

Florida Pastor and Son Arrested in \$8 Million COVID Scam

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A Florida pastor and his son have been taken into custody for their part in fraudulently obtaining COVID relief funds totaling more than \$8 million to put a down payment on a mansion in Central Florida.

Father and son, Evan and Josh Edwards, were arrested at their home in New Smyrna Beach last week, five months after an NBC News report raised questions over why the two hadn't been charged in an alleged scam. Federal prosecutors first filed court papers in the case in Dec. 2020.

The federal government seized over \$7.6 million in assets from ASLAN International Ministry as part of a civil asset forfeiture for money launder and bank fraud offenses in Sept. 2020.

NBC News reported that Walter Gnida, a retired truck driver and part-time accountant, was 88 years old and suffering from dementia when his name appeared on a loan application filed by Josh Edwards on behalf of ASLAN, which was seeking millions of dollars in federal COVID relief money.

"It's an utter betrayal," Gnida's son, Kevin, told NBC News earlier this week from his home in Canada. "I know with 100% confidence that my dad would have never participated in this. I'm glad they got caught."

The Paycheck Protection Program loan application stated that ALSAN International Ministry employed 486 people. In the indictment documents, however, federal prosecutors revealed

that both members of the Edwards family knew that the actual number of employees was “significantly lower, or entirely non-existent.”

NBC News reported that the Edwards family “sought to use some of the money they received from the federal government to buy a \$3.7 million, 4,700-square-foot home in a new Disney World development called Golden Oaks.”

The deal, however, never materialized, and authorities recovered all of the COVID money.

The Edwards’ were Christian missionaries from Canada who lived in Turkey for several years before moving to Florida in 2019. NBC News reported that they “ran a faith-based charity with a high-minded mission: to ‘communicate Christian love in doctrine and service to the poor.’”

Scripture addresses deception much like the Edwards’ have perpetrated: “For such people do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own appetites, and through smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting,” (Rom. 16:18).

Psalms 36:3 reads, “The words of their mouth are wickedness and deceit; they have ceased to be wise and to do good.”

During the investigation, feds showed up at ASLAN International’s offices in Orlando, but the door was locked and workers at the neighboring businesses told them nobody was ever seen inside, NBC News reported. A review of the ministry’s website found that the donation links were inactive and section of text were apparently lifted from other religious sites, a complaint filed against the ministry read.

NBC News reported that “Evan Edwards was wheeled out of the house in a wheelchair. Agents escorted Josh Edwards out of the home and into a law enforcement vehicle, his hands cuffed behind his back.”

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Shawn A. Akers *is the online editor for Charisma Media.*