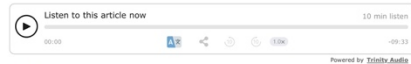


FBI Investigating an Insular, Nameless Religious Group Undergoing Sexual Abuse Reckoning

Agents are said to have visited at least one senior member of the group, sources tell VICE News.



By Anna Merlan

February 21, 2024, 10:12am [Share](#) [Tweet](#) [Signal](#)



A CREST OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION IS SEEN INSIDE THE J. EDGAR HOOVER FBI BUILDING IN WASHINGTON, D.C. PHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES.

MORE LIKE THIS

News

The GOP Has Impeached Alejandro Mayorkas and the Far Right Loves It

TESS OWEN
02.14.24



News

The Israel-Hezbollah Conflict Is Escalating and IDF Warns It's Just the Start



In an unusually transparent move, an FBI field office in Omaha, Nebraska announced this week that it is looking for help from the public in identifying people with “knowledge of abuse and/or criminal behavior” in an insular, nameless religious sect, often referred to by outsiders as the “Two by Twos.”

As VICE News detailed in an investigation in October, the group is in the midst of a dramatic reckoning with a decades-long pattern of sexual abuse, often committed against children by people in the community with a high degree of spiritual authority. Both current members of the sect and people who have left it have accused the group of failing to alert secular authorities when individuals are said to have molested children.



VICE News

A Nameless, Insular Religious Sect Is Being Rocked by a Massive Sexual Abuse Scandal

ANNA MERLAN 10.12.23

For several weeks, former members of the community who have become anti-abuse activists have told VICE News that it appears the FBI is investigating the group. The FBI generally does not confirm or deny active investigations; reached for comment last week, an FBI spokesperson in their Seattle office gave the usual response, telling VICE News, “The FBI’s media policy prohibits confirming or denying an investigation unless in rare circumstances.” The same spokesperson did not immediately respond to a follow-up request for comment. But the request for help from the Omaha office is exceedingly clear that the group is being investigated; the agency even created an online questionnaire for people with knowledge or direct experience of the abuse.

The group – usually referred to by insiders as “The Truth” or “The Way” – has a lineage that stretches back over 100 years. The name “Two by Twos” is drawn from the fact that its preachers, known as “workers,” are homeless and itinerant, traveling in pairs around territories composed of several states to lead prayer meetings held in people’s homes. Workers are often expected to sleep in the houses of congregants, which several people told VICE News has led to sexual abuse committed against children. Above workers are “overseers,” who in the United States have control over territories that include several states. Both workers and overseers have been accused of sexual abuse, committed both in the homes of congregants and during large conventions held yearly.

The current tumult began in March 2023, when a letter began circulating disclosing that an Oregon overseer named Dean Bruer had been a “sexual predator” whose patterns of alleged abuse first came to light after he abruptly died in a hotel room in the remote community of Government Camp. The letter, said to have been written by Bruer’s successor Doyle Smith, added: “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 staff look at the Ministry Safe Program and possibly other venues that help understand, recognize, and prevent such problems.” (Italics his.)

Notably, this letter does not suggest that Bruer’s alleged behavior was referred to legal authorities. (Smith did not respond to a previous request for comment from VICE News.) Sources within the community told VICE News that instead of alerting law enforcement, sexual abuse allegations were often handled by

temporarily removing the accused person from prayer meetings, or, in the case of workers, seemingly moving them to a different territory.

Former members of the group told VICE News that one specific overseer, Darryl Doland, an overseer for Washington state, received a visit from FBI agents. There is no evidence that Doland is himself accused of abuse or any other crime; he has, however, been unusually transparent in his communications with members about what he said was his own inadequate response when receiving reports of sexual abuse.

“I want to personally apologize for the times I have ‘tuned out’ the muted cry of a wounded, frightened person and left their plea for help unheeded,” Doland wrote in an April 2023 letter said to have been sent to community members in Washington, North Idaho, and Alaska; the letter was reprinted on WINGS For Truth, which information about the sect’s issues with child sexual assault and reshapes letters from workers and overseers.

“I am saddened and deeply sorry to know that my responses (or lack thereof) have hindered justice and/or healing in some way,” Doland’s letter continued. “I hope you will forgive me for this.” It followed with concrete steps Doland says leaders in the group will now take: “Going forward, we will have a zero-tolerance policy regarding CSA. If we are made aware of CSA violations involving a victim who is presently a minor, we will report it to authorities immediately, in compliance with the law.”

Reached for comment on February 10, Doland would not confirm or deny whether he had received a visit from the FBI, but told VICE News he’s “actively addressing” abuse allegations in his region and committed to helping victims receive help.

“Thanks for reaching out,” Doland’s email read. “I am actively addressing all abuse allegations involving participants in this region of our fellowship. My paramount concern is that victims receive the professional help that they need. I take all allegations of abuse seriously, strongly recommend mandated reporter training to all, and encourage everyone to report issues to the proper legal authorities as soon as possible. This is my only statement at this time.”

Bruce Murdoch, a spokesperson for WINGS For Truth, told VICE News that WINGS is encouraging “full cooperation” from people in leadership positions in the group with the FBI investigation.

"WINGS would like encourage full cooperation for the FBI's investigation into victims of child sexual abuse stemming from the '2x2' church," Murdoch told VICE News in an email. "In particular, we encourage those in leadership positions of elders, workers and overseers to come forward where you have knowledge of past offenses that were never resolved through the proper legal and social channels."

Several groups of current and former members of the sect have formed to advocate for sexual abuse survivors and chart a path forward. Mike and Abbi Prussack and Kyle and Kari Hanks are two married couples who all grew up within the sect. They founded and help run a large support group on Facebook for ex members, and told VICE News in a statement that they'd first spoken to the FBI last year.

"After decades of being silenced, survivors are finally having their voices heard and amplified," their group statement read. "We first spoke with the FBI last year when they reached out to us and have continued to help them in their investigation while prioritizing survivors who have entrusted us with their stories. The FBI is motivated to expose abusers and those complicit within the church, especially those in positions of leadership. The investigators are compassionate and concerned for survivors. Their goal is to protect future generations of 2x2s. We encourage and stand behind survivors who want to reach out to the FBI with their stories."

Another major group is Voices for the Truth, who told VICE News that news of the FBI investigation is "a significant step forward in providing validation and support to countless victim-survivors." The group also said that they've recently partnered with RAINN, the national anti-sexual violence organization, to create a hotline with specific resources for people who are current and former members of the sect. Their full statement reads as follows:

We are grateful that a legal and professional entity is acknowledging both the historical and ongoing abuse crisis within the Truth community. This recognition is a significant step forward in providing validation and support to

countless victim-survivors. It is our sincere hope that the FBI's investigation will be a valuable resource and a powerful tool for victim-survivors as they navigate their personal healing journeys.

We encourage victim-survivors to explore all avenues of support available to them and to choose what feels safe and empowering. It is vital that victim-survivors and their loved ones have access to psychologically safe and compassionate support from professionals who fully understand the unique circumstances of the Truth community. That's why we have partnered with RAINN — the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization and operators of the National Sexual Assault Hotline — for our Victim-Survivor Support Hotline, which will be launching in early March.

See more here: <https://voicesforhetruth.org/hotline/>

Update, 2:40 P.M. EST:

A spokesperson for the FBI Omaha field office confirmed to the investigation to VICE News, but said they were unable to answer further questions about its scope or whether other FBI field offices are involved. The statement reads, in full: “Because the FBI Omaha field office is seeking the public’s help in identifying potential victims, I can confirm an investigation. In order to preserve the integrity and capabilities of the investigation, I cannot share any details of the ongoing process.”

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/88x7zp/fbi-investigating-an-insular-nameless-religious-group-undergoing-sexual-abuse-reckoning?callback=in&code=NDQ5NZQ5YJETMTY2MIOZY2JKLTGWN2ITZJRHMJDNME0ZTZH&state=14cda3839edb40c7a4b61d4ab65a263b>