

Word of Faith Fellowship Accused of Trafficking Slave Labor From Brazil

Word of Faith Fellowship in North Carolina has been accused of funneling in slave labor from sister churches in Brazil.

“They trafficked us up here. They knew what they were doing. They needed labor and we were cheap labor—[expletive], free labor,” says Andre Oliveira, who came to America from Brazil.

The newest report from the Associated Press claims Jam and Sam Whaley were part of a trafficking scheme that forced Brazil’s Word of Faith congregation members to come to the United States on a tourist visa.

Word of Faith would allegedly take away their passports and traveling documents once they arrived. Then, the Brazilians would be used as slave labor to clean warehouses for the secretive evangelical church, later toiling at businesses owned by senior ministers.

The AP reports that any deviation from the rules risked the wrath of church leaders, Oliveira says, ranging from beatings to shaming from the pulpit. Oliveira says he was forced into this system.

“They kept us as slaves,” Oliveira said, pausing at times to wipe away tears. “We were expendable. We meant nothing to them. Nothing. How can you do that to people – claim you love them and then beat them in the name of God?”

Headlines thrust the North Carolina into the spotlight when an expose claimed 43 members were suing the church for various forms abuse, including violent exorcisms.

Jane Whaley reportedly tried to “purify” sinners and cast out

devils by a process known as “blasting,” an ear-piercing verbal onslaught often conducted in hours-long sessions.

Word of Faith Fellowship justifies the practice with Scriptures like Acts 2:2 and Exodus 15:8.

“I saw so many people beaten over the years. Little kids punched in the face, called Satanists,” former member Katherine Fetachu told The Associated Press.

The Whaleys and the congregation maintain the AP is intentionally targeting them, and listening to former members who seek vengeance.

“The whole set of AP articles are targeted to incite hate crimes against us at Word of Faith Fellowship,” according to a church statement. “We have received multiple threats. It appears that the accusers want the church doors closed, but they also want businesses closed. The church owns no businesses, and this ought to be against the law. If they will do this to us, what will they do to you and others?”

The attorney for the church, Joshua B. Farmer, says that despite multiple investigations, the church continues to be found not guilty of the various accusations.

“Our church has been the target of religious bigotry and persecution for several decades. One-sided media stories with salacious headlines established the narrative and attempted to hang us on the ‘cult’ label,” Farmer says in his statement. “...Despite the adversity, our church, its leaders and its members have been vindicated at every point.” {eoa}