

Fugitive Polygamous Sect Leader Finally Apprehended

A fugitive leader of the polygamous Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sect, who had been on the run for almost a year, was captured by authorities, officials said.

Lyle Jeffs, 57, was arrested on June 14 in the small South Dakota city of Yankton, about 80 miles (130 km) southwest of Sioux Falls. He had been living out of a Ford pickup truck there for at least two weeks, Eric Barnhart, special agent in charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Salt Lake City office, said at a press conference.

Jeffs had been on the run since he slipped out of an ankle monitor and fled house arrest on June 18, 2016, in Salt Lake City, where he was awaiting trial with other leaders of the religious sect on charges they diverted money from a federal government food assistance program for the poor.

"When you flee a federal indictment, the long arm of the law will eventually catch up to you and bring you back to justice," Utah U.S. Attorney John Huber said at the press conference.

A member of the public, who has not been named, spotted Jeffs and tipped off local law enforcement on Wednesday. He was arrested without incident and booked into Minnehaha County Jail, where he is awaiting extradition to Utah.

Jeffs will likely face additional felony charges for fleeing prosecution, Hubert said.

The FBI and local authorities are investigating whether anyone helped Jeffs, as well as where, besides Yankton, he spent the past year.

Lyle Jeffs is a brother of Warren Jeffs, who is considered the prophet of the religious sect and is serving a sentence of up to life in prison plus 20 years in Texas for illegally marrying and sexually abusing underage girls.

FLDS is based in Hildale, Utah, and Colorado City, Arizona. It is an offshoot of the mainstream Salt Lake City-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormon church, which renounced polygamy in 1890 and is not affiliated with the FLDS.

Prosecutors allege that 11 FLDS leaders, including Lyle Jeffs, conspired to defraud the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or food stamps, and conspired to commit money laundering.

Lyle Jeffs pleaded not guilty to the two-count indictment in February 2016. He fled house arrest by using olive oil to slip a GPS tracking bracelet off his ankle, the FBI said. {eoa}