailed affidavit about their odd, unhappy life; the defendant's mother, Ima Jean Ely, who is paying for a new legal challenge; and Fort Worth defense attorney Ward Casey, who filed a legal action last summer seeking to gain Stevenson a new trial.

They say false charges could easily have emerged from the Stevenson household, which was disturbed in a variety of ways. As members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, the family was unusually insulated from the outside world, says Sheila Lott. The kids didn't go to school or play with neighbors or do anything to expose them to much beyond their mother's enormous influence. Lott says her siblings, particularly the youngest two, were dominated by Shirley Stevenson, a woman who claimed to have multiple-personality disorder and various undiagnosed diseases, and did strange, neurotic things such as insist she was pregnant when it was obvious she was not.

When police and prosecutors are asked to investigate sex-related charges made against a backdrop of divorce and disputes over child support, as was the case here, one would expect prosecutors to exhibit considerable skepticism about what is being alleged. In this instance, says Casey, they ignored some clear, contradictory evidence and chose instead to rely on the word of family witnesses who were unusually close, one of whom had a big ax to grind.

"It was a swearing match," Casey says. "These accusations were so stale, so implausible...Those witnesses were troubled enough, manipulated enough, to lie."

Edward and Shirley Stevenson agree on few things about their 25 years together beyond a few basic details.

They met in 1967, after they had written each other while he was stationed in Vietnam. Of the several men she had written to from her Tampa-area home, "he sounded really lonely, more lonely than some of the other boys I was writing to," Shirley testified at his trial. Born and raised in Abilene, the son of a schoolteacher, Edward had enlisted in the Air Force after failing to finish any courses during his one year in college.

Just four days after they met in person, Edward and Shirley were married. By 1968, they had their first child, Sheila. Another daughter, Shelly, followed in 1971.

By that time, says Edward, the honeymoon was over. "After Shelly was born, she started to get harder to get along with. We started fighting over all kinds of things."

One thing they did agree on, though, was their decision in the late 1960s to join the Jehovah's Witnesses, the door-to-door proselytizers who had been predicting the world would end in 1975. "These Witnesses came to the house and I turned them away, and Shirley said, 'Oh, I like their literature.' She got me interested in starting Bible study with them...and I moved into that religion."

The Stevensons began distributing the Witnesses' newsletter, The Watchtower, most Saturdays, attending church at the Kingdom Hall, and adopting the habits and beliefs of the sect: eschewing material gain, education, and all manner of holidays in order to get to work preparing to be saved.

"When Ed came back from Vietnam, he decided our government was a little on the corrupt side, and he didn't want a lot to do with it," recalls Stevenson's younger brother, Leland Beatty, who manages a foundation that does rural development work. "He wanted to live as simple and pure and God-fearing a

life as he possibly could."

In long, involved letters, Stevenson tried to convert his two brothers and mother, lifelong Methodists, to his new faith.

"It was a good religion if you're poor, and we were poor," recalls Sheila Lott. "You don't have birthdays or Christmas or the Fourth of July. You don't have phone calls from friends or Girl Scouts." The only contact she was allowed to have with nonbelievers, she recalls, is when she and her parents knocked on their doors selling Watchtowers, Bibles, and books.

From the time she was born until she left home at age 18, Lott says, the family moved about eight times among trailers, duplexes, and small rent houses in Florida and Texas. Usually they packed up and left in advance of unpaid bills. Their houses were small, cluttered with "pack-rat stuff like newspapers, milk jugs, egg cartons, old furniture, and clothes," and dark. Her mother, she says, usually hung blankets or quilts over all of the windows. As Edward recalls: "In the middle of a bright summer day, you'd have to put a light on to see."

Edward worked in jobs such as carpentry or repairing electric motors, or labored in the fields picking strawberries. He turned his paycheck over to his wife, who managed the family bills. Making as little as \$5,000 in a bad year, he earned enough to afford 15-year-old station wagons and a black-and-white TV. "One day it would be beans and franks, the next macaroni and cheese, the next beans and franks," recalls daughter Sheila.

By the late '70s, there were two more mouths to feed. In 1975, a third daughter, Sally, was born, and in 1978, a son, Sam. (Both of these names have been changed to protect the privacy of complainants in a sex-crimes case.)

By the time the two youngest children were starting public school in Clyde, a small town near Abilene, Shirley Stevenson decided they would be home-schooled. The decision rankled Edward's mother, Ima Jean Ely, who taught public school in Abilene for 21 years.

"I talked to school officials asking if she could keep them out of school, and they wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole," Ely recalls. "Sometimes I'd go to Clyde during the day to see if the children were studying. They'd just be sitting around in that dark house. I felt so sorry for the kids."

Stevenson says his ex-wife, who has a 10th-grade education, actually did teach the kids, bringing home from the library stacks of books, which they learned to read. There also were days when something came over her and she was so listless, she wouldn't get out of bed, her daughter and ex-husband say.

Shelly Stevenson, the second-oldest child, testified at her father's trial that living in her family was "like being locked away in a terrible prison somewhere." But she and her older sister, Sheila, have far different ideas about who was at fault.

"He was mean to his family, always wanted respect. That's all he ever talked about, but he never did anything," Shelly testified about her father. She declined to be interviewed for this story.

Her sister Sheila Lott, who is now a graphics technician at a sign company in Abilene, says her parents "really fought, but things were always my mother's way. If we're gonna go somewhere, it was where she wanted to go. In her house, she reigns. My mom is the kind of person who, if you disagree with her, she is angry, she doesn't love you."

Sheila recalls that when she was about 11 years old, her mother took her into her bedroom and told her she was going to kill her. "She said I had to decide what method she would use to kill me, and if I didn't, she would decide on the method, and it would be the most painful she could imagine...In the morning she didn't say anything more about it."

In her sworn affidavit, Sheila states: "When I was about 13 years old, my mother developed multiple sclerosis. She was so disabled, she had to use a wheelchair for approximately three or four years." A few years later, though, "My mother did not have multiple sclerosis anymore, but she had developed multiple-personality disorder."

The daughter adds, "She'd say she was this little girl, and I'd think, whatever. If it was big on TV or in the news, that's what she had. It was all in her mind."

Shirley Stevenson and her daughter Sally, who still live together, declined to be interviewed for this story.

Edward says he believes the multiple-personality disorder was real. "Sam and I would try to count how many personalities she had," he says. But he says his wife was unstable just some of the time. Some days she would go off to her job as a grocery checker and be just fine.

"We didn't always live in a somber house," Edward recalls. "We talked, we studied, we played together

outside and went on our Watchtower walks together. We grew a garden outside and planted and hoed and stuff, Shirley and all of us."

More often, though, there were deep, drawn-out arguments and fighting "over money, or little things, over everything," recalls Sheila Lott. "There wasn't a lot of love in that house." The combat was mostly verbal, with the kids drilled by their mother to take her side, she says. At worst, her father would swing a fist and deliberately miss. Once, she recalls, her mother threw a glass of tea at her father. He split her lip.

As for attitudes toward sex--something that would be quite telling given events to come--Sheila says the household was as conservative as its faith. "When my mother told me about the birds and the bees, I came away with the impression that when a baby is conceived, a man and woman lie in bed fully clothed and God makes something go from him to her...She very much made us feel sex was dirty."

Even a suggestion of raciness in a TV program would bar it from the family set, Sheila and her father agree.

In 1988, the family had moved to a little brick bungalow in a blue-collar section of Arlington, and Sheila left home, mad at both of her parents. The second oldest, Shelly, was also about to go out on her own.

The marriage was just about over too.

In June 1992, the Stevensons separated, and Edward moved out. Less than two years later, in February 1994, they finalized a contested divorce in which the only outstanding issue was custody of Sam, who was 16 at the time.

At the divorce hearing, Stevenson remembers, his son testified that he would rather kill himself than be made to have visitation rights with his father. Stevenson says his son's words showed the depth of hatred for him that his wife had helped instill. Sam got his wish to stay in the custody of his mom.

More critical, though, is the fact that at the hearing in 1994, two years after Stevenson had moved away, nobody in the family said a word about the behavior for which he is now behind bars. Not his son, his daughter, or his wife. In a proceeding in which his character and actions would have been a central issue, nobody accused him of such things.

Two and a half years later, however, on November 11, 1996, Shirley, Sally, and Sam Stevenson showed up at the Arlington police station telling extremely disturbing tales. Back in 1992, they claimed, when Stevenson was still living with them, he was a sexual monster--groping his daughter and masturbating in front of her. As it came out in court, presented by a veteran prosecutor who says she can discern when someone is telling the truth, their stories required a few leaps of faith to be believed.

Stevenson says the catalyst for the charges was yet another fight, this time over the two months or so he was behind in his \$200-a-month child support, an obligation that was soon to run out as his son became an adult. "She told me I'd better get the money," he says, "or she would make me pay."

Looking "bedraggled, sort of whipped," in the words of the detective who took the case, Shirley Stevenson arrived at the Arlington police station that November morning with two of her children: Sally, who was then 21 and living at home, and Sam, who was about to turn 18.

The mother had driven them. Neither owned a car or had learned to drive.

In an interview room, Sally told detective James Warman of the sex-crimes squad that Edward Stevenson deliberately masturbated in front of her on at least 10 occasions in early 1992. He would be on his bed, more or less ordering her to watch from the doorway of his room, she said.

"Since he was my father and I was just a kid, I had to obey him," she later told the jury--which may or may not have processed that she was a "kid" of 16 at the time.

Her mother said she, too, witnessed this ugly ritual, but didn't think to report it to police until now. "I did not know it was against the law," Shirley Stevenson told jurors at her husband's trial. "I knew it was against God's law of everything good, but I didn't know police would do anything about it." The son also said he witnessed his sister at his father's door.

The three accused Stevenson of groping Sally's breasts through her clothing while he play-wrestled with her, again, behavior that supposedly began when she was 16.

But there was more to tell, a lot more.

According to Warman, three weeks after Sally accused her father of exposing himself and groping her, she said she remembered something else that happened that spring of 1992. It was something she left out the first time she talked to police: Her father had raped her.

"I did not remember it when I made the first statement," she testified later. "I had made drawings to help me remember, because I knew that what I had remembered him doing had not been all, and so my

mother and my brother were talking about the pictures I had just drawn, and I was thinking about them, and suddenly I remembered what he had done."

Her mother also testified about how these memories were suddenly "recovered."

"I had seen different programs on television where children had been in traumatic situations of one kind or another...but wouldn't be able to talk about it...So what they would do, they would have these children draw pictures of their feelings or what they would remember, so I asked [Sally] to draw a picture of Ed. It was just kind of a stick figure, but I kept gently persisting, and over the course of a few days, I asked her to draw a picture of what happened in the bedroom."

Pretty soon Sally was drawing figures that represented the bed and the door and her father. Shirley testified how she suggested to her daughter that the drawing showed Sally in her father's bed. "And she said, yes, they were both on the bed. She closed her eyes and nodded, and when she opened them, she just looked so--like guilty and disgusted and every emotion you can imagine. And I just told her, I said, 'It's OK.'"

Thus, Sally came to remember, as a 21-year-old woman, that her father had raped her four and a half years earlier.

"...He forced himself on me both anally and the normal way that a man would do that sort of thing with a woman," Sally told the jury.

She also testified that "bits of memory" had returned to her about how her father would molest her and her older sister Shelly when she was "5 or 6."

"There is a memory that I have of my father taking me and my sister Shelly to the library, where he would meet another man, and that other man would take Shelly away, and then my father would take me to the hotel...He would then rape me."

Sally's sister Shelly testified--after Stevenson had already been convicted in the first phase of the trial--that these events simply did not happen. Her father never did anything sexual, never had any kind of sexual contact with any of the children, she said during the trial's sentencing phase.

According to Sheila Lott, Shelly has told her the same thing in private. Sheila, who did not testify at the trial, said later in her affidavit, "I never heard anybody accuse my dad of any type of sexual misconduct. He certainly did not masturbate in front of the children. If he had, my mother would have called the police in a heartbeat."

What did Callaghan think of the apparent hole in the case caused by Shelly's testimony?

The fact that Shelly said the library-hotel episode didn't happen had no bearing on how she assessed the case or the truthfulness of what was being alleged, she says.

"The question is whether what [Sally] said was true. It's not about this other stuff," says Callaghan, suggesting that perhaps Shelly was molested but simply doesn't want to talk about it.

Asked whether she pressed Shelly on this important matter of corroboration, Callaghan replied, "If that is something she prefers not to discuss, I am not going to make it emotionally difficult for her more than I have to...A lot of kids suppress stuff they don't want to talk about. She wasn't going to talk about it. I didn't ask her about it, didn't talk about it."

But Shelly, who was in her mid-20s when she took the stand, did talk about it. She said under oath that it didn't happen.

Another very graphic bit of evidence that seemed not to support stories of forceful rapes was the testimony of Cheryl Gharis, an emergency-room nurse who did a rape exam on Sally. She testified that the young woman's hymen was still intact.

Again, Callaghan says this was not a problem in the case. "It doesn't mean anything one way or another," says Callaghan. "In most instances, sexual abusers don't actually perform full intercourse. What they usually do is rub their genitals."

But that, the trial record shows, is not what Sally said on the witness stand. She said in frank detail that "he put his penis in my vagina" during the alleged 1992 assault.

Stevenson, working in his own defense, did nothing to underscore these kinds of troubling inconsistencies. For the most part, he offered his claim that his ex-wife put the children up to smearing him but did not subpoena any witnesses or ask the precise questions needed to bolster his defense. He returned several times to the weakly supportive fact that police found no pornography at his Addison apartment, where he had moved after the divorce, and that he kept none at the family home.

But Callaghan did have one thing, one piece of hard evidence, that she says showed the defendant to have a sick, sexual mind. It was a letter he had written to his daughter shortly after the 1992 divorce. It

read: "Dear Sally, you sure looked smashing in the suit at court the other day. Pink sure looks good on you. It sure made me wonder if any young brothers were noticing as well. Well? How 'bout the flowers. I bought some tulips at the grocery store the other day and they sure are pretty. They have almost burgundy petals, soft and feathery. I sure thought of you and wondered if you had practiced your 'green thumb' any since I've been gone. Well, be good. I know you are anyway, and call or write, especially if I can be of help. Bye now. Love, Dad."

In her closing argument to the jury, Callaghan said the letter was filled with "sexualized content," particularly its "obsessive discussion of botany" and "observations concerning her appearance."

Stevenson says the letter was nothing more than an icebreaker following the divorce. What could be wrong about inquiring whether his then-19-year-old daughter had caught the eye of any boys at church? And gardening was an interest he and his daughter shared, something he could bring up in strained times.

Says Casey, the defense attorney, "They're true believers down there at the DA's office. If you ask me, anyone who saw sex in that letter is the one I'd say had a sick mind."

Throughout Stevenson's trial, Casey says, contradictory evidence was shoved aside with explanations of what "usually happens" in sex-abuse cases, such as memories being repressed or outcries delayed. And the hard evidence, the letter, was no evidence at all.

As his own attorney, though, Stevenson made none of those points, poked none of those holes. "When he cross-examined his family, it sounded like a bunch of people arguing about stuff around the kitchen table," says Casey, whose best-known court victory, the winning of a probated sentence for an accomplice in a race-hate murder case, prompted 10,000 people to march through downtown Fort Worth in 1992.

Rather than go to the heart of the matter, Stevenson brought up tangential family spats, such as the time in 1990 when his wife snatched Sheila's 2-year-old child because she wanted to raise the toddler herself. The police were called, but she gave the child back, and no charges were filed.

Worse, he didn't know enough to object when the state was going out of bounds.

In response to one of Callaghan's questions, Warman, the detective, said he thought Sally was telling the truth about the sexual abuse. Under the law, experts aren't allowed to testify what they think about witnesses' truthfulness. "Police aren't human lie detectors," Casey says. That is something the law gives to the jury to decide. "Stevenson didn't know that," Casey adds. "Hell, he testified he thought those prosecutors had been real fair to him."

Stevenson was sentenced to 18 years for touching his daughter's breasts through her clothing and 10 years for indecent exposure, terms that visiting Judge Calvin Ashley set to run at the same time. Callaghan presented the evidence about the alleged rapes, but she dropped the charge at trial. Still, she argued to the jury that the rape evidence helped prove the other two charges.

Casey calls the tactic "poisoning the well," and Stevenson did nothing to blunt its effects. The defense attorney suspects it explains the lengthy sentences for the charges that did go to the jury.

Given what jurors remember about the case, he might be right.

"I thought we should give him more time," recalls Douglas Free, a 38-year-old information tech worker from Grapevine. "It was pretty clear to me he raped that girl."

He says he and others on the panel thought a 20-year sentence, the most they could give for a second-degree felony, was too low. Then again, with several close relatives in police work, Free says he was surprised he was chosen for the jury at all. "I'm the kind of person who thinks the legal system does too much to protect the guilty," he says. "I'm not a guy a defense lawyer would pick."

In this case, though, the prosecutor did all the picking.

As Stevenson sat back during jury selection and didn't say a word, Callaghan quizzed prospective jurors about their attitudes on a number of sensitive issues in the case. "Anyone think that, frankly, repressed memory or memories that come back a long time later is just too weird? That you couldn't accept that as a possibility? Do you think that you could listen to evidence concerning repressed memory and decide whether you think it happened?"

When several on the panel answered "Yes" to the last question, Callaghan affirmed their views to the rest. "In other words, people can do that because, OK, that happened, but I still have to live in this world and I still have to go on despite it." She also asked whether prospective jurors had problems with delayed outcries from victims or whether they could convict someone with no physical evidence, as was the issue here.

Ima Jean Ely, the defendant's mother, was in the courtroom from the start of her son's trial. She

remembers thinking when he told Callaghan she could pick the jury, "It's all over for him. How could he be so ignorant?"

Says Casey, "As lawyers, we go to all these seminars, spend years listening to people teach you how to pick juries, how to make that first impression talking with them. And here Stevenson doesn't even make an attempt. That's how it all started."

Several Fort Worth defense lawyers who weren't involved in the case say self-representation, which never is a wise idea, is particularly foolhardy when the charges involve incest or domestic sexual abuse. "They try these cases with no physical evidence all the time, and they're dad-gum difficult to defend," says Bill Magnuson. "The attitude is, if a child makes an outcry, they tend to believe it. Even a good lawyer has a difficult time."

It is on this issue--how Stevenson came to represent himself--that Casey is hanging his attempt to gain Stevenson a new trial. He says the implausible facts of the case, and new evidence such as Sheila's affidavit, show that the issue of representation was critical to Stevenson's getting a fair trial.

Legally, though, it isn't enough to say Stevenson did a terrible job playing his own lawyer. Casey argues that Tarrant County's system of appointing lawyers to people who can't afford one worked to coerce Stevenson into representing himself.

From the first time detective Warman came to question him in November 1996, Stevenson maintained his innocence, insisting that the charges were organized by his spiteful ex-wife.

After his arrest in December 1996, he was released on \$5,000 bail and paid Fort Worth defense attorney Brian Willett \$2,500 to represent him. According to a sworn statement from Stevenson, Willett later told him that the \$2,500 only covered fees for an uncontested case--in other words, it paid only for entering a guilty or no-contest plea. It would take another \$7,500 to defend him in a trial.

Stevenson says he told his lawyer that he couldn't afford the fee--by the time of the trial he was working as a pizza-delivery man--and that under no circumstances would he accept a plea-bargain.

This is the juncture, Casey claims, where Stevenson was forced to make an unfair and unconstitutional choice.

On his bail bond, Stevenson was informed in bold type that he was required to appear in court with a lawyer, and that if he did not, he could be found "to have violated a condition of bond and may be arrested and placed in jail and his bond forfeited."

Stevenson didn't want to accept a guilty plea, and he didn't want to go to jail. "I already waived my right to a speedy trial, so I thought I'd sit in jail for a year or two. Then maybe they'd offer me a plea," he says. "I wasn't ever going to plead guilty to doing these filthy, disgusting things."

So Stevenson wrote the court a note saying, "I will under no circumstances accept a plea...I move this court to remove [his lawyer] and proceed to trial pro se...representing myself."

Also guiding Stevenson's thoughts, Casey says, is the common practice in Tarrant County of offering court-appointed lawyers only to defendants who are too poor to make bail. To support that, he collected affidavits from seven Fort Worth defense attorneys who said it is the long-standing practice of the county's judges to advise defendants that a lawyer will not be appointed to represent them if they are out on bail.

That is fairly common across the state, according to a State Bar of Texas study released in September. The report, written by Fort Worth attorney Allan Butcher, found that most Texas counties have no criteria for determining whether defendants are indigent. Two-thirds of defense lawyers surveyed across the state said that whether a person is able to post bail is the standard typically used in the courts to determine a person's eligibility for court-appointed counsel.

This leaves people such as Stevenson--who had enough money to make bail but not enough to afford an attorney who would take the case to trial--in a bind, Casey contends. It forced him to choose between two rights: the right to bail and the right to legal counsel. The bond-requirement warning pushed him into defending himself.

Prosecutor Callaghan calls Casey's argument "bunk." Stevenson made it clear that even if he could afford a lawyer, he wanted to represent himself. He said on the record that he had a better chance of acquittal on his own. "He is very arrogant. He made it clear he was smarter than all of us, and he was going to get out of it for that reason," the prosecutor says.

Her office's legal response to Casey's challenge contends that the court never threatened Stevenson with jail if he requested a court-appointed attorney.

But Casey argues in response: "No court, no lawyer ever advised [Stevenson] that his bail would not be forfeited and that he would not be placed back in jail if he requested that the court appoint him an

attorney."

Fort Worth defense attorney Tim Moore says Casey's argument is interesting, but he doesn't give it much of a chance. "With our appeals courts, he's probably out of luck," says Moore, pointing to the pro-prosecution bent of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals in recent years. "If they won't let guys out when their DNA shows they weren't at the scene, you have to wonder in a case like this."

Ima Jean Ely says Casey has admitted to her that a new trial is a long shot, but she's willing to pay for him to take it through the state appeals process. And Casey seems willing to take it beyond that--to the federal courts--if need be.

"He needs a full, fair hearing," Casey says. "He's already had a lawyer who has said, 'Pay me or I'm out of here.'"

Like many prisoners, Stevenson spends a little time with the law books these days--to pass the hours, maybe to see if the fat, brown volumes hold any secrets to his case. He sent a letter from Cuero while this story was being researched that included references to Tiberius Caesar, the U.S. Constitution, and Texas judges' oath of office.

If he was arrogant about his courtroom abilities at his 1998 trial, he isn't anymore. "This crime didn't happen. I needed a lawyer to tell the jury that," he says. "I was way out of my league."

The Times (U.K.) Newspaper - August 15th 2000:

Exile saves child sex offender from jail

BY SHIRLEY ENGLISH

A SHERIFF decided not to jail a convicted paedophile yesterday because he had "voluntarily exiled" himself to a remote Hebridean island. Thomas Maxwell, 60, a Jehovah's Witness for 30 years, could have been imprisoned for six months after admitting two counts of shameless indecency with a 12-year-old girl he met through his church while he was living in Sauchie, near Alloa, between 1994 and 1996.

Instead Maxwell, now living on the island of Harris, was given three years' probation and 240 hours' community service by Sheriff William Reid at Alloa Sheriff Court. He was also placed on the sex offenders register. Angry islanders claimed that Maxwell was now living close to a school and that his nextdoor neighbours had two young girls.

Morag Munro, an Independent councillor on Harris, said: "This is not some remote castaway island. The sheriff must be pretty ignorant if he thinks this is some kind of uninhabited island."

BBC News - August 14th 2000:

Paedophile escapes jail

Maxwell's name was added the sex offenders' list

A sheriff's decision not to jail a 60-year-old paedophile has provoked a public outcry on the island of Harris where the man is now living.

Monday, 14 August, 2000, 18:08 GMT 19:08 UK

Thomas Maxwell, a Jehovah's Witness for more than 30 years, was sentenced to three years probation and 240 hours community service for sex offences against a 12-year-old.

His name will also be added to the sex offenders' register.

At Alloa Sheriff Court, Sheriff William Reid said his decision not to impose a prison sentence had been influenced by Maxwell's voluntary exile to a remote part of the Western Isles.

But the residents of Leverburgh in Harris where Maxwell is now living are outraged.

'Thoroughly nasty'

Community council secretary John Mitchell said people would be horrified and that children on the island needed protection from Maxwell.

But Sheriff Reid, who described the offences against the girl as "thoroughly nasty", said: "If I were to send you to prison the maximum period you could spend there would be three months, and then you would be released back into the community without any supervision whatsoever."

"I doubt whether such a short period of imprisonment would benefit you or society as a whole."

"It is better for the community that you be kept under prolonged supervision."

"I also take into account that you have voluntarily exiled yourself to some remote part of the Western Isles."

'Animal'

Maxwell was living in Woodlea Park, Sauchie, near Alloa, at the time of the offences.

He was found guilty at Alloa Sheriff Court in June on two counts of behaving with shameless indecency.

His victim, now 17, broke down in loud sobs as the sentence was read out. She shouted "animal" as Maxwell was led quickly from the dock.

As he left the building, members of the Alloa congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses shouted "pervert".

Robert Millan, a church elder, said Maxwell would be summoned before the church's judicial committee and could be dismissed from the movement.

The girl's father said: "This man betrayed our trust and ruined our family life."

'Huge personal loss'

"He should be disfellowshipped and no longer regarded as a brother in the Christian congregation until such time as he shows true repentance, and I don't think he's very likely to do that."

Defence lawyer, April Campbell, said Maxwell had suffered "huge personal loss" as a result of the case.

She said: "His life has been irrevocably shattered. His marriage has broken down, he has been rejected by his family, and he has been rejected by the congregation of the church of which he was a member for 30 or so years."

"He has suffered severe psychological difficulties and depression and it is inconceivable that he should find himself in a position to re-offend."

Miss Campbell added: "He feels a great and terrible shame and recognises the possibility of psychological harm to his victim."

Illawarra Mercury News - August 5th 2000:

Judge blasts church over sex offences

A Wollongong judge yesterday launched a scathing attack on the Jehovah's Witness congregation at Balgownie, accusing elders of failing to report child sex abuse.

Illawarra Mercury/ August 5, 2000

By Michelle Tydd

Judge John Goldring in Wollongong District Court said he was surprised police had not taken action against the congregation.

"And I wished they had," the angry judge said.

The attack came as he sentenced Robert Leslie Souter to five years' jail for sexual assaults on two teenage boys 20 years ago.

Judge Goldring said congregation elders were told of the sexual assaults by Souter in 1990 and he was "disfellowshipped" or excommunicated five years later without any further action.

"The moral punishment imposed by a church is not punishment demanded by law," Judge Goldring said.

"I cannot criticise the church sufficiently enough ... it's well known in these courts that churches are criticised for failing to report criminal activity."

"The church may have spiritual responsibility but it does not exceed the authority of the state," Judge Goldring said.

The congregation that met in Balgownie was known as the Corrimal congregation. It has since moved

to Fairy Meadow.

Souter, 46, pleaded guilty to one count of buggery and four counts of indecent assault.

The court was told the offences took place when Souter and the two victims were members of the congregation at Balgownie. From 1978 to 1980 Souter committed at least five offences, four of which were committed on one victim.

The court heard Souter became known to the boys' families and earned their trust.

Souter committed the sex acts during outings to the beach and to the Blue Mountains.

Solicitor for the Crown Ines Chiumento said it had been a major violation of trust.

Souter's barrister Terry McGill, who defended the congregation saying it took great pains to care for its flock, told the court his client had suffered remorse since the offences.

He said Souter's marriage had broken up and he now lived in another state.

Judge Goldring said he reduced the jail sentence taking into account Souter had been a sex abuse victim. He imposed a non-parole period of three years.

Presiding elder in the Corrimal congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, Roger Graham, said he could not comment about practices 20 years ago.

However, he said the approach the congregation took today was to speak to victims and offer them support and encouragement to come forward.

"If they choose to take legal action, we give them all the support they need," Mr Graham said.

"It is not up to the church to take that action without victim approval because it is they who have to face the interrogation and stress of the matter."

Associated Press (AP) News - October 21st 1999:

Man loses bid to sue Jehovah's Witnesses over sexual abuse

The Associated Press

10.21.99

PORTLAND, Maine A Portland man who sued the Jehovah's Witnesses over sexual abuse he suffered from a church member when he was a teen has lost his appeal to have the case reinstated.

Bryan Rees, 24, obtained a judgment against Larry Baker, who pleaded guilty to sexually abusing Rees, but he also sought to sue three elders of the Augusta church as well as the denomination's legal corporation.

In a unanimous ruling, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court on Oct. 18 upheld a lower court's dismissal of the claims against the church leaders and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc.

Rees' lawyer says the decision effectively gives rights to churches that are not afforded individuals or corporations.

"If we molest someone, we're liable. If they molest somebody, they can hold up the First Amendment shield and be granted immunity," said Michael J. Waxman, who vowed to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Bruce Maloney, a Bangor lawyer for the Watchtower Society, says that the way in which the Watchtower Society chooses leaders and disciplines church members is part of its constitutionally protected freedom of religion.

He says the decision permits members to make religious decisions without worrying about being second-guessed by a secular court.

In his lawsuit, Rees contended leaders in the Augusta church he attended as a teen-ager knew that Baker had molested a child in the past but did not warn church members or expel Baker.

Rees was molested by Baker from 1989 to 1992 while he was a teen-ager living next door to Baker in the Lincoln County town of Jefferson.

Baker, who served six months in prison for unlawful sexual contact with a minor and sexual abuse of a minor, said in a deposition that he engaged in sexual acts about 30 times with Rees, Waxman said.

Rees ultimately required psychiatric hospitalization following the acts that started when he was 14 years old, Waxman said. Rees won a \$1.2 million judgment against Baker but did not collect damages, the lawyer said.

Rees' lawsuit accused the defendants of breaching a fiduciary duty owed to him as a member of the congregation and of infliction of emotional distress. He also sued his stepfather, one of the church elders, for negligence.

According to the high court ruling, the elders of the church demoted Baker, rebuked him in private and temporarily forbade him from having contact with minors after becoming aware of the first case episode.

However, the elders did not make the congregation aware of the episode and they later allowed him to resume activities as an ordinary member of the church.

In dismissing claims for emotional distress, Justice Leigh Saufley wrote that to hold the church responsible would require delving into matters of redemption and forgiveness, "an inquiry that would require secular investigation of matters that are almost entirely ecclesiastical in nature."

"State courts may not interfere in matters concerning religious doctrine or organization," Saufley wrote.

Waxman says the state's position regarding churches is among the most conservative in the country. He also says that common sense dictates the church should have done something to protect children from Baker.

"The church's dogma would not have precluded reasonable and appropriate action in this case," Waxman said.

Malonee said his clients were sorry that Rees was victimized but that they felt the court made the right decision.

As for Rees, he says he has straightened out his life after going through a difficult period following the sexual abuse. He now has a daughter and a job as a security officer.

He said he believed the justices let him down in their ruling and added that he is disenchanted with organized religion.

"I agree with Governor Ventura that religion is a sham for weak-minded people," he said, referring to recent comments the Reform Party governor from Minnesota made in an interview with Playboy.

Quote from August 9th 1999 Issue of Newsweek Magazine, Pages 27, 28 about Mark Barton:

"In his suicide note last week, Barton denied that he had killed his first wife and her mother. He went on to say, "I have come to hate this life in this system of things." His marriage was in trouble by fall of last year. In October Leigh Ann moved out and rented an apartment in a neighboring town. Barton's cyberspace "profile" as an America Online subscriber was, in retrospect, slightly ominous. In his first entry, about a year ago, he wrote, "Enjoy day to day stock trading" as a hobby. His personal quote was "A dollar earned is a dollar saved." But in early 1999, he no longer listed himself as married, and his hobbies now included "Guns, Day Trading." His personal quote was from the Clint Eastwood shoot-'em-up "Dirty Harry": "Make my day."

Searching for help, Barton went to the Jehovah's Witnesses for instruction. His wife had left him over money, he told his minister, but he couldn't stop gambling on stocks. "It was a fever that he had," the minister, who did not wish to have his name used, told NEWSWEEK. Barton said he was waking up in the middle of the night, and feared that he had inherited some kind of undefined mental imbalance from his father. From the Bible, he began reciting from Revelation 21:4 ("and there shall be no death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be anymore pain")."

"This Is Lancashire" News - March 19th 1999:

Jail for Jehovah's Witness

A MORECAMBE man has admitted indecently assaulting a young boy who was a member of his church.

Godfrey Bagnall, 57, of Arnside Crescent, Morecambe, was an elder and pioneer for the Jehovah's Witnesses. He admitted three charges of indecent assault on a boy starting at the age of eight. The court heard how the boy, now and adult, had turned to drugs "as a direct result of the abuse he sustained."

Bagnall was "de-fellowshipped" from the religion after the boy complained but was later re-instated. Mr Stuart Denny, defending, said Bagnall and the boy had a good relationship which Bagnall had taken too far. The Judge, Mr Justice Newman, said: "He deserved better of you."

Bagnall was sentenced to nine months imprisonment for three counts of indecent assault and was placed on the sex offenders register for 10 years.

Portland.com News - May 1998

Religious group invokes rights in abuse case

By Steven G. Vegh Staff Writer Copyright

The Jehovah's Witnesses are invoking their constitutional right to religious freedom as a defense in a lawsuit that blames the church for sexual abuse by a member.

The lawsuit, filed by Bryan Rees in Cumberland County Superior Court, seeks unspecified damages for abuse that Rees says he endured between 1989 and 1992. It names Larry Baker as the man who abused him.

The lawsuit also names the denomination, known formally as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc.; Alan Ayers, Rees's stepfather and a church leader; and Patrick LaBreck and Robert Wells, who Rees says were leaders in his congregation.

Rees claims that leaders in the Augusta church he attended as a teen-ager knew that Baker had molested a child in the past but did not warn church members or expel Baker. That failure left Rees vulnerable to abuse, the lawsuit says. Rees is now 23 and lives in Portland.

The First Amendment to the Constitution provides several protections, one of which prevents Congress from prohibiting the free practice of religion.

The way in which the Watchtower Society chooses leaders and disciplines church members is part of its practice of religion, says Bruce Mallonee, the attorney representing Wells, LaBreck and the Society.

"If they can be required to go to trial and defend their actions . . . they'll have to base their decisions not on what their prayers and Bible tell them, but on what they think a jury would require of them," Mallonee said.

Mallonee has asked the court to dismiss the case. A ruling on that request is expected this summer.

Rees's attorney says that churches and church leaders should be held accountable for leaders' mistakes.

"It's disgusting to think their interest in governing their own people somehow surpasses the state's and our own interest in making sure (abuse) doesn't happen," Michael J. Waxman said.

According to the lawsuit, Baker was Rees's next-door neighbor in the Lincoln County town of Jefferson and a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation to which Rees's family belonged.

The lawsuit says that Ayers, Wells and LaBreck were elders in the congregation who served on a church panel that disciplined Baker before 1989 for molesting a boy. The panel forbade Baker from having contact with children in the church and demoted him from his position as an elder.

The lawsuit says the congregation was never told about Baker's acts, leaving Rees vulnerable to abuse.

According to Rees, Baker started abusing him in 1989 and continued until 1992. The lawsuit says that during that time, Baker regained his leadership post as an elder.

Rees later told a counselor about the abuse, and the case was reported to police. Baker was convicted in 1993 of unlawful sexual contact and sexual abuse of a minor.

Court papers filed by attorney M. Michaela Murphy on behalf of Baker deny the bulk of Rees's allegations. Murphy had no comment when contacted Monday.

According to Waxman, the Jehovah's Witnesses dodged their responsibility to protect children when the elders kept their discipline against Baker confidential.

But Mallonee says that if the case goes to trial, "(that) puts the court in the position of telling the religious organization how to run its affairs."

Attorneys disagree on whether churches can cite the First Amendment in a case like this one.

"To say this (case) should be dismissed . . . because they're a church and immune from civil liability because of the First Amendment seems a creative argument," said Cabanne Howard, who teaches at the University of Maine School of Law.

But David Gregory, who also is on the law school's faculty, said the case probably falls under the principal of avoiding interference with religious beliefs by not treating churches under ordinary liability laws.

A Jehovah's Witness Lawyer from the Watchtower's Patterson, NY branch writes a rebuttal:

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Published on Saturday, May 23, 1998 Page: 8A 1998 Guy Gannett Communications

Church has no control over its members

It is not my practice to litigate a matter outside of the courtroom, but as an attorney involved in representing the interests of Jehovah's Witnesses, I must respond to the false allegations that sexual abuse was perpetrated by an elder, contained in Mr. Vegh's article of May 12.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe they have a responsibility before God to protect the children in the congregation.

The Watchtower Society has stated its official position in the Jan. 1, 1997, "Watchtower." "For the protection of our children, a man known to have been a child molester does not qualify for a responsible position in the congregation."

The perpetrator at no time held a leadership position in the church - not before the wrongdoing, not at the time of the wrongdoing, not after the wrongdoing. The May 12 article is wrong when it says he "regained his leadership post as an elder." He was a next-door neighbor of the plaintiff and a fellow parishioner.

The plaintiff is seeking to hold the church responsible for activities that took place in a private setting, between neighbors.

Clearly, the personal activities of church members are outside of the control of the church.

The plaintiff's counsel seeks to strip a church of the sanctity and complete confidentiality of the confession and impose upon it liability for the wrongdoing of its members.

When all the facts have been developed, in a court of law rather than the court of public opinion, it will be clear that the Watchtower Society and church elders did all that was possible to safeguard the plaintiff.

Paul D. Polidoro
Patterson, N.Y.

Associated Press (AP) News - May 13th 1998:

Maine man sues Jehovah's Witnesses over alleged sexual abuse

The Associated Press

05.13.98

PORTLAND, Maine -- A Portland man is suing the Jehovah's Witnesses because he was allegedly sexually abused by a church member in Augusta and the denomination did nothing to protect him.

Bryan Rees, 23, seeks unspecified damages for abuse that Rees says he endured between 1989 and

1992.

Rees claims that leaders in the Augusta church he attended as a teen-ager knew that Larry Baker had molested a child in the past but did not warn church members or expel Baker.

Besides Baker, the lawsuit names one of the denomination's legal corporations, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc., along with Alan Ayers, Rees' stepfather, and Patrick LaBreck and Robert Wells, who were leaders in his congregation.

Part of the Jehovah Witnesses' defense is based on its constitutional right to religious freedom.

The way in which the Watchtower Society chooses leaders and disciplines church members is part of its practice of religion, says Bruce Mallonee, the attorney representing Wells, LaBreck and the Society.

If the case goes to trial, that "puts the court in the position of telling the religious organization how to run its affairs," Mallonee said.

Mallonee has asked the Cumberland County Superior Court to dismiss the case. A ruling on that request is expected this summer.

Rees' attorney says that churches and church leaders should be held accountable for leaders' mistakes.

"It's disgusting to think their interest in governing their own people somehow surpasses the state's and our own interest in making sure (abuse) doesn't happen," Michael J. Waxman said.

According to the lawsuit, Baker was Rees' next-door neighbor in the Lincoln County town of Jefferson and a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation to which Rees' family belonged.

Court papers filed by attorney M. Michaela Murphy on behalf of Baker deny the bulk of Rees' allegations.

Baker could not be reached for comment. There was no telephone listing for him in the town of Jefferson.

Associated Press (AP) News - March 16th 1998:

Former church elder convicted of lewdness with minor

YERINGTON, Nev. (AP) - A former Jehovah's Witnesses church elder was convicted of lewdness with a minor for a 1992 incident with an 8-year-old girl at his home.

March 16, 1998

A Lyon District Court jury returned the verdict Thursday against Daniel Steven Fitzwater, who faces up to 20 years in prison when he returns to court for sentencing April 20.

During the trial, Chief Deputy District Attorney John Schlegelmilch said Fitzwater used his position as a church elder to gain the trust of the victim's family before the incident.

The girl, now 13, was left in the care of Fitzwater's wife when her parents went on a deer hunting trip, and the sexual molestation occurred when Mrs. Fitzwater made a trip to town, the prosecutor said.

"He was supposed to be looking over the flock," but he committed a "crime against nature and Jehovah," Schlegelmilch said.

The girl went on to develop behavioral problems, experience nightmares and attempt suicide at the age of 10, he added.

But court-appointed defense attorney Jeffrey Morrison questioned the girl's credibility, saying she has accused others of the same crime.

"It will be your task to determine what is fact and what is fantasy in the mind of a troubled young girl," he told jurors.

Fitzwater took the stand during the trial to deny the charges, but two women supported the prosecution's case by testifying he inappropriately touched them when they were young.

One was his stepdaughter.

Fitzwater lived in Weed Heights, a mining community near Yerington, when the crime occurred. He has since moved out of Lyon County.

Yerington is 80 miles southwest of Reno.

Associated Press (AP) News - February 25th 1998:

Lawsuit accuses church organization of not reporting sexual abuse

HOUSTON (AP) -- A Houston teen-ager has filed a lawsuit accusing the national Jehovah's Witness organization of failing to tell authorities that her brother was sexually abusing her.

Wednesday, February 25, 1998

Now 19, the woman says her brother, three years older than she, began sexually abusing her in the mid-1980s. In 1988, she says, her family sought counseling by church elder Kerry W. "John" Landers and told him of the assaults.

"Despite this knowledge and/or suspicion, Landers was instructed by the national Jehovah's Witness organization to handle the matter in-house rather than report such sexual abuse to the authorities, as required by Texas law," according to the lawsuit, filed by attorney John T. McDowell:

The brother was counseled to stop the inappropriate activity, but the church was advised that he was continuing to molest his sister.

The local Jehovah's Witnesses leadership in 1992 appointed Landers and two other elders "to 'investigate' the matter as a 'judicial proceeding,'" McDowell said in the suit.

During that action, the brother confessed, "apologized, said he wouldn't do it anymore, and the elders put the matter to rest without reporting the matter to the Texas authorities," the lawsuit says.

The brother was eventually convicted of sex abuse and sentenced to prison. Authorities were tipped off to the abuse when the sister was being treated for depression and told a hospital worker of the abuse.

During the trial, the church counselor testified under a grant of immunity that the church had said it wanted the matter kept "in-house."

That attitude of secrecy was changed after the criminal case, McDowell said.

Church attorney Jeffrey Parsons of Houston says the church strongly believes it did nothing wrong.

"We are sorry to see this come to litigation, but that is her right," Parsons said. He said further comment would be inappropriate.

Defendants include Landers and the national nonprofit groups that head the national church -- the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, and Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc.

The suit seeks unspecified damages for "severe emotional and bodily injuries," compensation for medical and psychiatric treatment, and gross negligence.

Verdens Gang Newspaper - September 16th 1996:

Didn't Repent Enough

Jehovah's Witness committed new sex abuse crimes.

The Jehovah's Witness who through 23 years sexually abused an unknown number of children, continued his sexual crimes after in vain having asked to be punished.

By **FREDDY KONGSBERG**, The Newspaper *Verdens Gang*, Sept 16th, 1996

Three years after he came forth as a very repentant sinner, he committed at least four new acts of sexual abuse.

My acts and my desires are violations of the word of the Bible. I want to make up for myself and return to the congregation, was the 61 year old man's prayer to the police and prosecution.

Not answered

His prayer was not answered, even if there was not a shadow of doubt that he had for years sexually abused an unknown number of Jehovah's Witness children.

His detailed confession was about crimes which, according to the police, were legally obsolete.

Despite having committed a series of shocking crimes against small children, he had to leave the Police Station as a free man, against his will.

What should have been his final confrontation with his dark sexual desires and pedophilia, never became a confrontation.

Reported to the Police

The man who, after the disclosure of the sexual abuse, was disfellowshipped from the religious movement, continued abusing children.

Three years after reporting himself to the police for his shocking secret, he was himself reported to the police by the parents of a nine year old boy.

When he was called for interrogation by the police, he confessed yet again to having abused small children.

This time, the sexual crimes were not obsolete. In Toten magistrate's court the man was sentenced for five instances of lewd action.

35-50 victims

There are reasonable cause to believe that the seriously religious man based on depositions from acquaintances and the man's many sex victims may have sexually abused between 35 and 50 Jehovah's-children. He received a very gentle sentence.

He did not have to be imprisoned for any of the five month sentence which was made conditional with two years period of probation.

Both the Police prosecution and the State Attorney asked for unconditional prison sentence, says Chief of Police Tore Vigen with Vestoppland Police District.

The magistrate's court were informed that the man had confessed crimes that the prosecution meant was obsolete.

The police documents from the shelved cases, partly as obsolete and partly because of insufficient evidence, were given to the court for information. These crimes were not considered for sentencing.

Were silent

Despite that many of the abuse victims of the former Jehovah's Witness informed their parents about the crimes, the man was never reported to the police for any of the sex-crimes that demonstrated to be obsolete.

Both the parents of the children and the leaders of the congregation were silent about the crimes after having done an internal trial of the sex-crimes. The man was disfellowshipped by the congregation's elders in the so-called judicial committee.

Verdens Gang Newspaper - September 16th 1996:

The Congregation Was Silent

Jehovahs Witnesses were completely silent about one of their own sexually abusing children for many years.

By **FREDDY KONGSBERG**, The Newspaper *Verdens Gang*, Sept 16th, 1996

The man was after internal exposure disfellowshipped from the sect, but never reported to the police.

If Jehovah's Witnesses had reported the case, the man would probably have been sentenced for some of the crimes which then would not have been obsolete, says Chief of Police Tore Vigen.

From what VG knows, he explained in his confession and during interrogations that the leaders of the congregation never encouraged him to go to the police.

The decision to report himself was wholly his own, because he allegedly felt very burdened by guilt, first and foremost because the Bible condemn those assaults.

He did not hide that he by demonstrating sincere repentance and make up for himself could come back to the congregation.

The man has, as VG understands, tried to keep a certain contact with the congregation, but is not an active Witness.

Jehovah's Witnesses relation to abuse caused some sensation when VG earlier could report the sect's demands to its sex victims: Witnesses needed three eye witnesses to the abuse before congregation elders wanted to process those cases. The judicial committees of the religious community judge according to Bible principles.

Verdens Gang Newspaper - September 16th 1996:

Asked to be Punished for Child-Sex

Jehovahs Witness confessed assault on children, but avoids prosecution

A repentant Jehovahs Witness confessed to the police that he for 23 years had sexually abused children in the congregation. But his request for punishment was not answered.

By Freddy Kongsberg (The Newspaper Verdens Gang, Sept 16th, 1996)

He was disfellowshipped from the controversial sect which has its own court, but the leaders of the congregation were silent about the shocking sexual abuse of the congregations children.

When he two years later on his own initiative went to the police, he asked in vain to be punished for his sexual desires and crimes:

Vestopland police district dismissed the case against the 61 year old man. The repentant sinner repented too late.

A couple of the incidents were close to the line, but most of them were legally obsolete, says Chief of Police Tore Vigen.

Several Years

In his own confession he told the police how he got release for his dark sides by sexually abusing ten children in the ages from 6 to 14 years. He named nine of the children who were victims of his sexual desires, which came with irresistible force. Some of the children he abused for several years.

There are indications that the man as an active Jehovahs Witness may have sexually abused as many as 35 to 50 children.

Among other things, the sex-victims tell in their explanations to the police that they know about several others they mean were sexually abused by the man.

Also the closest-of-kin to the man, who now no longer want anything to do with him, have in conversations with Secretary General Ola degaard in Landsforeningen Rettferd for Taperne (The Society Justice for Losers), given similar information.

We therefore have all reason to believe that a shocking number of children have been defenceless victims of a man who will not have to be called to justice, says Secretary General Ola degaard.

Regrets

Chief of Police Vigen can only regret that it was not possible to prosecute the man.

Even if the police, after what VG knows, according to their documents showed the man content of the punishment acts paragraph 195, Vigen says it was never really the idea to accuse the man after this provision.

The punishment acts paragraph 195 about "sexual relations to minors" have a time limit of wholly 15 years.

The mans sexual abuse was mostly palpation, which has a much shorter time limit, says Vigen.

Vigen means the police handled the case in a proper way. The named victims and their relatives were all questioned.

Wanted to settle

I have taken the case up many times to see if there is anything we could have done differently. My conclusion is that we could not, says Chief of Police Vigen.

Vigen confirms, however, that the decision not to prosecute despite the mans confession and the offendeds explanation, partially was justified by the stand of evidence.

But the decision not to prosecute was caused mainly by limitations.

The man explain to the police he wanted to settle this, hoping to go back to the congregation.

But his prayer for punishment was not answered.

Western Daily Press Newspaper - March 25th 1977:

"Satan's Witness"

Here is the Web Page where you find more information about this News Article:

<http://watchtower.observer.org/apps/pbcs.dll/article?Date=20020510&Category=JWANDCHILDREN2&ArtNo=205100005&Ref=AR> (<http://watchtower.observer.org/apps/pbcs.dll/article?Date=20020510&Category=JWANDCHILDREN2&ArtNo=205100005&Ref=AR>)

 Edited by - UnDisfellowshipped on 23 October 2002 4:38:39



(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped) *11 years ago*

bttt (bringing this Thread back to the top of the Active Threads List).

Also, I wanted to let everyone know that there appears to be some technical problems with this Thread, and it seems that I am the only person who can Post on it (weird huh?).

So, if anyone has been trying to post comments on this Thread, you can E-Mail them to me at danphard@yahoo.com (<mailto:danphard@yahoo.com>) if you want.



(/member/UnDisfellowshipped)

UnDisfellowshipped (/member/UnDisfellowshipped) *11 years ago*

This post has been rated for Restricted, click to view

5 (/topic/silentlambs-archive-every-news-article-ever?page=1&size=5)

10 (/topic/silentlambs-archive-every-news-article-ever?page=1&size=10)

20 (/topic/silentlambs-archive-every-news-article-ever?page=1&size=20)

- [« \(/topic/silentlambs-archive-every-news-article-ever?page=1\)](#)
- [1 \(/topic/silentlambs-archive-every-news-article-ever?page=1\)](#)
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