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Bombshell lawsuits allege 'insidious child sex abuse epidemic' and decades of whitewashing inside secretive confines of Jehovah's Witness church

- **Separate suits filed this week in Vermont and Connecticut accuse two 'ministerial servants' of molesting several children in the 1980s and 1990s**
- **Miranda Lewis, 23, and Annessa Lewis, 27, say in their suits they were abused in Vermont in the 1990s at ages 4 and 5 by Norton True**
- **Sybelle Almodovar and Evelyn Selimaj--along with their brother--allege they were molested in Connecticut by Orlando Afanador starting in 1988**
- **Both suits say the abuse was reported to the church and then swept under the rug**

By [Ap](#) and [Josh Gardner for MailOnline](#)

Published: 16:06 GMT, 2 October 2014 | Updated: 20:24 GMT, 2 October 2014

Two bombshell lawsuits filed against the Jehovah's Witnesses allege 'an insidious...epidemic' of child sex abuse within the church with roots at least as far back as the 1980s.

Two sisters in Vermont and a group of three siblings in Connecticut are suing the secretive church, local branches and the 'ministerial servants' they say molested them in the 80s and 90s with no repercussions from church elders, despite both groups having reported the abuse.

The suits are among several that co-attorney Irwin Zalkin says his firm has filed in Connecticut, Vermont and three other states.



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Revelations? Along with her sister Sybelle Almodovar (right), Evelyn Selimaj (left) is suing the Jehovah's Witness church over claims she and her sister were sexually assaulted in the 1980s and 1990s by a church 'ministerial servant'



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Their brother Ferdinand Almodovar (right in an undated family photo) is also suing. The siblings all say the church knew what had happened and did nothing. There is one of several related lawsuits attorney Irwin Zalkin says have been or will be filed soon which name the church

'This is an insidious problem, an epidemic problem with child sex abuse within this organization that so far seems more concerned about protecting its reputation from scandal than about the children,' Zalkin told the [Hartford Courant](#).

Along with Thomas McNamara, Zalkin is suing the East Spanish Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses New Haven and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York on behalf of Sybelle Almodovar, Evelyn Selimaj and Ferdinand Almodovar.

The siblings claim that over the course of five years, beginning in 1988, church ministerial servant Orlando Afanador sexually abused them while they were children living in New haven, Connecticut.



Named: Evelyn Selimaj and her siblings have accused Orlando Afanador (pictured) of molesting them repeatedly over the course of five years. He's since been convicted on an unrelated sex abuse charge in Nebraska and remains a registered sex offender

Afanador--who is a registered sex offender for a Nebraska offense, for which he served several years in prison--moved into the attic of the children's home with his wife and would babysit them while their mother worked nights.

According to the suit, he began coming into 8-year-old Sybelle's room and sexually assaulting her at night while 6-year-old Evelyn lay in fear nearby.

Mr. Almodovar's suit claims Afanador forced him into performing oral sex some 25 times.

Evelyn Selimaj said at a press conference Wednesday that, subsequent to the abuse, the family moved to the Dominican Republic and once there told elders at their new congregation about they'd endured.

She said the church did nothing.

'We are not the first and we are not the last ones that he abused,' Selimaj said. 'While we cannot get our childhood back one thing we hope this lawsuit will do is prevent another child from the devastation we faced.'

According to the Hartford Courant, co-attorney Thomas McNamara is also filing a suit on behalf of Bianca Martinez. Martinez lived in the same building as the Afanador and claims he molested her multiple times in New Haven.

Not far away, in Vermont, [Zalkin is representing](#) another set of siblings who say they were also sexually assaulted by church 'ministerial servants' as children.

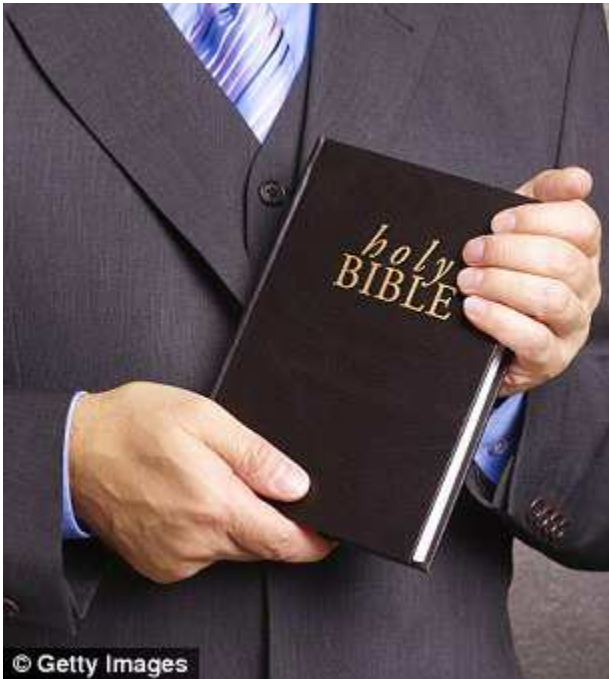
Miranda Lewis, 23, and Annessa Lewis, 27, say in their lawsuits that they were abused in the 1990s at ages 4 and 5 by Norton True, who they said the church knew had a history of sexually assaulting minors.



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'This is an insidious problem, an epidemic problem with child sex abuse within this organization that so far seems more concerned about protecting its reputation from scandal than about the children,' co-attorney for the Connecticut siblings--as well as their counterparts suing in Vermont--Irwin Zalkin said. The Jehovah's Witness Brooklyn headquarters are shown here

THE BIGGEST CHURCH YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT: BELIEFS OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES



There is one God Almighty--a Spirit Being with a body but not a human body. There is one God and no Trinity.

God created the heavens and earth in six days, but each 'day' is equal to thousands of years. God created and controls all processes and events.

Christ is Lord and Savior, but not God (Jehovah) incarnate, not a God-man but inferior to God. No soul remains after death.

The original sin caused humans to inherit death and sin.

Abortion is wrong. Homosexuality is a serious sin. Gender roles are defined: Men are the head of the household and women are loving caretakers.

Service in the armed forces or any form of allegiance to government is prohibited.

Blood transfusions are considered wrong, as God said the soul is in the blood. Bone marrow transplants are left to the individual conscience.

source: beliefnet.com

They have sued True, the Bellows Falls congregation of the Jehovah's Witnesses and its governing body, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York. They say their mother reported the allegations to the congregation but no action was taken against True.

The congregation and the Watchtower Bible and Track Society of New York did not return messages seeking comment. True could not be reached; there is no phone listing for him in Vermont.

Miranda Lewis on Tuesday attended a press conference with lawyer Jerome O'Neill, who has won millions of dollars in settlements for plaintiffs in priest sex abuse cases against the Vermont's Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington.



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Speaking out: Miranda Lewis, 23, said Tuesday she and her sister were molested multiple times by 'ministerial servant' Norton True in the 1990s and that the church was told and did nothing. She is suing for an undisclosed sum



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Pictured as a child: Miranda Lewis said she was molested multiple times by True, the first time at age 4 after a church meeting, when he stopped her from exiting the room

Lewis said she was molested multiple times by True, the first time at age 4 after a church meeting, when he stopped her from exiting the room.

Annessa Lewis said she was molested by True at age 4 while he was babysitting her at his home.

Their mother reported the allegations to the elders of the congregation, but they took no apparent action against True and did not report the allegations to police or a child protective agency, the lawsuit said.

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'Defendants Bellows Falls Congregation and Watchtower, by their actions and choices not to take action, ratified, authorized and approved of Defendant True's sexual molestation of children,' the complaint said.

The lawsuits seek unspecified damages.

HISTORIC \$28 MILLION AWARD: IS A WINNING 2012 CLAIM AGAINST THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES THE BLUEPRINT FOR NEWEST LAWSUIT?

A Northern California jury awarded \$28 million in damages to a woman who said the Jehovah's Witnesses allowed an adult member of a Fremont, California, church to molest her when she was a child.

In the summer of 2012, Alameda County jurors awarded \$7 million in compensatory damages on Wednesday and an additional \$21 million in punitive damages on Thursday to the plaintiff, Candace Conti.

'This is the largest jury verdict for a single victim in a religious child abuse case in the country,' Mr. Simons said.



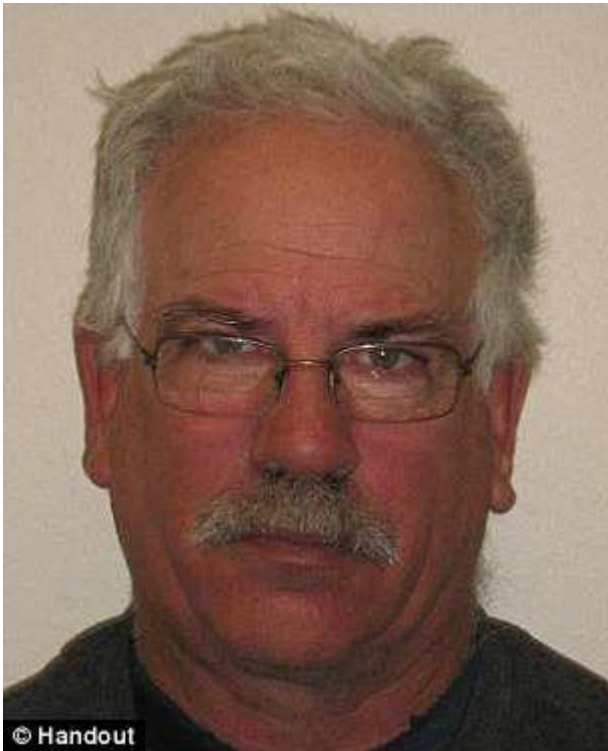
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Historic award: In the summer of 2012, Alameda County jurors awarded \$7 million in compensatory damages on Wednesday and an additional \$21 million in punitive damages on Thursday to the plaintiff, Candace Conti (pictured)

In her lawsuit, Ms. Conti, 26, said that in 1995 and 1996, when she was 9 and 10 years old and a member of the North Fremont Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, she was repeatedly molested by a fellow congregant, Jonathan Kendrick.

Ms. Conti has identified herself publicly to encourage other victims of sexual abuse to come forward, Mr. Simons said.



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The man Conti named: Mr. Jonathan Kendrick was never criminally charged in the case involving Ms. Conti, but he was also convicted in 2004 of lewd or lascivious acts with a child, records show

“Nothing can bring back my childhood,” Ms. Conti told The Oakland Tribune. “But through this and through, hopefully, a change in their policy, we can make something good come out of it.”

Ms. Conti also said in her lawsuit that the Christian denomination’s national leaders formed a policy in 1989 that instructed the church’s elders to keep child sex abuse accusations secret. Congregation elders followed that policy when Mr. Kendrick was convicted in 1994 of misdemeanor child molestation in Alameda County, according to Mr. Simons.

Mr. Kendrick was never criminally charged in the case involving Ms. Conti, but he was also convicted in 2004 of lewd or lascivious acts with a child, records show.

Mr. Kendrick, 58, now lives in Oakley, Calif., according to the state’s sex offender registry. He was ordered to pay 60 percent of the judgment, but Mr. Simons said there would be no attempt to collect any money from Mr. Kendrick, in part because he would not be able to pay. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York — the organization overseeing the Jehovah’s Witnesses — would be responsible for 40 percent, Mr. Simons said.

Jim McCabe, a lawyer for the congregation, said he planned to appeal the jury’s decision.

“The Jehovah’s Witnesses hate child abuse and believe it’s a plague on humanity,” Mr. McCabe said. “Jonathan Kendrick was not a leader or a pastor. He was just a rank-and-file member. This is a tragic case where a member of a religious group has brought liability on the group for actions he alone may have taken.”

Read more:

- [Jehovah's Witness congregation sued for alleged child abuse | Vermont - WPTZ Home](#)
- [Siblings Sue Jehovah's Witnesses Over Alleged Child Sex Abuse - Hartford Courant](#)



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[Rowley](#), Moscow, 1 day ago

I was raised as a Jehovah's Witness. It was the worst aspect of my childhood by far. I was taught that all other churches were controlled by Satan and that, before the end of the 20th century, God was due to execute, at the Battle of Armageddon, all the world's non Jehovah's Witnesses. I simply suffered nightmares. Others have died through refusing blood transfusions, been shunned by family and friends for leaving the organisation, or as described here, been sexually abused and had their cries for help callously ignored.

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