



How Jehovah's Witness leaders are responding to child abuse scrutiny

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Besieged by reports that Jehovah's Witnesses shield child sexual abusers from prosecution, the religion's top leadership appears to have settled on a strategy: "Let the story die."

A Portuguese news documentary

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UE3--fnSH8>) released in October was yet another report from across the globe to detail the Witnesses' policy of not reporting child abusers to law enforcement. As in other media reports, top officials refused to speak to the journalists who produced it.

After it aired, however, David Splane, a member of the Witnesses' Governing Body, spoke to 600 congregations from the religion's Portuguese headquarters in Carnaxide, according to TVI, the station that aired the documentary. Splane's talk provided a window (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XK9T4TlSYk>) into how Jehovah's Witnesses leaders are handling the scrutiny.

“Now, sometimes, the brothers will call New York and say, ‘Why don’t you do something about this? This was a terrible program,’ ” said Splane, who was visiting from global headquarters in Brooklyn. “What do you want us to do? The journalist has a closed mind. The journalist isn’t interested in the truth. And so we usually just leave things as they are and let the story die.”

The documentary, “In the Shadow of Sin (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UE3--fnSH8>),” was based on the Witnesses’ own internal documents.

“Slanderous, negative remarks that people were making about Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Jehovah’s Witnesses weren’t there to defend themselves,” Splane said.

Ana Leal, the journalist who reported the story, said she sent numerous emails to the Witnesses and went to the organization’s Portuguese headquarters asking for their participation before the documentary aired. After Splane’s remarks in November, Leal went back and tried again.

In a follow-up report (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XK9T4TlSYyk>), Leal said the Witnesses let her through the gates of their compound, only to tell her, “We have nothing to add.”

Talk about déjà vu.

Reveal has been reporting on the Witnesses’ child abuse policies (<https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-use-1st-amendment-to-hide-child-sex-abuse-claims/>) since last year. I’ve called and emailed the Witnesses’ office of public information

dozens of times. I've phoned the homes of top officials, including members of the Governing Body. I've flown to New York twice and walked into the Witnesses' global headquarters to request interviews. No one would talk.

Both times at headquarters, I asked to visit the office of public information on the fourth floor, and was told to have a seat in the lobby and wait for the courtesy phone on the wall to ring.

Each time, I waited 30 minutes before a secretary named Bryce called down to inform me that there would be no comment. He would not let me come up to his office to discuss why. When I asked Bryce for his last name, he refused to give it.

Hours before we published our first story in February, the Watchtower sent a brief statement in lieu of an interview. It said Jehovah's Witnesses abhor child abuse and comply with secular laws.

Two weeks after that story went live, another Governing Body member, Stephen Lett, [posted a video](https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witness-leader-says-child-sex-abuse-claims-are-lies/) (<https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witness-leader-says-child-sex-abuse-claims-are-lies/>) on the Witnesses' website, dismissing reports that the organization is permissive toward child abusers. He called such reports "apostate-driven lies" and "false stories that are designed to separate us from Jehovah's organization."

"Because any human who tries to get us to compromise Bible principles really is an agent of Satan," he said.

Lett also refused to grant an interview.

Splane told followers in Portugal that Jehovah is already dealing with the misinformation spread by journalists.

“He sends his Witnesses out from door to door to correct the record,” he said, referring to the doorstep preaching campaigns for which the organization is known.

Jehovah's Witnesses leaders have said publicly that they are proud of their child protection policies and that they do more to shield young members from harm than other religions. Despite mounting lawsuits and media reports, however, they have failed to acknowledge that the organization has hidden child abuse from secular authorities around the world for decades.

They haven't expressed outrage over the abuse of their children. Or given indications that they'll be changing their policies. Instead, they've made one thing clear: They want the press to go away.

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