

Team 10 obtains video of admitted child molester in Jehovah's Witnesses

Some people say group covered up abuse for years

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SAN DIEGO - Team 10 has obtained a video that some people say helps to prove Jehovah's Witnesses covered up child abuse for years.

In a video deposition taken in 2011 during a civil lawsuit, admitted serial pedophile Gonzalo Campos said he abused several children in his San Diego congregation from the early 1980's through the mid 90's.

"I did abuse him," said Campos in the video. "I touched his private parts."

His on-camera admissions and a confidential settlement worth millions, may have to be enough for his victims. The Jehovah's Witnesses never told police about Campos, who was a church elder. He's never been charged with a crime and he may never see the inside of a prison cell. He has fled the country and now is in Mexico. He also still is a member of Jehovah's Witnesses.

An attorney questions Campos on the video, "Were you allowed to continue to give bible study to children after you attempted to touch (the victim) inappropriately?"

"Yes," Campos said.

Irwin Zalkin represents the seven victims who have come forward.

"He is a serial pedophile," Zalkin said. "It's about accountability. It's about taking responsibility. It's about protection of children. It's about changing the way they operate."

Zalkin claims child abuse continues inside the Jehovah's Witness community. He claims church leaders, known as elders, and Jehovah's Witness' headquarters, known as The Watchtower, treat child abuse like a sin instead of a crime.

"The elders are instructed that they are to report that up the chain to The Watchtower, before or not to authorities," Zalkin said. "It is The Watchtower who will decide what happens."

Team 10 found The Watchtower has sent each congregation and its elders several confidential memos

about how to handle child abuse starting in 1989.

The original memo warns to "be careful not to divulge information about personal matters, quoting scripture which says there is 'a time to keep quiet.'"

Another memo from October 2012 outlines the current church policy.

It tells elders to "call the legal department" and "contact your ... Overseer." It says, "loving elders should take steps to protect children, especially when ... the one who has sexually abused a child ... will be allowed to remain a member ..."

Jim McCabe is the attorney for the Jehovah's Witnesses. He explained how the church now handles abuse allegations.

"Today whenever there's an allegation of child abuse and a local congregation hears about it they call headquarters and get instructions," McCabe said.

Team 10 learned Campos is still a member of the Jehovah's Witness church as he lives in Mexico, but McCabe says he is not allowed to hold a leadership position.

Team 10 also learned Campos is just one of thousands of alleged abusers the Jehovah's Witnesses know about.

A database detailing more than 23,000 allegations of abuse was discovered in church headquarters and revealed to the public in 2002.

When Team 10 asked McCabe if the church always reports allegations of abuse to police, he answered no.

"Under biblical law a man can only be convicted on the testimony of two or more witnesses," McCabe said.

McCabe is a Jehovah's Witness and elder of his La Jolla church. He said the Jehovah's Witnesses have always reported abuse allegations to police when required by law. It became law in California in 1997.

"Our problem is that there are some bad men that sneak into organizations," McCabe said. "They snuck into our organization, they snuck into other organizations."

Team 10 asked if Zalkin believed it's widely known that there are sexual abuse problems inside Jehovah's Witnesses.

"No, no and it needs to be brought to the public's attention," Zalkin said. "They have been operating in secrecy and at will for decades."

"We wish we could undo what has been done, but it can't be," McCabe said.

Zalkin said he plans to file more lawsuits against Jehovah's Witnesses soon.

Some of those cases stem from other alleged abuse in San Diego.

McCabe issued this statement to Team 10:

"The letter that you refer to that you received from Zalkin Law Firm is six pages long and this was the only literal and intended reference having anything to do with Child Sex Abuse (click <http://bit.ly/130ITiR> for the letter; refer to page 3, Section B). I also gave you dozen of published articles in the Awake! and Watchtower magazines that constitute Jehovah's Witnesses policy on child abuse -- we abhor it and do not condone it or cover it up."

(*Editor's note: Due to an editing error, a quote was incorrectly attributed to the wrong person in an earlier version of this story. Zalkin, the attorney who plans to file lawsuits against Jehovah's Witnesses, said this issue needs to be brought to the public's attention.)

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