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Friend says church shunned family before murder-suicide

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(WJBK) - Police say a Keego Harbor woman killed her husband and two grown children before taking her own life.

A friend of the victims believe the family's religion is linked to the tragedy. Joyce Taylors outburst during Sunday services at the Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall in Union Lake was caught on camera.

"They were the nicest people, they would give their shirt off their back," she said. "That is how wonderful they were."

Investigators say last Friday 45-year-old Lauren Stuart shot and killed her husband Daniel, daughter Bethany and son Steven, both in their mid-20s.

Then, Lauren turned the gun on herself.

FOX 2: "Would you blame religion?"

"Yes absolutely, 100 percent," Taylor said.

Police aren't releasing a motive, but Joyce says it has everything to do with the family being shunned by the Jehovah's Witness Church that they belonged to for decades.

"They suffered the harsh consequences that every Jehovah's Witness faces when they choose to leave the religion," she said.

Joyce says she left the church 30 years ago and experienced shunning. She says that includes no communication with any family or friends still members of the church.

She says that's exactly what happened with the Stuarts.

"I can guarantee you straight on, if they were to have called their family, especially Danny, and if they recognized the phone number, they would not answer it," Joan said.

Joyce says Lauren Stuart confided in her often and most of those conversations had to do with the pain caused by the separation with the church.

"The church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, they were hog wild after them, just brutal," she said.

She says the church smeared the family's name, accused them of breaking into the church. And it also forbids any family or friends from association with the Stuart family.

We reached out to the local Jehovah's Witness church and their headquarters in New York. FOX 2 did not hear back with them in time for this story.

FOX 2: "Why did they want to silence you?"

"Because I was telling the truth," Joan said.