

NEWS

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**Victim of Childhood Sexual Abuse Awarded \$13.5 Million Default Judgment
Against the Jehovah's Witnesses National Organization the Watchtower
*Childhood Victim Suffered Sexual Abuse from his Bible Study Teacher and
Ordained Minister of the Jehovah's Witnesses***

San Diego, CA, October 31, 2014 – San Diego Superior Court Judge Joan M. Lewis has entered a judgment against the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. (Watchtower) for \$13.5 million in punitive and compensatory damages in a civil lawsuit filed by the Zalkin Law Firm on behalf of a victim of sexual abuse who was a child member of the Linda Vista Spanish Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1986.

The case involved child sexual abuse by a serial child sexual predator within two local San Diego congregations of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Zalkin Law Firm filed this civil lawsuit in February of 2013 (Case No: 37-2012-00099849-CU-PO-CTL). The plaintiff, Jose Lopez, was a minor child whose family was active in the congregation at the time of the alleged abuse. In her ruling at the end of trial on Thursday, Judge Lewis found the conduct of the governing corporate leader, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. and its governing body's efforts to cover up the abuse and protect the perpetrator "reprehensible and reckless".

"Mr. Lopez has suffered for years as a result of this horrendous abuse and we are pleased that he will finally receive justice and compensation as a result of Judge Lewis' strong ruling against the Watchtower," said Irwin Zalkin, attorney representing Mr. Lopez. "The Watchtower has ignored sexual abuse complaints from its members for years, choosing to protect sexual predators and not children. This ruling may hopefully awake the Jehovah's Witnesses leadership to the standards of morality and care for children that our society demands."

In a highly unusual case, Judge Lewis had entered a default judgment against the corporate head of the Jehovah's Witnesses after it refused to obey court orders to produce documents that would show the depth and breadth of the problem of sexual abuse of children within congregations of the

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Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the United States. In addition, Watchtower refused a court order to produce the longest serving member of its governing body for a deposition.

Both the Fourth District Court of Appeals, and the California Supreme Court rebuffed Watchtower's efforts the reverse Judge Lewis' orders on these matters. Despite the decision of the Appeals Court and the California Supreme Court, Watchtower refused to produce the documents or the witness.

California law permits the court to strike the answer of a defendant that refuses to abide by a court order and to enter a default judgment against them. After giving Watchtower every opportunity to comply with her order, Judge Lewis issued the terminating sanction and entered a default judgment against Watchtower. She then ordered the Zalkin Law Firm lawyers for the victim to prove their case by putting on evidence to support the allegations of the victim's complaint.

After hearing six days of testimony and presentation of written evidence, Judge Lewis was satisfied that the Plaintiff had more that adequately proved his case. Accordingly, she issued a judgment in favor of the Plaintiff in the amount of \$13,500,000.00 that includes an award of \$10,500,000 in punitive damages intended to punish Watchtower for its reprehensible conduct.

The case itself involved a known serial child molester by the name of Gonzalo Campos. At the time he sexually abuse the plaintiff, Jose Lopez, in 1986, who was only 7 years old, he was an ordained minister of the Jehovah's Witnesses and had already abused four other children. Evidence in the case showed that Elders of the Linda Vista Congregation of the Jehovah's Witnesses were aware as early as 1982 that Campos was a child molester but chose to take no action against him. Further evidence showed that Church leaders did not report him to law enforcement, they did not warn other parents of the congregation, they never checked to see if he might be abusing other children of the congregation, they allowed him to give bible study to young children and ultimately recommended him to Jose's mother as someone Jose should study bible with.

According to the evidence presented in the case, after Campos spent months grooming Jose and sexually molesting him, Jose reported the molestation to his mother. She and her mentor, a senior female member of the congregation, reported the sexual abuse to a congregation elder appointed by Watchtower. That elder and another elder confirmed that the sexual abuse occurred. Both Jose's mother and her mentor were told by church leaders not to say anything that it would get handled. Nothing was done, and ultimately, Jose and his mother disassociated themselves from the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Case evidence presented in the trial further showed that despite the reports and confession by Campos of abusing a child in 1982 and Jose in 1986, he was allowed to remain in the congregation and over the next twelve years was actually elevated up the organizational ladder ultimately becoming an elder himself in 1993. During this time frame he has confessed to sexually abusing at least eight children.

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Documents and testimony in the case showed that elders and the Watchtower took no action for almost a year after receiving a written complaint in April of 1994 from a mother of one of the victims whose son was molested by Campos in approximately 1984. During this time as an elder, he continued to abuse young Jehovah's Witness children. Even after he was expelled as a known and confessed child molester, he was reinstated within a few years without any warning to parents of children within the congregation.

After hearing testimony from numerous witnesses and seeing dozens of documents, Judge Lewis stated that the testimony of many of the elders and experts of the Jehovah's Witnesses was not credible and appeared to cover up the truth.

“Rather than reaching out to victims, the leadership of the Jehovah's Witnesses consistently treats victims as adversaries. They circle their wagons and attack the victim”, said Zalkin, who has filed cases in five other states on behalf of other Jehovah's Witnesses childhood sexual abuse victims. “This court ruling is a clear condemnation of the disgraceful conduct of this organization, conduct that is totally contrary to what one would expect from a religious institution that promotes itself as living in the Truth.”

About The Zalkin Law Firm

With offices in San Diego and New York, The Zalkin Law Firm (www.zalkin.com) is one of the premier sexual abuse and personal injury law firms in the country. The firm's lawyers have represented hundreds of survivors of childhood sexual abuse and achieved groundbreaking results in numerous high-profile clergy abuse cases across the United States.

The Zalkin Law Firm has aggressively represented hundreds of survivors of child sexual abuse, including former Boy Scouts. The firm has negotiated over \$200 million in settlements in Catholic clergy sex abuse cases. The firm currently has more than 20 active lawsuits against the Jehovah's Witnesses in five states, representing victims of childhood sexual abuse.

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