



WINGS for Truth

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FBI Is Seeking Possible Abuse Victims From Elusive Church Group

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An isolationist "Church With No Name" is making a name for itself in law enforcement circles as individuals continue to come forward with allegations of sexual abuse by its members and elders.

The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Omaha, Nebraska, field office requested the public's assistance in identifying potential child victims of a religious group with no official name, referred to by outsiders as "2x2," "The Way," "The Truth" and "The Church With No Name," according to a press release issued in February.

Victims are being sought in the Midwest region including South Dakota.

The Press & Dakotan contacted the FBI for comment but was told that it does not issue statements on ongoing investigations.

The group is active in Nebraska and other states as well as internationally — and also in the Yankton area.

Cynthia Liles, a private investigator based in Oregon, has also been investigating allegations against the sect and is working with FBI investigators.

Liles told the Press & Dakotan that a couple of survivors have reported abuse occurring in South Dakota. Liles was also able to confirm that there is a farm in rural Utica that hosts an annual 2x2 convention, though, to her knowledge, no victim reports have been made in connection with that location.

A P.I. TAKES UP THE CASE

Liles' investigative scope includes child sex abuse cases against institutions of trust, including Boy Scouts of America, the Catholic Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) or Mormon church and various schools, she said.

Ironically, Liles is a former member of the 2x2 group.

"So, I was helping a couple of women who were abused as children that had been abused by ministers in this church that I grew up in," Liles said. "Then the scandal broke, and I

started a hotline on my phone in March of 2023, and then it's been a deluge ever since."

The scandal Liles refers to began with the death of a highly respected 2x2 member, former Overseer Dean Bruer, who was found dead of natural causes in a Best Western hotel room in Government Camp, Oregon, in June 2022.

Ministers of the church are expected to maintain their celibacy and are itinerant, traveling in pairs — hence the name 2x2 — from one member's home to another's, Liles said.

"These ministers stay in people's homes and they're homeless," she said. "Bruer died in a hotel room, which was quite unusual for a minister to be staying in a hotel room."

In addition to housing its ministers, the group keeps to itself and teaches against exposure to television, which made the location of Bruer's death shocking to many in the sect.

A letter sent to the sect's elders in Oregon by Bruer's successor, Overseer Doyle Smith, in March 2023, caused many survivors alleging sexual abuse by Bruer and others in the church to come forward.

There were so many allegations that Liles set up nonprofit Advocates for the Truth (AFTT) to help the survivors report and recover from 2x2 sexual abuse, she said.

A LETTER FROM THE LEADERSHIP

According to the letter, which has been posted online by survivor groups, Smith said that recent evidence had surfaced that Bruer had been a sexual predator.

"We never respect or defend such totally inappropriate behavior among us," Smith said. "There is a very united consensus among us that the only thing to do is to be transparent with all of you for obvious reasons, though this is very difficult. We are very sorry for the hurt this will bring to the hearts of many. Thankfully, he is no longer in a position to hurt anyone."

The letter went on to say that Bruer's personal records showed that he had a Best Western Hotel preferred customer account and spent a considerable amount of time and money in motels.

"The receipts often included 'two guests,'" Smith said. "Victims have come forward, and there was very confirming and incriminating evidence found on his computer and phone."

"His actions include rape and abuse of underage victims. He totally abused his authority as an overseer in order to control, manipulate and threaten his victims. We are strongly recommending our sta" look at the Ministry Safe Program and possibly other venues that help understand, recognize and prevent such problems."

Liles said she asked callers what exactly angered them about the situation.

"It was the fact that (the group) waited so long to let people know," she said. "And, this is the MO of the church in any regard, but with this situation the email and letter went out to elders in Oregon and instructed the elders to either read it to the people meeting with them, or print it and show it to people but (to take the letter back), and they did that. They weren't actually supposed to hand it out to anyone. That upset people, too."

THE INVESTIGATION

The 2x2 sect included approximately 200,000-250,000 members at its height. In 2023 Liles' organization estimated 2x2 membership at around 75,000 — and continues to diminish. The largest congregations are in the U.S., Canada and Australia.

"We're working with survivors from 30 countries now. So, it is all over the world," Liles said, noting that the number of perpetrators being investigated has exceeded 800. "Also, if a pedophile was caught in the States or Canada, (the church) would ship them o" to some of these other countries."

Homegrown congregations in other countries, including India and South Africa, are also discovering that many of their native ministers are pedophiles, she said.

"Most of these perpetrators have multiple allegations against them," Liles said. "Almost all of the perps reported to

us the ministry knew about, because people inform the leadership instead of law enforcement.”

The oldest living survivor that has come forward so far is a 95-year-old woman who was abused by a 2x2 minister when she was 5 years old, Liles said.

Many of the victims that contacted Liles have also contacted the FBI, which has been working behind the scenes since May of last year, she said.

“I got a call from an agent in California. I talked to a homeland security person from Montana and I was contacted by an FBI agent in Nebraska,” Liles said. “He was very interested in the case and he subpoenaed all of my documentation and agents came to my home in July for two days and went through everything.”

Liles, who forwards perpetrator information she gathers to the FBI, said 2x2 leadership has addressed allegations internally, often with the perpetrator or victim making an apology, and has not involved police.

A SURVIVOR

One survivor contacted the Press & Dakotan about her experience. Her real name is not being used in this article. “Jane Jones” was growing up in Rapid City when the abuse occurred. She said the abuse began when she was 12 and ended three years later. The abuser was married and approximately 30 years old at the time. They met through the group’s religious ceremonies or “Meeting,” and he and his wife became babysitters for Jane and her siblings when the parents were out of town, she said.

“Everybody knew he had this obsession with me,” Jane said. “One time, somebody was looking for me and asked his wife, ‘Do you know where (your husband) is?’ And she said, ‘Well, go find Jane. That’s where he’ll be.’”

Rather than being scared of her abuser, Jane was groomed to enjoy the attention and believed they had a special relationship, she said.

The abuse ended when the wife found inappropriate emails from her husband to Jane and also to another underage girl, Jane said.

"I found out she knew, so I called her at age 15 bawling hysterically and apologized to her," Jane said. "All she said to me was, 'He should have known better.' It was never spoken of again."

Jane said her abuser and his wife went on to become foster parents and also adopted a young girl. Ultimately, he became an elder of the 2x2 group.

As an adult, Jane entered therapy and began to understand that these events were not her fault. Though the statute of limitations had expired, the therapist encouraged Jane to reach out to the sect's leaders about putting a stop to any more abuse by this man, she said.

Because there continues to be foster children in the couple's home, the therapist filed a report with the South Dakota Department of Social Services (DSS). Representatives of DSS responded that the claims were unsubstantiated and took no action, Jane said.

It is unclear if DSS investigated the allegation.

However, the group's elders agreed to keep the man from attending meetings and from holding them in his home, but they never shared that information with other decision makers in the sect, Jane said.

She said she monitors the situation continuously to ensure he is never in a position to exploit other children. In the process, she has found church hierarchy uncommunicative

because of their fear of being quoted in an online or public forum, she said.

"I emailed them back, and I said, 'That's really disappointing, that your fear of the internet took precedence over the care of survivors,'" Jane said. "You should be able to stand behind your word, no matter where it gets posted. And then I never heard back."

She has since broken with the church but continues to keep tabs on her abuser.

Liles said the investigation is ongoing but faces a lot of resistance from the church itself, which has no formal structure, does not file with the government and hides its money.

"(It's) a secret sect that has covered up child sex abuse for over 100 years, for its entire existence," she said. "They've done nothing for the survivors. They still are doing nothing for the survivors, and it's an institution you can't sue because they're under the radar."

Advocates for the Truth can be reached through its website at <http://www.advocatesforthetruth.com>.

Anyone who believes they or their children have been victimized by individuals associated with the 2x2 group or who has information relevant to the FBI's investigation is asked to visit, <http://www.fbi.gov/2x2> or call the FBI Omaha field office at 402-493-8688.

Parents can report abuse or criminal behavior against their children by this group at <https://forms.fbi.gov/2x2>, and also receive educational information and resource references for families addressing this issue.