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Jehovah's Witnesses use 1st Amendment to hide child sex abuse claims

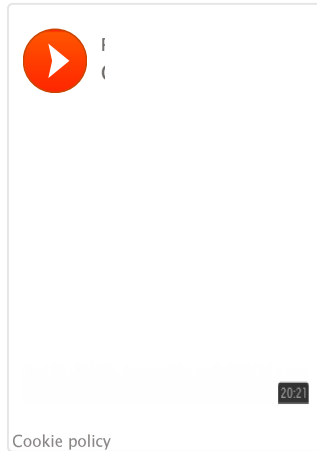


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By [Trey Bundy \(http://www.revealnews.org/author/trey-bundy/\)](http://www.revealnews.org/author/trey-bundy/) / February 14, 2015

The leadership of the Jehovah's Witnesses – one of the world's most insular religions – for 25 years has instructed its elders to keep cases of child sexual abuse secret from law enforcement and members of their own congregations, according to an examination of thousands of pages of documents in recent cases.

LISTEN TO THE REVEAL SEGMENT



The religion's parent organization, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, issued the directives in at least 10 memos dating back to 1989. Although the memos were anonymously written, Watchtower officials have testified that the organization's Governing Body approved them all.

The most recent letter

(<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1667064-watchtowernov62014.html>), dated Nov. 6, 2014, instructed elders – the spiritual leaders of local congregations – to form confidential committees to handle potential criminal matters internally.

“In some cases, the elders will form a judicial committee to handle the alleged wrongdoing that may also constitute a violation of criminal law (e.g., murder, rape, child abuse, fraud, theft, assault),” the directive stipulates. “Generally, the elders should not delay the judicial committee process, but strict confidentiality must be maintained to avoid unnecessary entanglement with secular authorities who may be conducting a criminal investigation of the matter.”

Within the organization, the Watchtower has final say over who is considered a serial child abuser. According to a 2012 Watchtower memo

(<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1659654-jehovahs-memo-2.html>): “Not every individual who has sexually abused a child in the past is considered a ‘predator.’ The (Watchtower), not the local body of elders, determines whether an individual who has sexually abused children in the past will be considered a ‘predator.’ ”

The directives are part of a pattern for the organization (<http://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses>), which has more than 8 million members worldwide and preaches that Armageddon will soon release the world from Satan’s grip. In the U.S., the Jehovah’s Witnesses operate more than 14,000 congregations with about 1 million members.

Internal documents obtained by Reveal show that the Witnesses have systematically instructed elders and other leaders to keep child sexual abuse confidential, while collecting detailed information on congregants who prey on children.

Having successfully leveraged the First Amendment as a defense of their right to not serve in the military or salute the American flag, the Jehovah’s Witnesses now are using a similar legal strategy to defend policies that shield serial predators from law enforcement.

“

“You come to us first. Don't tell anybody. ... You don't warn parents in the congregation. We'll decide what happens here.” That's their policy.”

— Irwin Zalkin, attorney for Jose Lopez, describing the system he believes the Witnesses have created

In many ways, the response by the Witnesses in recent child sexual abuse cases has mirrored the actions of another religious group (<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/11/10/outcast-3>): ultra-Orthodox Jews in New York. There, the community has faced a backlash for asking observant Jews to consult a rabbi instead of going immediately to police with evidence of abuse. With the Witnesses, however, there appears to be far more documentation and a bureaucratic protocol for dealing with allegations of abuse among its members.

For Jose Lopez, it took almost three decades to find some semblance of justice after he'd been molested – when he was 7 – by a predator who'd operated within a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in San Diego.

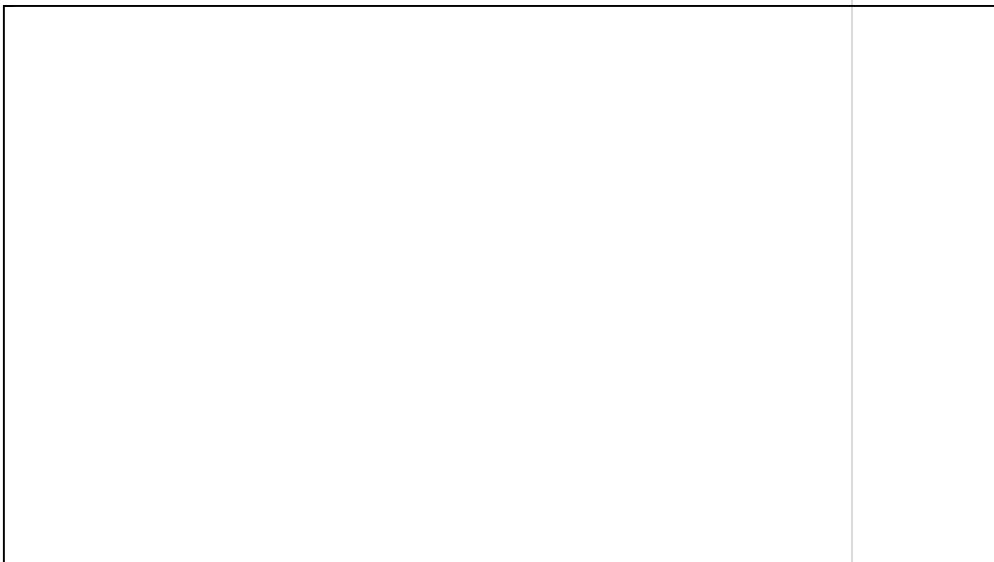
When his case against the Witnesses concluded in October, a judge awarded (<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2014/oct/31/jehovahs-witness-sex-abuse-judgment-lopez/>) Lopez \$13.5 million, a remarkably large sum in an era of frequent payouts in abuse cases. The decision rested in part on

the Witnesses' refusal to hand over documents in the case, prompting the frustrated judge to ban the organization from making a defense.

The Lopez case was remarkable for another reason. It forced the Witnesses into a rare admission: Somewhere within the organization, there is a trove of documents with the names and whereabouts of known child sexual abusers in its U.S. congregations.

During the trial, a senior official from the Jehovah's Witnesses headquarters, Richard Ashe, told Lopez's attorney, Irwin Zalkin, that the organization had collected and electronically scanned internal documents on decades of known abuse cases. Ashe said that the Witnesses keep their child sexual abuse reports in a Microsoft SharePoint database but that it would take years to extract the information because it was mixed up with millions of other documents.

"Honestly, Mr. Zalkin, the efforts that we've made up to this point is just trying to figure out how on earth we could ever do that in our filing system," Ashe said. "You're talking about 14,000 congregations and over 3 million documents that have been scanned and that would have to be searched. ... It would take years to do that."



Zalkin called in a software expert who testified that by using simple search terms, the Witnesses could produce the information in less than two months, or maybe two days. At that point, the Watchtower simply refused to provide the database.

During the case, Lopez said his mother reported his abuse to the elders in 1986, but they didn't call police or warn the congregation. Lopez and his mother left the religion soon after.

Even as the abuser, Gonzalo Campos, continued to sexually assault children, the elders promoted him within the congregation, first to ministerial servant in 1988, then to elder in 1993, according to a 1995 letter from elders to the Watchtower.

In 1994, John and Manuela Dorman learned that Campos had abused their son a decade earlier, court documents show. They called Campos, who confessed and said the elders already were aware of the situation. When Manuela Dorman went to the elders, they told her not to talk about the abuse. They said too much time had passed, and nothing could be done.

After a letter from the Dormans reached the Watchtower later that year, the elders confronted Campos. In 1995, he confessed and was disfellowshipped, the Witnesses' version of excommunication. By then, he had at least seven known victims, according to elders' letters.

But Campos was reinstated to the congregation in 2000, eight months after the elders had sent a letter to the Watchtower explaining that they had managed to keep Campos' past hidden, court documents show. "The community does not know of all this and there was no publicity about this," the letter read. "Everything took place in the congregation and because of that he was not prosecuted." Campos, according to news reports, fled to Mexico.

During Lopez's trial, Ashe testified that the Watchtower instructs elders that child abuse must be kept confidential.

"And it directs that that should be kept confidential from prosecuting authorities?" Zalkin asked.

"Yes," Ashe responded.

Asked whether the Watchtower's policy of silence hinders parents' ability to protect their children from abuse, Ashe told Zalkin, "Not in my view it doesn't."

Ashe did not respond to a request for comment. In a written statement to Reveal, representatives from the Watchtower said, "We continue to educate parents and provide them with valuable tools to help them educate and protect their children."

But Zalkin, who has been aggressively filing lawsuits against the Witnesses throughout the country, said the pattern is clear.

"Keep your mouth shut. Don't go to law enforcement," he said, describing the system he believes the Witnesses have created. " 'You come to us first. Don't tell anybody. ... You don't warn parents in the congregation. We'll decide what happens here.' That's their policy."

Increasing claims of cover-ups

WATCH

They come to your door, but how much do you really know about [Jehovah's Witnesses](http://www.revealnews.org/article/what-you-dont-know-about-jehovahs-witnesses/) (<http://www.revealnews.org/article/what-you-dont-know-about-jehovahs-witnesses/>)? We show you some surprising stuff (you probably didn't know) about the worldwide religion.

In the last few years, the Jehovah's Witnesses have been hit with an increasing barrage of lawsuits claiming the organization has covered up child sexual abuse.

A pair of sisters in Vermont [filed a suit](http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/local/vermont/2014/09/30/jehovahs-witnesses-face-lawsuit/16504945/)

[\(http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/local/vermont/2014/09/30/jehovahs-witnesses-face-lawsuit/16504945/\)](http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/local/vermont/2014/09/30/jehovahs-witnesses-face-lawsuit/16504945/) in September claiming that a member of their congregation molested them when they were as young as 4. When they reported the abuse to the elders in the congregation, they said, they were called liars. The next month in Dallas, [five women and one man filed a joint lawsuit](http://starlocalmedia.com/planocourier/plano-jehovah-s-witness-congregation-sued-for-sexual-abuse/article_1f09f23e-5bce-11e4-9b23-db6fa0ae2a91.html) [\(http://starlocalmedia.com/planocourier/plano-jehovah-s-witness-congregation-sued-for-sexual-abuse/article_1f09f23e-5bce-11e4-9b23-db6fa0ae2a91.html\)](http://starlocalmedia.com/planocourier/plano-jehovah-s-witness-congregation-sued-for-sexual-abuse/article_1f09f23e-5bce-11e4-9b23-db6fa0ae2a91.html) alleging that an elder in their congregation sexually abused them while they were all younger than 13.

In Oregon in December, [two former Witnesses](http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2014/12/jehovahs_witnesses_under_fire.h)

[\(http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2014/12/jehovahs_witnesses_under_fire.h\)](http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2014/12/jehovahs_witnesses_under_fire.h) sued the Watchtower and a local congregation, claiming the defendants kept silent after learning that an elder had sexually abused them when they were in grade school. Since 2012, attorneys have filed more than a dozen similar suits against the Watchtower in Connecticut, Florida, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma and other states.

[The Watchtower's frequent defense – that such cases violate protections under the free exercise clause of the First Amendment](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=The+Watchtower+uses+the+First+Amendment+to+keep+its+list+of+child+abusers+within+the+church+secret.) [\(https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=The Watchtower uses the First Amendment to keep its list of child abusers within the church secret.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=The+Watchtower+uses+the+First+Amendment+to+keep+its+list+of+child+abusers+within+the+church+secret.) [@Reveal](http://ow.ly/I2YHS) [@Reveal](http://ow.ly/I2YHS) – has led to the dismissal of several lawsuits. Watchtower lawyers argue that judicial questioning of the spiritual beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses would trample the organization's religious freedoms.

In a recent court hearing in California, Jehovah's Witnesses lawyer James McCabe argued that "the religious beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses were at play in this case from start to finish."

At the heart of this issue are the Watchtower's own child abuse policy memos.

Each memo has been addressed to "all bodies of elders" and bears the letterhead of either the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society or the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. Those are the primary corporations used by the organization to administer spiritual guidance, create and disseminate policy, oversee the writing and publication of literature, and manage the organization's vast real estate holdings.

"Often the peace, unity, and spiritual well-being of the congregation are at stake," a 1989 Watchtower memo (<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1659655-jehovahs-memo-3.html>) reads. "Improper use of the tongue by an elder can result in serious legal problems for the individual, the congregation, and even the Society."

The letter goes on to warn that breaches of confidentiality may lead to costly lawsuits and prosecutions. ([@reveal](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=Jehovah's+Witnesses'+memos+warn+elders+of+legal+action+if+they+report+child+abuse+outside+the+organization.+http://ow.ly/I2YHS))

"Worldly persons are quick to resort to lawsuits if they feel their 'rights' have been violated," according to the document. "Substantial monetary damages could be assessed against the elders or congregation. In some cases where the authorities are involved, certain complications could lead to a fine or imprisonment."

Subsequent memos reinforced the Watchtower's policies, culminating in a [1997 letter](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1659656-jehovahs-memo-4.html) (<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1659656-jehovahs-memo-4.html>) that directed elders to report all known or suspected child sexual abusers – past, present and future – to the organization's New York headquarters. This memo appears to be the foundation of the database referenced in Jose Lopez's case.

The memo lists 11 questions that must be answered in each case, including the name of the perpetrator, age of the victim and how many times the abuse occurred. Other questions appear to be designed to gauge the perpetrator's risk of exposure: "How is he viewed in the community and by the authorities? Has he lived down any notoriety in the community? Are members of the congregation aware of what took place?"

In the Lopez trial, the Watchtower refused to provide its list of perpetrators, in violation of an order upheld by the California Supreme Court. It also refused to provide the longest-serving member of the Governing Body, Gerrit Lösch, who was subpoenaed.

As a result, San Diego Superior Court Judge Joan Lewis disqualified the Watchtower's defense.

"Watchtower's actions or omissions were 'reprehensible.' I think 'disgraceful' may be synonymous with 'reprehensible,' but I think 'disgraceful' doesn't say enough about it," Lewis wrote in her decision.

"The award of punitive damages against them will hopefully send a message to Watchtower and its managing agents, the governing body of the Jehovah's Witnesses, that their handling of sex abuse cases within their congregation was absolutely reckless."

Her \$13.5 million verdict was based solely on Lopez's evidence and testimony.

“They fight every request for documents, every subpoena,” said attorney Irwin Zalkin. “They’ll take a hit not to produce what they know.”

“

“Not every individual who has sexually abused a child in the past is considered a ‘predator.’ The (Watchtower), not the local body of elders, determines whether an individual who has sexually abused children in the past will be considered a ‘predator.’ ”

— 2012 Watchtower memo

Child abuse policies based on Scripture

The Watchtower bases its child abuse policies on Scripture, and the message to elders is clear: Disobey the policy and you disobey God. For emphasis, the authors punctuate many of their policy directives with verses from the Bible.



The Jehovah's Witnesses have addressed child abuse in their literature, including this edition of Awake! magazine published in 1985.

For example, if a child reports to an elder that someone in the congregation has molested him or her, the child must produce another witness to the crime before the

elders will investigate the allegation

(<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=When a child reports abuse by a Jehovah's Witness, he or she must produce another witness to the crime.>

<http://ow.ly/I2YHS> via @reveal). The so-called two-witness rule, one memo explains

(<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1659654-jehovahs-memo-2.html>), comes from 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.”

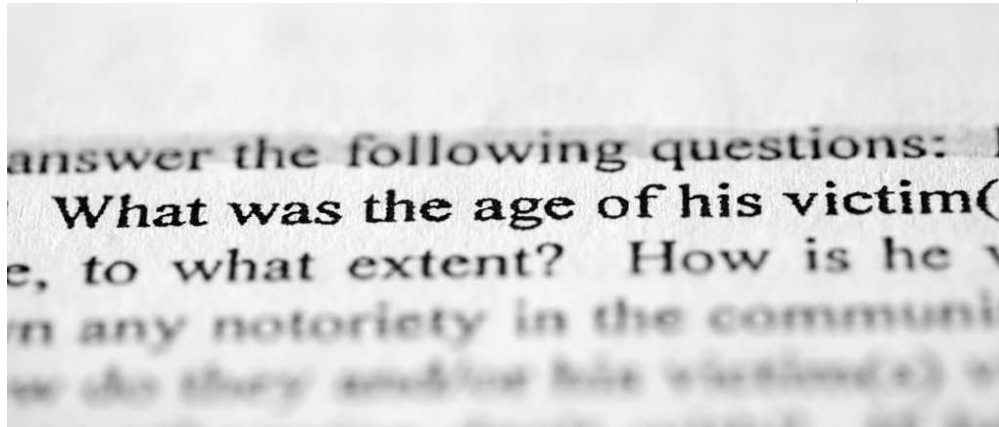
Although most incidents of child abuse don't occur in the presence of witnesses, senior official Richard Ashe said in his deposition that elders are bound by the two-witness rule. “You know the truth has the ring of truth to it, but it still has to be established scripturally by the mouth of two witnesses for the congregation to be authorized to take any action,” he said.

The only other way elders are allowed to take action is for the perpetrator to confess. But abusers who express repentance often are allowed to remain in the congregation.

In either case, elders are not instructed to call police unless required by state law. But state laws are complicated. According to a federal agency (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/clergymandated.pdf>), clergy are mandated to report child abuse in 42 states, but laws in 32 of those states, including California, contain a loophole called the clergy-penitent privilege. That exception allows religious leaders to withhold information from authorities when they receive it through a spiritual communication, such as a confession in the Catholic church.

Watchtower officials say they instruct their members to obey state laws. Their policy memos direct elders who hear of alleged child abuse to “contact the Society’s Legal Department immediately” to learn whether the laws in their states require them to notify police.

Silence on confessed abuse



Elders are expected to collect detailed information on child abuse within congregations on a form that is later sent to the Watchtower.

Credit: Adithya Sambamurthy/Reveal

Another case from California has exposed the way Jehovah’s Witnesses have hidden abuse from authorities, enabling predators to collect more victims.

In 1993 in Fremont, a Jehovah’s Witness named Jonathan Kendrick confessed to two elders that he had sexually abused his 13-year-old stepdaughter as she slept. Kendrick’s wife and her daughter, the victim, were present at the confession.

The elders, Michael Clarke and Gary Abrahamson, wrote to the Watchtower for guidance.

Two weeks later, [a letter from the Watchtower \(https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1657709-correspondence-between-wt-and-fremont-exhibits-1.html\)](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1657709-correspondence-between-wt-and-fremont-exhibits-1.html) advised the elders that Kendrick’s conduct constituted a “minor uncleanness” and that he

could remain a member of the congregation.

“However,” the letter said, “it would be appropriate for two elders to meet with him and provide him with strong Scriptural counsel.”

The Watchtower determined that Kendrick's crime didn't warrant police involvement, disfellowshipping or a warning to the congregation. Because the incident was known outside of the immediate family, it said Kendrick should lose his title of ministerial servant, which meant that he could no longer pass out Watchtower literature at the kingdom hall – the equivalent of a church for Jehovah's Witnesses – or turn on the microphone at the start of meetings.

The elders have testified that they watched Kendrick closely and told him not to be alone with children, but he was allowed to continue preaching the Bible door to door.

Although the North Fremont congregation's elders never reported Kendrick to authorities, he was prosecuted in 1994 after his stepdaughter, during a hospital visit, told police about the abuse, according to a police report. Kendrick pleaded guilty to misdemeanor sexual battery. He was fined \$200 and placed on probation.

The elders told the congregation that Kendrick had lost his title but, in accordance with Watchtower policy, did not say why.



Kendrick and his wife separated in 1997. He moved about 60 miles north to the city of Oakley, where he joined the local congregation and struck up a courtship with a recently widowed Witness named Linda Hood.

The courtship caught the attention of the Oakley elders. One of them, Roger Bentley, was charged with getting to know Kendrick on behalf of the congregation.

“He told me about an incident with his stepdaughter, but when he told that story, it was accidental touching,” Bentley said. “The version I remember is, he was coming home, it was dark, she was on the couch, he tripped on it and accidentally touched her breast.”

Later, in a court deposition, Kendrick acknowledged that he had lied to Bentley.

“Whenever I talked to anybody, including Roger, about that incident, I would use the term ‘battery,’ ” he said in the deposition. “I – I dropped the word ‘sexual’ battery. I didn’t want people to think I had been having sex with a child, so I just used the term ‘battery,’ whether it was with Roger or anybody else.”

About a year after Kendrick arrived in Oakley, he proposed to Hood. They asked Bentley to perform the wedding ceremony.

A letter from North Fremont to the Oakley elders, introducing Kendrick that year – signed by elder Larry Lamerdin – mentioned nothing about Kendrick's abuse of his stepdaughter. Although the elders had placed restrictions on Kendrick for "loss of temper," Lamerdin wrote, they had since lifted them.

"You will find him to be a fine individual, kind, loving, and appreciates the peace and refreshment of the Christian Brotherhood," the letter read. "He is a very interesting individual who has taken the lead with some young ones in the congregation and helped them from vearying (sic) off course."

Months later, elder Clarke of North Fremont sent a second report to Oakley. Nowhere did it mention sexual abuse or Kendrick's conviction.

"I can't overstate how powerful those two letters were to Oakley elders," former elder Bentley said in an interview. "Where does it say he's a child abuser? My conclusion was that Jonathan was telling the truth and every document that we saw said that he was telling the truth and that we could go ahead with that wedding."

Still, concerned that Kendrick recently had left a rocky marriage, Bentley urged Hood to call the North Fremont elders and ask them directly whether they believed Kendrick would make a good husband.

Hood called Clarke.

"Mr. Clarke told me Mr. Kendrick was a good person. Because I was not told any negative information about Jonathan and because that I was in love with him, I went ahead and married him," Hood wrote in a declaration to the Alameda County Superior Court.

The couple wed in Hood's backyard on New Year's Day 1999.

Clarke would not comment to Reveal for this story.

Lamerdin did not return phone messages.

Josh Hood, Linda's eldest son, disliked Kendrick from the beginning. He worried that his mother – still grieving over the death of her first husband a year earlier – had married a man she didn't really know.

One night in 2003, Kendrick broke a glass over the head of Josh's younger brother in a drunken fit, according to a police report. The adult brothers had had enough and went to their mother's house one night when no one was home to look for information about Kendrick. When they loaded a recovery software program onto Kendrick's computer, Josh Hood said in sworn testimony, they found child pornography.

"I swear to God, it made my heart almost come out of my chest," he said later in an interview, "because he'd been around my daughter for years."

Josh Hood then asked his 8-year-old daughter whether Kendrick had ever abused her, which she confirmed. He called his mother, who then called Kendrick at work.

Kendrick said he remembered Linda Hood asking whether it was true. "I don't think I said much," he recalled later under oath. "I was cutting my wrists at the time."

Soon after, Josh Hood tracked down Kendrick's ex-wife, who told him that Kendrick had abused her daughter almost a decade earlier. When Josh Hood learned that the North Fremont elders had withheld that information from his family, he was livid.

"They left out that Jonathan wasn't allowed to be around kids because he had had an incident with his stepdaughter from his previous marriage where he had touched her improperly," Josh Hood said. "They didn't want him around their children, so it should have been passed along."

After Kendrick cut his wrists, he spent three days recovering in a hospital. Manuel Iglesias and Jim Dominguez, the Oakley elders charged with investigating Josh Hood's daughter's allegations, visited him there. Meanwhile, Josh Hood reported the abuse to police and said he gave them a disk with the child pornography he claimed was copied from Kendrick's computer. Kendrick never was investigated for the alleged pornography.

Although Kendrick confessed to the elders about the abuse, according to court records, neither cooperated with the law enforcement investigation. Sgt. Jeffrey Baldwin of the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office said in a deposition that Iglesias did not return his calls. When Baldwin reached Dominguez, the elder told him that his visit with Iglesias and Kendrick was a "penitential visit" and therefore exempt from mandatory reporting laws.

"They would not speak to me on the matter; and that they referred me essentially to their attorney," Baldwin recalled.

Reached in person at his home, Dominguez told Reveal: "That was a dark time. I was trying to protect the congregation. I think it's best for me if I don't talk now."

Adhering to Watchtower policy, the Oakley elders also did not tell their congregation what Kendrick had done.

In 2003, Kendrick pleaded guilty to committing a lewd act on a minor under 14. He spent about eight months in jail and five years on probation, during which time he underwent sex offender treatment.

One victim comes forward



Candace Conti was awarded a record settlement in her child sexual abuse lawsuit against the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, the parent organization of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Credit: Adithya Sambamurthy/Reveal

But that was not the end. Years later, a woman claiming to have been another victim of Jonathan Kendrick would come forward, calling into question the testimony of the North Fremont elders and leading to the first U.S. trial in a child abuse case against the Watchtower.

Candace Conti was long gone from the Jehovah's Witnesses in 2009, when she decided to look up Kendrick on the Internet.

Years earlier, she said, Kendrick had abused her, but she had never reported the incident. She broke down when she found him on a sex offender registry.

“I know it never left me, knowing that he had hurt somebody else,” she said. “Knowing that he went to a different kingdom hall and hurt somebody else, knowing that that person was the same age as me.”

Conti was born into the Jehovah's Witnesses and attended the North Fremont congregation as far back as she can remember. Both of her parents and her grandparents on her mother's side were Witnesses. She started preaching door to door when she was 5, handing out Watchtower pamphlets with colorful illustrations of paradise on earth.

"I just remember my whole opening spiel was, 'Wouldn't you love to live in a beautiful place like this?' " she said. "You're bringing them to Jehovah's organization, you're saving these people's lives."

While in grade school, Conti spent 70 hours a month preaching. Kendrick had become close friends with Conti's father. Although she wasn't comfortable around Kendrick, Conti said she would end up alone with him during long afternoons of knocking on doors.

According to Conti, when she was 9 and 10 years old, Kendrick used the time they were alone to take her to his house and sexually assault her. She says she kept the abuse to herself for years (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/18/us/28-million-awarded-in-jehovahs-witnesses-abuse-case.html?_r=0).

While there is no dispute that Kendrick molested at least two girls, he emphatically denied to Reveal ever abusing or even being alone with Conti.

Kendrick would only say during a brief phone interview: "I did not molest Candace Conti. I have never been questioned by law enforcement involving Candace Conti. I've never been charged with a crime involving Candace Conti." He would not comment on any other cases.

Conti's discovery of Kendrick in the sex offender registry led her back to the Witnesses. She went to elders Michael Clarke and Larry Lamerdin, who had watched her grow up, and told them her story for the

first time. Because she didn't have any witnesses to her abuse, she said, they told her there was nothing they could do.

"They got the story from me and they both cried, she said. But they couldn't come to bat for me. It was out of their hands. They are bound by those rules and regulations that are passed down by the organization."

Clarke and Lamerdin wrote to the Oakley congregation in December 2009 to inform the elders that Kendrick had abused Conti. The letter arrived seven years after Josh Hood learned that Kendrick had abused his daughter.

"She claims that there (sic) relationship was inappropriate and her parents and congregation elders should have put a stop to it," they wrote. "We totally agreed."

"She asked us twice if we were going to report this to the authorities," they continued. "We told her that if she wishes to make a report, it is her absolute right to do so."

When Conti told them that she didn't trust the congregation to protect children, the elders wrote, "We shared a number of scriptures with her regarding Jehovah's love and concern for her."

Frustrated with the response from the Witnesses, Conti sued the Watchtower in 2011.

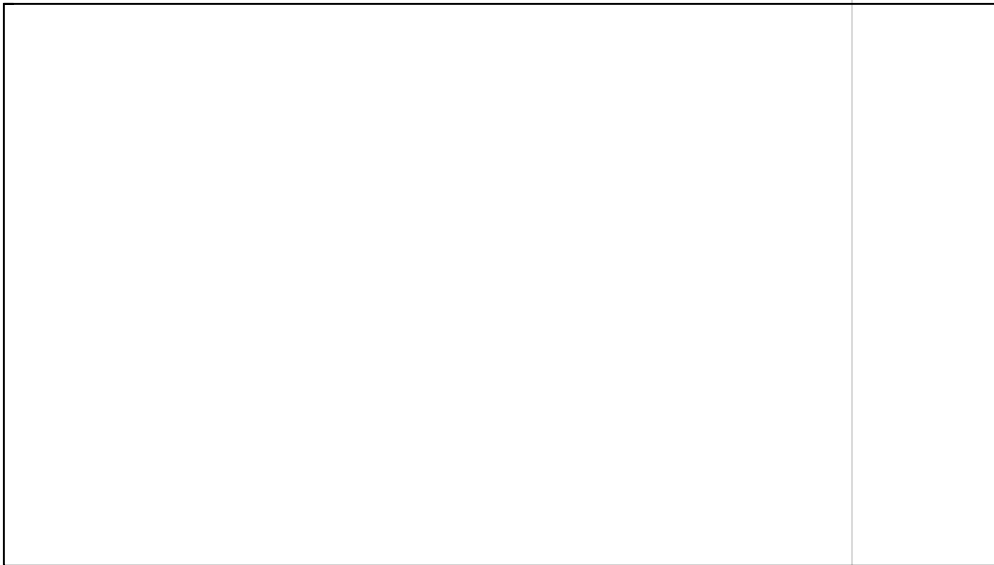
"It was to attack the policies and procedures that were in place, that let a serial molester continue to molest children," Conti said. "I had this sense of guilt. ...What if I had done something to maybe protect this other child?"

During the trial, Conti's attorney Rick Simons zeroed in on the Watchtower's child abuse policy memos.

In his deposition during Conti's lawsuit, Clarke said elders are required to adhere strictly to the Watchtower's policies.

"Are congregations free to deviate from the practices through which instructions are given through 'Body of Elder' letters?" her lawyers asked.

"No," Clarke responded.



In an attempt to discover who wrote the memos, Simons also deposed Allen Shuster, a supervisor in the Watchtower's service department, where the memos were drafted.

Shuster testified that he might have contributed to writing some of the memos but that he couldn't remember for sure.

"There would have been a group of elders within the service department that would have reviewed this letter," he said. "It would have been approved by a committee of the Governing Body."

Simons then asked about the two-witness rule.

"These are policies that come from the Governing Body?" Simons asked.

“That is an accurate statement, yes,” Shuster said.

Before the Conti case, all U.S. child abuse lawsuits against the Watchtower had been either dismissed or settled out of court. Hers was the first to go to trial. The jury found in 2012 that the North Fremont congregation and the Watchtower had been negligent, failing to protect Conti from a known child abuser. She was awarded more than \$15 million.

In the wake of the Conti verdict, Josh Hood and his daughter filed their own lawsuit against the Watchtower in 2012.

Howard Magee, the Hoods' lawyer, deposed Thomas Jefferson, another Watchtower supervisor in the New York service department. He corroborated Clarke's testimony in Conti's case that elders are instructed to report child abuse to the Watchtower's legal department and expected to follow whatever advice they receive.

Jefferson said the Watchtower has files on Kendrick's abuse history. He was not aware of any Watchtower policy that would prohibit Kendrick from preaching door to door, he said

“Child molestation is a confidential matter,” he said.

Kendrick, now 61, is still an active member of the Oakley congregation. He and Linda Hood remain together. Linda Hood's granddaughter's case was dismissed after the judge affirmed the Watchtower's First Amendment protection.

This month, a California judge in another case ruled against (<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1667068-riverside-county-terminating-sanctions-2-6-15.html>) the Watchtower for refusing to provide its database of abusers.

In a statement to Reveal punctuated with Bible citations, the Watchtower stated that congregation elders comply with child abuse reporting laws.

“The victim and his or her parents have the absolute right to report the matter to the governmental authorities. (Galatians 6:5),” the statement read. “Congregation elders do not shield abusers from the authorities or from the consequences of their actions. (Galatians 6:7).”

“We believe that loving and protective parents are the best deterrent to child abuse.”

This story was edited by Fernando Diaz and Robert Salladay and copy edited by Sheela Kamath and Nikki Frick.

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