IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF JACKSON COUNTY, MISSOURI

LAWRENCE LUCKY, an individual, Plaintiff, vs. KANSAS CITY STAR COMPANY, a corporation, JUDY THOMAS, an individual, JUSTIN WERNER, an individual, Defendants.	Case Number: **Plaintiff Demands Trial By Jury**

PETITION FOR DEFAMATION

Plaintiff Lawrence Lucky, for his petition, states as follows:

Parties, Jurisdiction, and Venue

1. Plaintiff Lawrence Lucky ("Lucky") is a natural person residing in Cass County, Missouri. He is the owner of Scriptones LLC and American Joe Coffee, two businesses based in the Kansas City Metropolitan area. He is also an inventor with two issued patents.

2. Defendant Kansas City Star Company is a business located in Kansas City, Missouri. Its principal place of business is 1601 McGee Street, Kansas City, MO 64108.

3. Defendant Judy Thomas is a natural person who, on information and belief, resides in Missouri.

4. Defendant Justin Werner is a natural person who, on information and belief, resides in Missouri.

5. Venue is proper in Jackson County for all Defendants because Kansas City Star Company's headquarters is located in Jackson County and all Defendants reside in the state of Missouri.

Factual Allegations

6. Werner was a troubled youth. At the age of 11, Werner molested another child ("John Doe 1") in the state of Minnesota. On information and belief, Werner's father reported Werner's sexual abuse to police, and Werner was charged and convicted.

7. Shortly after this, Werner's family moved to Missouri.

8. In 2008 Werner met Lucky through the International House of Prayer, Kansas City ("IHOPKC").

9. From 2008 until the beginning of 2010, Lucky held a paid staff position with IHOPKC related to IT and music. In addition to his paid staff responsibilities, Lucky volunteered with youth ministries during this same time. Lucky and Werner occasionally interacted in group settings between 2008 and 2010.

10. Lucky and Werner never met one on one for private meetings between 2008 and 2010.

11. In February 2010, Lucky accepted a new job as a recording engineer and production manager for a record label.

12. After accepting the new position, Lucky voluntarily left his job at IHOPKC.

13. Between 2010 and 2022, Lucky did occasionally continue to play bass at IHOPKC even after leaving his paid staff position.

14. In 2011, Werner was hired to do IT and website design for the same record label where Lucky had been hired a year prior.

15. At the time Werner began working with Lucky at the record label, Lucky had not been volunteering with IHOPKC youth ministries for nearly a year.

16. In August 2011, after Werner and Lucky began working together at the record label and after Werner's had already turned eighteen, Werner asked Lucky if they could begin meeting privately outside of work.

17. Werner was the one actively and persistently seeking to meet with Lucky outside of work.

18. Werner and Lucky's first private meeting took place on August 19, 2011, when Werner was an adult.

19. Between August 19, 2011, and November 22, 2011, Werner and Lucky met approximately eight to ten times. Audio recordings exist for four of these meetings.

20. In their private meetings, Werner confessed that he had sexually abused John Doe 1 and harbored resentment against his father for reporting Werner's sexual abuse to police. Werner also confessed that he was worried he, now being an adult, would sexually abuse minor boys again.

21. Werner also used these private meetings to discuss his sexual attraction to men.

22. Werner's demeanor and intent for these meetings seemed to shift over time. Unfortunately, Lucky was a victim of sexual abuse as a child and still processing his trauma. Therefore, Lucky, while celibate, harbored bi-curious desires. Over time, Werner encouraged Lucky to test these sexual desires with him, and, after several meetings, Lucky agreed.

23. Werner and Lucky met approximately two to four times to engage in consensual sexual acts.

24. Lucky never videotaped any of their sexual encounters.

25. On November 22, 2011, Werner suggested, and Lucky agreed, that they should stop meeting privately.

26. After November 22, 2011, Werner and Lucky continued to work amicably in a professional capacity, but never again had sexual contact.

27. Werner invited Lucky to his wedding in 2013.

28. Lucky was surprised when he learned the identity of Werner's fiancée as Werner had previously told Lucky he had sexual interactions with minor boys ("John Doe 2" and "John Doe 3") related to his fiancée. Lucky did not attend the wedding but did send a gift.

29. Lucky later learned that Werner did not tell his fiancée about Werner's prior sexual relationship with Lucky or minor John Does 1 through 3.

30. Werner was an adult when he began to pursue Lucky.

31. Lucky and Werner had no sexual encounters until after Werner was an adult and they were working together as professional colleagues. The only sexual contact Lucky and Werner ever had with one another happened between August 19, 2011, and November 22, 2011, as described above.

32. Werner and Lucky only engaged in consensual sexual contact.

33. Other than his prior abuse, Lucky's brief sexual experimentation with Werner was and is the only time Lucky has ever had any type of sexual contact with another male.

34. Additionally, Lucky's brief sexual experimentation with Werner was the only sexual acts Lucky ever had before marriage with anyone.

35. Lucky married his wife in 2020. Prior to his marriage, Lucky was transparent with his wife about his sexual past with Werner.

36. The last time Lucky remembers communicating with Werner was 2013 regarding Werner's wedding.

Werner's false allegations to police

37. In July 2022, Werner filed a false police incident report with the Kansas City police ("KCPD") claiming that Lucky committed statutory rape by having sex with Werner in 2010 when Werner was 16. Werner's police incident report did not claim that his sexual contact with Lucky was forced, and there was no suggestion that it was unwanted. Instead, Werner claimed that the consensual sexual contact happened when Werner was underage.

38. Werner later suggested that these rapes occurred in "counseling" sessions that were somehow connected to Lucky's job at IHOPKC.

39. Lucky was blindsided and shocked by these salacious and utterly false allegations.

40. Any meeting between Werner and Lucky between 2008 and 2010 always had other people present and never included any sexual contact.

41. Further, Lucky was and has never been a counselor. His position at the church was primarily IT and music related. He was not an ordained minister or licensed counselor.

42. It was only after Werner was an adult and he and Lucky were coworkers in a professional setting that they engaged in consensual sexual activity.

43. Moreover, Werner was consistently the individual who initiated the meetings and pursued sexual contact with Lucky. The record aptly demonstrated that Werner was encouraging their continued meeting and driving the sexual nature of these encounters.

44. Police investigated Werner's allegations over the course of a year. The police investigation found no evidence to support Werner's claims that Lucky was guilty of rape or sexual assault. Instead, the evidence conclusively supported Lucky's innocence. Werner stated everything

that they did was consensual, and Werner was found to have been a consenting adult at the time of their sexual interactions. This is why Lucky was never arrested and never charged with any criminal wrongdoing. Werner further admitted to police that he was sexually fulfilled by his encounters with Lucky.

45. On August 9, 2023, KCPD informed Lucky that, due to the investigation yielding no evidence supporting Werner's allegations, they were closing the case and not filing charges.

46. After a year of anxiety, fear, and trepidation, Lucky and his family thought the matter was finally behind them, and they could move on with their lives. Unfortunately, Werner was not finished with his vicious defamatory campaign.

Werner and the Kansas City Star partner to destroy Lucky's reputation

47. Despite Werner's claims already having been debunked by the KCPD, Werner decided to recycle his defamatory lies to Judy Thomas, reporter for the Kansas City Star, in the summer of 2024.

48. Thomas had recently published a series of articles about clergy sexual abuse, and specifically sexual misconduct at IHOPKC. Thus, Werner framed his defamatory allegations to Thomas as another example of sexual abuse sanctioned by IHOPKC.

49. Werner told Thomas that, while serving as an IHOPKC "counselor," Lucky sexually abused him, raped him, and other related allegations.

50. On or around this time, Thomas and Werner also contacted other former members of the student ministries, seeking to recast innocent interactions as sexual, provocative, and inappropriate for the purposes of making Werner's claims of sexual abuse seem both likely and widespread.

51. On July 30, 2024, Thomas contacted Lucky, asking questions related to claims about Lucky's involvement in student ministries between 2008 and 2010, and specifically about claims by Werner that Lucky had abused him in early 2010 when Werner was 16 years old.

52. Lucky responded to Thomas the following day providing evidence that Lucky's private meetings with Werner began in August 2011, after Werner had already turned 18. Further, the evidence provided to Thomas showed that Lucky and Werner were coworkers at the time they met privately and had been for several months. Lucky also provided Thomas with evidence showing that Werner not only had a history of lying in general, but a record of lying and deception about his sexual history.

53. Notably, the evidence Lucky provided to Thomas was the corroborating evidence provided to the KCPD and on which the police relied for their decision not to pursue charges against Lucky.

54. Lucky is now aware that the allegations surfaced to law enforcement a second time in 2024. Despite finding no probable cause, the investigative detective sent the case to the prosecutor for review with a blank probable cause statement. The prosecutor declined to press charges due to insufficient evidence and no probable cause.

55. Prior to publication, Thomas claims to have had the police report from the KCPD. Under Missouri law, law enforcement may not release investigative reports until cases are closed. Thus, at the time of publication, Thomas would have already known that police had determined not to press charges against Lucky.

56. Thomas also selectively quoted portions of messages to make them appear to have a different meaning than when read in context. For example, Thomas selectively quoted a message

trying to schedule a group gathering to play video games to make it seem like Werner and Lucky were scheduling a one-on-one meeting and that Lucky was the one initiating the request to meet.

57. But Thomas wasn't about to let the truth get in the way of a good story.

58. Thomas went on to publish five articles containing numerous defamatory claims about Lucky.

59. Thomas's first article, published August 11, 2024, was titled "Former IHOPKC teens allege sexual misconduct by youth group leader. Was it covered up?." A true and correct copy of this article is attached to this petition as Exhibit A ("Article 1").

60. Article 1 falsely claimed that:

- Multiple individuals alleged Lucky engaged in sexual abuse.
- Werner endured "sexual abuse" "at the hands of his volunteer youth group leader," Lucky.
- Werner's parents sent Werner to Lucky for "private counseling when he was going through puberty and struggling with sexuality issues."
- Lucky raped Werner in 2010 during private counseling sessions when Werner was 16.
- Two other IHOPKC youth described personal incidents similar to Werner's allegations.
- Lucky had a sleepover with teen boys at his duplex in south Kansas City on Jan. 16, 2009.
- Lucky showered alone with boys.
- Lucky filmed sexual encounters with Justin on a video recorder.
- Lucky told Justin to keep their sexual encounters secret.
- Lucky was banned from IHOPKC facilities and programs.

61. Thomas's second article, published August 20, 2024, was titled "IHOPKC says it banned youth group leader accused of abuse. He was still there years later." A true and correct copy of this article is attached to this petition as Exhibit B ("Article 2").

62. Article 2 falsely claimed that:

- Lucky sexually assaulted Werner in early 2010 when Werner was 16
- Lucky asked boys to shower nude with him "to cleanse them of their sins."

- Lucky was banned from IHOPKC.

63. Thomas's third article, published August 21, 2024, was titled "IHOPKC says outside firm to examine handling of abuse claims. Is it truly independent?" A true and correct copy of this article is attached to this petition as Exhibit C ("Article 3").

64. Article 3 falsely claimed that:

- Lucky was banned from IHOPKC over allegations of sexual misconduct with teen boys.
- Lucky sexually abused Werner in 2010.
- Lucky raped Werner when Werner was 16 and seeing Lucky for private counseling at his home.
- Lucky asked teen boys to shower with him.

65. Thomas's fourth article, published September 11, 2024, was titled "Outside group with law enforcement expertise investigates handling of IHOPKC scandal." A true and correct copy of this article is attached to this petition as Exhibit D ("Article 4").

66. Article 4 falsely claimed that:

- Lucky had inappropriate sexual contact with teenage boys.
- Werner was sexually abused by Lucky in 2010.

67. Thomas's fifth article, published October 17, 2024, was titled "Prosecutor won't file sex abuse charges against former IHOPKC volunteer youth group leader." A true and correct copy of this article is attached to this petition as Exhibit E ("Article 5").

68. Article 5 falsely claimed that:

- Lucky had sexual contact with Werner when he was 16 and 17.
- Lucky took boys to the gym and asked them to shower nude with him.
- Lucky was "terminated" from his positions at IHOPKC on February 28, 2010.
- Lucky was banned from IHOPKC.
- Lucky was still under investigation after the case was declined and cleared by the prosecutor on October 15, 2024.

69. To be clear, Lucky never sexually abused or raped anyone. Lucky never showered alone with boys. Werner's parents never sent Werner to Lucky for counseling about puberty or otherwise. Besides Werner's claims starting in 2022, no one has ever accused Lucky of rape or sexual assault. Lucky was never asked to leave or banned from IHOPKC. Lucky never filmed sexual encounters with Werner. And police investigated Werner's claims in 2022, 2023, and 2024, and determined Werner was a consenting adult at the time of the incidents he described. The case was reviewed and authorities declined to prosecute twice—once by the KCPD and a second time by the Jackson County Prosecutor.

70. Despite numerous facts and evidence in her possession that put her on notice the falsity of Werner's claims and these outrageous allegations, Thomas published her defamatory allegations anyway.

71. In the Articles, Thomas repeatedly named Lucky, stated his occupation, listed his business, told people where Lucky lived, and made numerous insinuations to the public that Lucky was a dangerous child predator, groomer, and rapist.

72. Even more shameful, Werner is now profiting and glorying from his lies as a self-described victim's advocate "for boys and men abused in the church." Werner's self-aggrandizement based on his defamatory claims is despicable. On social media, Werner has described himself as a "hero," a "survivor," and "brave," for speaking out about his "abuse," clearly relishing the accolades and benefits he is receiving for his victim status. Unfortunately, his false claims discredit and cheapen the harm suffered by actual victims of church sexual abuse.

73. Meanwhile, the damage to Lucky's family, his reputation, his businesses, and his health from these lies has been catastrophic.

74. Due to these false and reprehensible claims, Lucky has become a pariah in his community. He and his wife have been shunned, threatened with physical violence, and live in fear of their safety. Lucky is no longer permitted to play music in local churches, musical projects he has been a part of are not being released for fear of backlash, and he and his family have been ostracized.

75. Lucky's sound mixing business declined precipitously immediately following the publication of the defamatory allegations and continues to suffer. A colleague posted one of the articles, which led the false allegations to be passed around co-workers, professional colleagues, and former employers in a small, tight-knit community which thrives on word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals from local film and TV producers, production managers, and peers.

76. Lucky's coffee business also suffered. The Kansas City Star sold paper copies of the defamatory articles in the same locations where Lucky's brand of coffee is sold, contributing to the sharp downturn in sales immediately after the Articles' publication. Other prospective business ventures and government partnerships halted as the false claims circulated among Lucky's business contacts.

77. Lucky and his wife have been singled out for derision and lost friends and community standing. They are excluded from social gatherings and have been cut off from other sources of community engagement. Lucky and his wife are both in therapy to try to deal with the aftermath, and they worry these lies are going to negatively impact their child and their ability to adopt or foster children in the future.

78. Lucky is being treated by both a psychologist and psychiatrist. He has been diagnosed with severe depression and PTSD and now takes psychotropic medication for his mental

health. Lucky's PTSD symptoms include disassociation, avoidance, hypervigilance, sleep disturbance, and a persistent negative state.

79. In short, Werner and Thomas's defamatory claims, made with knowledge they are false and maliciously to destroy Lucky and his family, have had their desired effect.

Count I – Libel/Defamation by Judy Thomas and the Kansas City Star

80. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

81. Thomas and the Kansas City Star published statements about Lucky.

82. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements accused Lucky of crimes, including rape, sexual assault, and sexual abuse as described above. Thomas and the Kansas City Star accused Lucky of despicable behavior including abusing children, grooming children for sexual abuse, and having been banned and fired from a church for the same. These false claims are of the nature that would tend to harm the reputation of another so as to lower him in the estimation of the community or deter third persons from associating or dealing with Lucky.

83. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements identified Lucky directly.

84. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements were false.

85. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements were not privileged.

86. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements were published with malice as Thomas knew they were false or had reckless disregard for their truth or falsity.

87. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements have caused Lucky actual damage, including loss of reputation, humiliation, scorn, ridicule, loss of business, and emotional harm.

88. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count I against Thomas and the Kansas City Star for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

Count II – Libel/Defamation by Justin Werner

89. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

90. Werner published statements to the Kansas City Star and others about Lucky.

91. Werner's statements accused Lucky of crimes, including rape, sexual assault, and sexual abuse as described above. Werner's false claims are of the nature that would tend to harm the reputation of another so as to lower him in the estimation of the community or deter third persons from associating or dealing with Lucky.

92. Werner's statements identified Lucky directly.

93. Werner's statements were false.

94. Werner's statements were published with malice as he knew they were false or had reckless disregard for their truth or falsity.

95. Werner's statements have caused Lucky actual damage, including loss of reputation, humiliation, scorn, ridicule, loss of business, and emotional harm.

96. Werner's statements were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count II against Defendant Werner for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

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Count III – Injurious Falsehood by Judy Thomas and the Kansas City Star

97. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

98. Thomas and the Kansas City Star published false statements about Lucky.

99. Thomas and the Kansas City Star intended for publication of his statements to result in harm to interests of Lucky having a pecuniary value, or either recognized or should have recognized that it was likely to do so.

100. Thomas and the Kansas City Star knew that its statements were false or acted in reckless disregard of the statements' truth or falsity.

101. As a result, Lucky has suffered pecuniary loss.

102. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's statements were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count III against Thomas and the Kansas City Star for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

Count IV – Injurious Falsehood by Justin Werner

103. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

104. Werner published false statements about Lucky.

105. Werner intended for publication of his statements to result in harm to interests of Lucky having a pecuniary value, or either recognized or should have recognized that his statements were likely to do so.

106. Werner knew that its statements were false or acted in reckless disregard of the statements' truth or falsity.

107. As a result, Lucky has suffered pecuniary loss.

108. Werner's statements were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count IV against Defendant Werner for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

Count V – Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress by Thomas and the Kansas City Star

109. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

110. Thomas and the Kansas City Star acted intentionally or recklessly.

111. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's conduct was extreme and outrageous.

112. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's conduct caused and continues to cause Lucky extreme and severe emotional distress.

113. The extreme and severe emotional distress caused by Thomas and the Kansas City Star has caused Lucky bodily harm.

114. Thomas and the Kansas City Star's acts were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count V against Defendants Thomas and the Kansas City Star for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

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Count VI – Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress by Justin Werner

115. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference as if set forth fully within all preceding paragraphs.

116. Werner acted intentionally or recklessly.

117. Werner's conduct was extreme and outrageous.

118. Werner's conduct caused and continues to cause Lucky extreme and severe emotional distress.

119. The extreme and severe emotional distress caused by Werner has caused Lucky bodily harm.

120. Werner's acts were outrageous because of evil motive or reckless indifference.

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment on Count VI against Defendant Werner for such damages that are fair and reasonable, including punitive damages, which sum is in excess of $25,000.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: February 5, 2025

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Exhibit “A”

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

IHOPKC says it banned youth group leader accused of abuse. He was still there years later

Jody L. Thomas
Tue, August 30, 2022 at 10:00 AM CDT · 10 min read

Reality Check is a live series holding those with power to account and shining a light on their decisions. Have a suggestion for a Reality Check? Email our journalists at RealityCheck@kcur.com.

International House of Prayer Kansas City leaders scrambled to respond this month when a man **sent public with allegations** that he was sexually abused as a teen by his volunteer youth group leader.

IHOPKC denied that Larry Lucky had led a youth group or had any key role in its Student Ministries program. It said Lucky had been playing bass and singing in worship team in the organization's 24/7 Prayer Room and was dismissed in 2010 after a parent reported he was having inappropriate contact with teen boys, alleging that he was showering with them at a local gym.

But evidence is stacking up that contradicts IHOPKC's description of Lucky's involvement with the global prayer movement. Facebook posts in 2008 and 2009 show Lucky was a youth group leader. He was listed on the youth group media posts and archived videos show that Lucky was playing in the all-night Prayer Room in south Kansas City years beyond the date IHOPKC said he was terminated, leaving many to question whether he ever was dismissed at all.

Even IHOPKC says it doesn't know who made the decision to ban Lucky or why was told about it. It is unknown if the Star on Friday afternoon, IHOPKC said leadership was still seeking answers to many questions about the allegations against Lucky.

Regarding Mr. Lucky performing in the Prayer Room beyond that date (2010), we have recently learned that, in 2016, the Intern Room leaders, unaware of Mr. Lucky's removal, allowed him to play bass," IHOPKC told The Star. "He was removed from that worship team as soon as a leader with knowledge of the allegations became aware."

But that still doesn't explain the documentation — including videos and Facebook posts — that shows Lucky also performed at IHOPKC events in 2011, 2020 and 2021.

IHOPKC didn't have answers for those questions in Friday's response. It noted that even some former leaders said they didn't know Lucky was ever banned.

"Some former leaders do recall and others do not recall him being banned," it said. "We are working to uncover who made the banning decision and to whom it was communicated.

"With respect to your other questions about Mr. Lucky's involvement, we are working on confirming time and involvement from our records and other sources. We are also working to determine if the alleged conduct with any of different accounts of the involvement will be part of our investigation."

In Friday's response, IHOPKC said it is committed to handling the challenges that come with running an organization that has thousands of annual attendees and volunteers across several campuses.

"In recent years we have made updates to procedures and technology to detect and prevent individuals who have been banned from gaining unauthorized access to our facilities," said. "This includes our security team intercepting and removing banned individuals from the premises, formally trespassing them, and ensuring they are arrested by police if they return."

On Aug. 9, The Star reported allegations by Justin Werner, publicly saying for the first time that Lucky sexually assaulted him in early 2010 when he was 16. At the time, Werner alleged, he was attending Lucky's small youth group and seeing him for private counseling. The Star also reported that Werner and other former IHOPKC youth said Lucky would take boys to the gym, then ask them to shower nude with him, telling them he needed to cleanse them of their sins.

Justin Werner, 34, alleges that a former volunteer youth group leader at the International House of Prayer-Kansas City sexually abused him when he was a teenager. Courtesy photo | Courtesy photo

Werner filed a police report with the Kansas City Police Department in July 2022, and the case is under review by the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office. Lucky called the allegations "fabrications" and said in an email to The Star that Werner was not 16, but 18, at the time of their meetings. The legal age of consent in Missouri is 17. Lucky did not respond to follow-up questions last week.

"Proving the truck and splitting halves"

Reaction to the story has been intense, with former IHOPKC staffers, leaders and supporters expressing outrage at the responses of current leadership. In Student Ministries, you didn't have clear policies or training in place to make sure that staff and community members understood parameters with working with minors, and you didn't have adequate HR policies to make it clear which leaders were responsible for folks."

Current IHOPKC leaders, still dealing with the aftermath of a **sex scandal involving Pastor Mike Bickle** that surfaced last fall, said The Star this month that it was the first third-hand of the allegations involving Lucky.

Mike Bickle, founder of IHOPKC.

After checking their records, they said Lucky had no official role in IHOPKC's Student Ministries department, that he had never any youth groups and had volunteered a few hours a day for just six weeks in January and February 2010.

They said Lucky played music sets in IHOPKC's 24/7 Prayer Room and worked in the Intern Room, where he had "no authority over any youth groups and had volunteered a few hours a day for just six weeks in January and February 2010.

They said Lucky played music sets in IHOPKC's 24/7 Prayer Room and worked in the Intern Room, where he had "no authority over any youth groups and had contact "alleging that he met up with teen boys at a local community center where they showered together. They said Lucky was "terminated" from the Prayer Room and IT positions on Feb. 28, 2010. And two former leaders told The Star that Lucky was banned from the Intern Room.

But archived videos from the Prayer Room show Lucky performing there years later in one clear tape 1, 2009. Lucky is playing bass guitar.

Another video shows Lucky playing on stage during IHOPKC's 2011 Christmas conference, an annual event that was held every December at Barrie Hall, drawing thousands of young adults. And Lucky's Fanscan — who later became the wife of a pastor on Facebook in 2020 and 2021 that he was playing in the Prayer Room.

"Big Fanny Lucky Lucky is about to play live with a band at the International House of prayer, where they have 24/7 prayer and worship in Kansas City, wrote on Oct. 17, 2020. And on Jan. 30, 2021, "Husband is playing tonight at the International House of Prayer if you want to come to the right now and worship."

Musician Galyan Hancock said the Prayer Room staff was never told about the allegations or about Lucky being terminated.

"I played with Larry on and during the intro, ...talked with him before and after sets," Hancock wrote Aug. 10 on X. "As a core, full time staff musician, I had no idea of these allegations."

More former staff and leaders spoke out on social media over the weekend.

"I was a leader in Student ministries at the time," said Tyler Todd, who said he was in the staff meetings. "I was never told about this statement. Larry was allowed around kids and we never given an open course of warning from leadership about him. He was actively involved through at least 2011."

Hancock quickly responded. "Yes. This has unearthed a whole new level of fury."

"Cast one the Lord all your you"

As for IHOPKC's contention that Lucky did not lead any youth groups, Facebook posts in 2008 and 2009 indicate otherwise.

Just ask Ethan Salyer.

On Sept. 20, 2009, Lucky posted a message on the Intern ID year-pics. Facebook wall.

"Yo at 4 run Ethan, you are a young man of God even when u don't feel u are," it said. "But the 40 high small group rowdy ones (that is high school) about 40 min (Ethan pic #5 at the moment) And I also have all nighters every month and half of the high small group were we seek the Lord for an extended time. Lots of fun times."

And in a second post that day, Lucky wrote: "The reason I ask is because I just see the Lord lift over you and would loose to have you around it. It's high and in my small group so we can run after the Lord together. If you're over free and are able to come sometime ... you are welcome to come you young man of God!"

The International House of Prayer Kansas City. Nov. 19, 2021.

When The Star article was published this month, Salyer said, several friends sent him screenshots of those posts.

"I definitely remember Larry," he said. "He was someone who was a pretty prominent figure in a lot of my friends' lives."

Salyer said he wasn't "super involved" with IHOPKC's Student Ministries back then, but many friends were. He said he didn't go to any of the sleepovers that Lucky had for the boys.

"I had friends that did," he said. "And I almost felt, you know, kind of jealous. I wanted to experience it, because it sounded fun."

Salyer said he heard the talk about Lucky and the showers, so he wasn't surprised when he saw the story.

"But I was a little bit surprised that people have started talking about it, you know, years later."

Now Salyer said, he believes Lucky was likely grooming him at the time.

"Big Grina," he said. "I had no idea then. But my mother did. She always had a concern about Larry, and she wouldn't let me go to any of his youth groups, or really be involved with him that much.

"Honestly, looking at it now, I feel really lucky."

View comments (1)

Exhibit “B”

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Jody L. Thomas
Tue, August 30, 2022 at 10:00 AM CDT · 10 min read

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IHOPKC didn't have answers for those questions in Friday's response. It noted that even some former leaders said they didn't know Lucky was ever banned.

"Some former leaders do recall and others do not recall him being banned," it said. "We are working to uncover who made the banning decision and to whom it was communicated.

"With respect to your other questions about Mr. Lucky's involvement, we are working on confirming time and involvement from our records and other sources. We are also working to determine if the alleged conduct with any of different accounts of the involvement will be part of our investigation."

In Friday's response, IHOPKC said it is committed to handling the challenges that come with running an organization that has thousands of annual attendees and volunteers across several campuses.

"In recent years we have made updates to procedures and technology to detect and prevent individuals who have been banned from gaining unauthorized access to our facilities," said. "This includes our security team intercepting and removing banned individuals from the premises, formally trespassing them, and ensuring they are arrested by police if they return."

On Aug. 9, The Star reported allegations by Justin Werner, publicly saying for the first time that Lucky sexually assaulted him in early 2010 when he was 16. At the time, Werner alleged, he was attending Lucky's small youth group and seeing him for private counseling. The Star also reported that Werner and other former IHOPKC youth said Lucky would take boys to the gym, then ask them to shower nude with him, telling them he needed to cleanse them of their sins.

Justin Werner, 34, alleges that a former volunteer youth group leader at the International House of Prayer-Kansas City sexually abused him when he was a teenager. Courtesy photo | Courtesy photo

Werner filed a police report with the Kansas City Police Department in July 2022, and the case is under review by the Jackson County Prosecutor's Office. Lucky called the allegations "fabrications" and said in an email to The Star that Werner was not 16, but 18, at the time of their meetings. The legal age of consent in Missouri is 17. Lucky did not respond to follow-up questions last week.

"Proving the truck and splitting halves"

Reaction to the story has been intense, with former IHOPKC staffers, leaders and supporters expressing outrage at the responses of current leadership. In Student Ministries, you didn't have clear policies or training in place to make sure that staff and community members understood parameters with working with minors, and you didn't have adequate HR policies to make it clear which leaders were responsible for folks."

Current IHOPKC leaders, still dealing with the aftermath of a **sex scandal involving Pastor Mike Bickle** that surfaced last fall, said The Star this month that it was the first third-hand of the allegations involving Lucky.

Mike Bickle, founder of IHOPKC.

After checking their records, they said Lucky had no official role in IHOPKC's Student Ministries department, that he had never any youth groups and had volunteered a few hours a day for just six weeks in January and February 2010.

They said Lucky played music sets in IHOPKC's 24/7 Prayer Room and worked in the Intern Room, where he had "no authority over any youth groups and had volunteered a few hours a day for just six weeks in January and February 2010.

They said Lucky played music sets in IHOPKC's 24/7 Prayer Room and worked in the Intern Room, where he had "no authority over any youth groups and had contact "alleging that he met up with teen boys at a local community center where they showered together. They said Lucky was "terminated" from the Prayer Room and IT positions on Feb. 28, 2010. And two former leaders told The Star that Lucky was banned from the Intern Room.

But archived videos from the Prayer Room show Lucky performing there years later in one clear tape 1, 2009. Lucky is playing bass guitar.

Another video shows Lucky playing on stage during IHOPKC's 2011 Christmas conference, an annual event that was held every December at Barrie Hall, drawing thousands of young adults. And Lucky's Fanscan — who later became the wife of a pastor on Facebook in 2020 and 2021 that he was playing in the Prayer Room.

"Big Fanny Lucky Lucky is about to play live with a band at the International House of prayer, where they have 24/7 prayer and worship in Kansas City, wrote on Oct. 17, 2020. And on Jan. 30, 2021, "Husband is playing tonight at the International House of Prayer if you want to come to the right now and worship."

Musician Galyan Hancock said the Prayer Room staff was never told about the allegations or about Lucky being terminated.

"I played with Larry on and during the intro, ...talked with him before and after sets," Hancock wrote Aug. 10 on X. "As a core, full time staff musician, I had no idea of these allegations."

More former staff and leaders spoke out on social media over the weekend.

"I was a leader in Student ministries at the time," said Tyler Todd, who said he was in the staff meetings. "I was never told about this statement. Larry was allowed around kids and we never given an open course of warning from leadership about him. He was actively involved through at least 2011."

Hancock quickly responded. "Yes. This has unearthed a whole new level of fury."

"Cast one the Lord all your you"

As for IHOPKC's contention that Lucky did not lead any youth groups, Facebook posts in 2008 and 2009 indicate otherwise.

Just ask Ethan Salyer.

On Sept. 20, 2009, Lucky posted a message on the Intern ID year-pics. Facebook wall.

"Yo at 4 run Ethan, you are a young man of God even when u don't feel u are," it said. "But the 40 high small group rowdy ones (that is high school) about 40 min (Ethan pic #5 at the moment) And I also have all nighters every month and half of the high small group were we seek the Lord for an extended time. Lots of fun times."

And in a second post that day, Lucky wrote: "The reason I ask is because I just see the Lord lift over you and would loose to have you around it. It's high and in my small group so we can run after the Lord together. If you're over free and are able to come sometime ... you are welcome to come you young man of God!"

The International House of Prayer Kansas City. Nov. 19, 2021.

When The Star article was published this month, Salyer said, several friends sent him screenshots of those posts.

"I definitely remember Larry," he said. "He was someone who was a pretty prominent figure in a lot of my friends' lives."

Salyer said he wasn't "super involved" with IHOPKC's Student Ministries back then, but many friends were. He said he didn't go to any of the sleepovers that Lucky had for the boys.

"I had friends that did," he said. "And I almost felt, you know, kind of jealous. I wanted to experience it, because it sounded fun."

Salyer said he heard the talk about Lucky and the showers, so he wasn't surprised when he saw the story.

"But I was a little bit surprised that people have started talking about it, you know, years later."

Now Salyer said, he believes Lucky was likely grooming him at the time.

"Big Grina," he said. "I had no idea then. But my mother did. She always had a concern about Larry, and she wouldn't let me go to any of his youth groups, or really be involved with him that much.

"Honestly, looking at it now, I feel really lucky."

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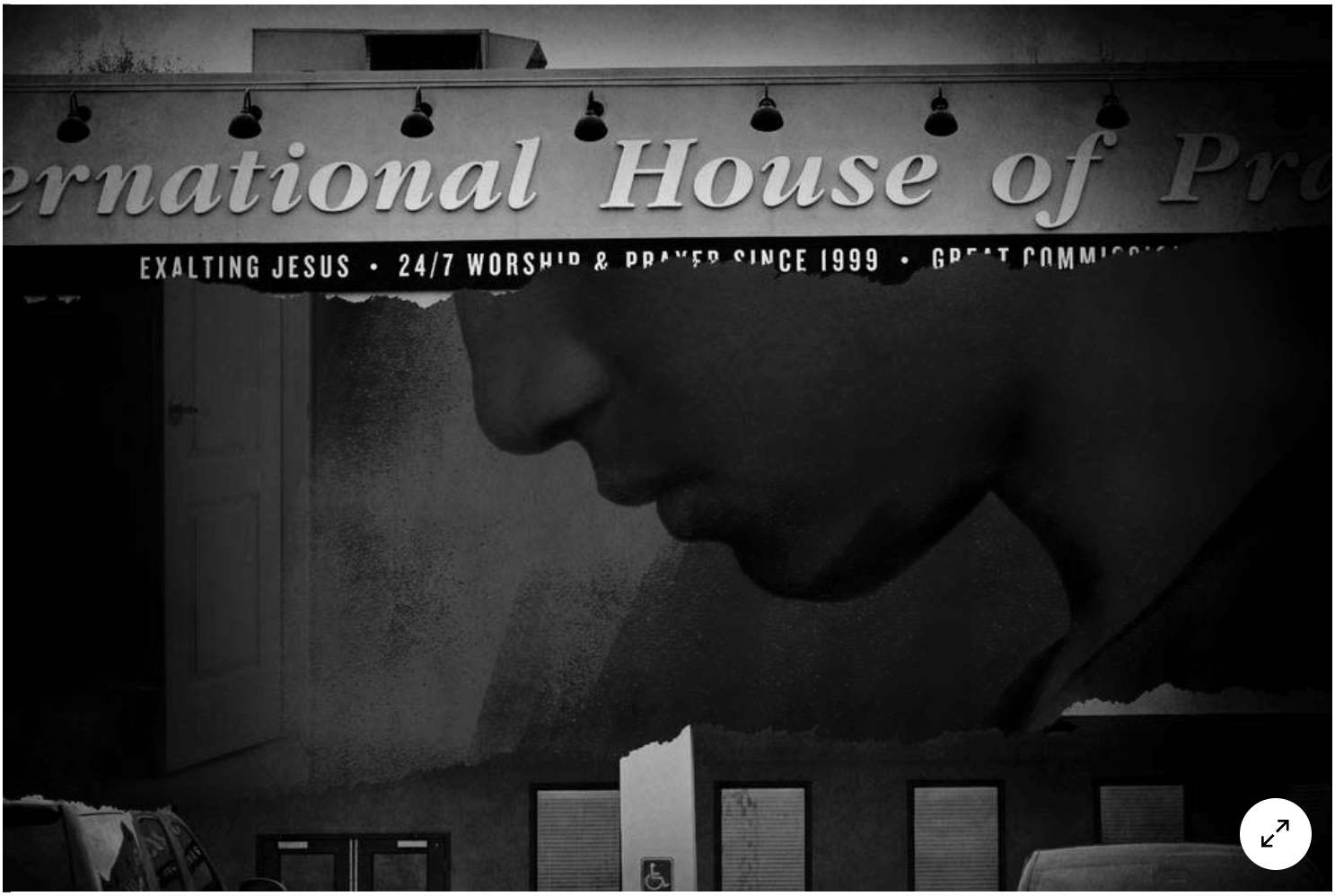
Exhibit “C”

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

IHOPKC says outside firm to examine handling of abuse claims. Is it truly independent?

Judy L. Thomas
Wed, August 21, 2024 at 10:30 AM CDT
12 min read



Sexual misconduct allegations underscore what many say is a longstanding culture of systemic abuse and cover-up that thrived within the International House of Prayer-Kansas City.

Reality Check is a Star series holding those with power to account and shining a light on their decisions. Have a suggestion for a future story? Email our journalists at RealityCheck@kcstar.com.

A law firm hired by the International House of Prayer Kansas City to examine how it handled sexual misconduct allegations faces criticism that its founder has been a defense attorney for ministries and won't conduct an impartial investigation.

IHOPKC hired Telios Law to determine why a former volunteer youth group leader and musician was still involved with the organization years after being banned over allegations of sexual misconduct with teen boys. The firm also is tasked with helping create a safe environment for children within the 24/7 global ministry.

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The news that IHOPKC had hired Theresa Sidebotham and her Colorado-based Telios Law prompted immediate backlash last week from some who have had dealings with the firm. They said that in previous investigations, Sidebotham had tried to minimize the damage done to organizations' reputations and in some cases re-traumatized victims.

In an Aug. 12 statement, Audrey Luhmann said that the Anglican Church in North America hired Telios Law in January 2022 to investigate allegations of spiritual abuse against its bishop and several clergy in the Upper Midwest Diocese.

Luhmann said many who submitted reports or interviewed with Telios "felt challenged, disbelieved, or misrepresented in the individual summary letters Telios later sent back to them."

" ... In short, the investigation felt like a sham," Luhmann said. "It was a waste of the denomination's money, a misuse of the witnesses' time, and was re-traumatizing and demeaning for survivors."

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Sidebotham told The Star that her role when hired by an organization usually focuses on prevention and training or conducting or advising on investigations. She also has done some occasional defense work and plaintiff work, she said in

"Where possible, we emphasize healing and reconciliation instead of litigation, which usually exacerbates the harm to everyone involved," she said. "Of course, an investigative role means that I could not and would not do any defense work or plaintiff work."

If an organization fails to prevent abuse, train, evaluate its leadership and respond to those it harmed, Sidebotham said, "it has failed in its mission."

"If you look at my website and writings, you'll see that I'm very candid about these goals with my clients, and I believe that is why they choose to work with us," she said. "IHOPKC has expressed to me that they have chosen us to help them create a safe environment, respond well to anyone who comes forward, and evaluate leadership conduct."

Training begins in September

IHOPKC issued a statement on Aug. 10 announcing it had hired Sidebotham's firm. The statement came a day after The Star published the story of a man who said he was sexually abused in 2010 by a former IHOPKC youth group leader.

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The statement said IHOPKC had hired Sidebotham weeks earlier "to help us build a culture that prevents sexual harassment and child endangerment."

IHOPKC said Sidebotham would begin leading a training series in September on how to ensure children are safe and protected.

What the statement didn't say, however, was that Sidebotham also was asked to look into the allegations made by Justin Werner that his former IHOPKC youth group leader, Larry Lucky, raped Werner when he was 16 and was seeing Lucky for private counseling at his home.

Werner went public with his story in The Star on Aug. 9, and other former IHOPKC youth alleged that Lucky had taken teen boys to the gym and asked them to shower with him.

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IHOPKC denied that Lucky had led a youth group or had any key role in its Student Ministries program but said Lucky had been playing bass guitar on a worship team in the organization's 24/7 Prayer Room and was dismissed in 2010 after a parent reported that he was showering with teen boys at a local gym.

But Facebook posts in 2008 and 2009 indicate that Lucky indeed was leading a youth group of boys. And social media posts and archived videos show that Lucky was playing in the all-night Prayer Room years beyond the date IHOPKC said he was terminated, leaving many to question whether he ever was dismissed at all.

Lucky called the allegations "fabrications" and said in a July 31 email to The Star that Werner was not 16, but 18, at the time of their meetings. The legal age of consent in Missouri is 17. Lucky said in a follow-up email on Aug. 2 that he would not comment further to The Star but welcomed a true third-party investigation.

Trying to uncover details

In its Aug. 10 statement, IHOPKC said The Star had "published a story concerning inappropriate sexual contact with teenage boys in incidents that occurred on campus and outside of his role at IHOPKC."

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"We have been actively working to uncover details and offer support to the victims and their families in light of this devastating news," the statement said, adding that "we first became aware of the allegations through a reporter's inquiry just days ago and immediately launched an investigation with the help of independent experts."

IHOPKC said it was examining all records in its possession "to understand what occurred and how it was handled."

Werner said Sidebotham emailed him Aug. 5 — four days after The Star first contacted IHOPKC seeking comment about Lucky.

"I am writing to follow up on your report to the Kansas Star of having been sexually abused by a man associated with IHOPKC," she wrote. "I am so very sorry to hear about your experience, and I recognize how painful and challenging this time must be for you."

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She said IHOPKC "has requested that I conduct an independent investigation into these matters."

"I am aware that there may be an ongoing law enforcement investigation, and we would want to support that in any way possible," she wrote. "However, we also seek to better understand your experience to ensure a thorough investigation. And there may be others who were harmed, and talking to you would be the best foundation for us to gather information to support others."

Sidebotham asked if Werner would be open to meeting with her for an interview "to share your story."

investigation was complete.

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In an email to The Star on Friday, IHOPKC said Sidebotham and Telios Law "are not investigating the sexual abuse allegations against Mr. Lucky, as that is in the hands of law enforcement."

"They are investigating how former leadership responded to the allegations against Mr. Lucky, and are charged with identifying any failures or mishandlings, including whether mandatory reporting was carried out."

IHOPKC to make 'important' findings public

IHOPKC said it also hopes to identify whether anyone else was harmed.

"And if so," it said, "we will promptly report that."

IHOPKC asked those who may have been harmed or have knowledge about abuse "to please reach out to us, as this may be helpful for the investigation. Anyone who has been harmed should also contact the police."

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According to IHOPKC, "No former leaders from that time are currently employed by or in positions of influence with IHOPKC; thus they will have no input whatsoever.

"Rest assured that important findings of this investigation will be made public."

IHOPKC told The Star that Telios Law also will audit its current policies "to ensure a comprehensive response to any reports, and that all possible measures are built into a culture dedicated to preventing something of this nature from happening again."

"We hope and believe that individuals who have felt let down in the past will come to view this investigation, training, and policy update as a pivotal moment in accountability, change, and healing," it said.

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Many former staffers and leaders, however, don't trust IHOPKC to do the right thing. They point to an independent investigation it commissioned in 2018 of staffer Brad Tebbutt. He was accused that year by a Washington woman of sexually abusing her for 2 ½ years in the 1980s starting when she was 14 and he was a 27-year-old youth pastor at a Baptist church in California.

When she came forward, Tebbutt was the director of an IHOPKC ministry for those 50 and older. IHOPKC put Tebbutt on administrative leave and hired GRACE, a Virginia nonprofit whose name stands for Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment, to conduct a third-party investigation.

The investigation was completed in early 2019, but IHOPKC did not release the results.

Last November, however, a 15-page executive summary of the findings was leaked. The report, dated Jan. 31, 2019, concluded that though evidence was not raised during the investigation that Tebbutt sexually abused anyone in the IHOPKC community, "the evidence shows that Mr. Tebbutt repeatedly exploited the access and trust granted him by Jane Doe and by the church (in California) by sexually abusing a youth in his care from a position of spiritual authority."

Among GRACE's recommendations was for leaders to decide whether Tebbutt would be permitted to return to IHOPKC.

"Without a proven demonstration of authentic repentance, Brad Tebbutt's employment and association with IHOP should be terminated," the report said. "Should he be permitted to return to IHOP, he must never be allowed on the property when minors are present. In addition, he must never be allowed at, or granted participation in, any off-campus IHOP activities in which minors are present."

Despite the recommendations, Tebbutt was promoted to a position that

against others associated with the ministry had surfaced that needed to be immediately investigated. Failure to do so and to implement recommended changes, the report said, "is likely to result in continued missteps when handling and responding to misconduct issues at IHOP."

Others criticize firm's methods

Others who have been involved with Telios Law investigations criticized its tactics as well.

Investigative journalist Rebecca Hopkins wrote on Substack Aug. 12 of her experience with the firm last year after she became a whistleblower regarding Mission Aviation Fellowship, one of the largest mission aviation organizations in the world. She said she and 15 other MAF missionaries had documented aviation safety concerns and what they saw as problematic sexual behavior of married missionary pilots with women overseas.

Sidebotham's investigation, Hopkins said, "largely exonerated MAF of wrongdoing." Of the whistleblowers' 35 original concerns, she said, the report substantiated abuse of power or spiritual abuse in only one case. And the conclusions about their situation, she said, in her view included many inaccuracies "that favored leaders' accounts over ours."

"She didn't quote from any of the 300 pages of documentation we'd provided," Hopkins wrote. "It seemed to me like she was simply taking leaders' word for it. In several cases she wrote that there were no corroborating witnesses to back up our claims, even though she never came back to us to say she needed more corroboration. I later learned she chose not to interview our entire list of witnesses either."

Luhmann, of the Anglican Church in North America, and a representative from another ministry issued statements in collaboration with Hopkins' story.

allegations of "spiritual abuse" by leadership at the church she helped start in 2013.

Coles said the investigation "lacked appropriate independence, transparency, and care for participants."

"It appeared that participants would risk significant re-traumatization and further harm if they participated and that, even assuming the best of intentions by Telios Law and Church Leadership, the investigation process was set up such that it would protect the Church institution and its leaders," Coles said.

In her response to The Star last week, Sidebotham said that "while I do not think Ms. Hopkins' article fairly represents our work, we are not able to comment specifically on investigations."

She added, however, that "the investigations you reference did make findings of abuse, mismanagement, and/or a need for process changes, healing, and justice."

Sidebotham said her firm also recommended numerous improvements the organizations could make, including ways to help those who were harmed whether or not abuse was substantiated.

"It's understandable that persons would be hurt and upset if their specific allegations could not be substantiated," she said. "Unfortunately, it's impossible for every investigation to substantiate all allegations. That does not necessarily mean a determination that the allegation is false, only that we did not meet the standard of proof of preponderance of the evidence."

Not the first investigation

This isn't the first time IHOPKC has come under fire for hiring a law firm to investigate sex abuse allegations. When IHOPKC founder Mike Bickle was accused last fall of sexually abusing multiple women over several decades,

IHOPKC originally hired the Stinson LLP law firm — a national firm with an office in Kansas City — to investigate, but quickly reversed that decision after critics questioned whether it could be impartial.

Then it hired Audrey Manito, an attorney with close ties to IHOPKC, to conduct interviews with those alleging abuse. When that action was heavily criticized, IHOPKC hired Rosalee McNamara of the Lathrop GPM firm to conduct an outside investigation.

But Bickle's alleged victims and those supporting them, who have become known as the Advocate Group, declined to talk to McNamara, saying her firm couldn't be impartial because it also has represented defendants in sex abuse cases.

McNamara released the findings of her investigation earlier this year. She found that Bickle "more likely than not" engaged in inappropriate behavior that included sexual contact and clergy misconduct. Critics, however, said the abuse and coverups extended beyond Bickle and that until a real third-party investigation was conducted, the full truth would remain hidden.

Boz Tchividjian, a Florida attorney who specializes in sex abuse cases and is representing some of Bickle's alleged victims, said he had concerns about whether the Telios firm would be truly unbiased.

"An 'independent investigator' who has previously represented churches or Christian organizations in sexual abuse claims is not 'independent' and cannot be trusted," he posted last week on X. "Your abuse experience has immeasurable importance and value ... please only share it with those who have earned your trust."

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Exhibit “D”

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

Outside group with law enforcement expertise investigates handling of IHOPKC scandal

Judy L. Thomas
Wed, September 11, 2024 at 1:41 PM CDT

A company with law enforcement expertise has been hired to conduct a third-party investigation into sex abuse allegations against International House of Prayer-Kansas City founder Mike Bickle and others in the ministry.

Firm's investigations, a Wisconsin-based company, will examine the scandal plaguing the 24/7 global prayer ministry, according to an announcement by Tikkun Global, a network of Messianic Jewish congregations and ministries that serves eight congregations in Israel and about 30 in the U.S.

The announcement caps a monthslong effort by former IHOPKC leaders, known as the Advocate Group, who called for an independent investigation into the sex abuse allegations. Tikkun Global will oversee the investigation, the Advocate Group said, to ensure independence.

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"With many other leaders in the Body of Messiah, we have felt that only a third-party independent investigation, where the results would be made public, could bring clarity and justice," Tikkun Global said in its announcement.

"Someone once said sunlight is the best disinfectant. It seems that most independent congregations are not prepared to deal properly with allegations of sexual assault. They don't have a plan and often just 'wing it.' In the process, the

Firefly's team includes current and retired law enforcement investigators, experienced therapists and forensic interviewers from across the country, its website says.

"Our team is experienced in investigating sexual and physical abuse, along with working to heal the trauma that often follows," it says. "Our mission is seeking justice for sexual abuse victims, searching for the truth, and shedding light on the darkness victims have endured for years. Our team is also aware there are always two sides to a story, and we will strive to uncover the truth."

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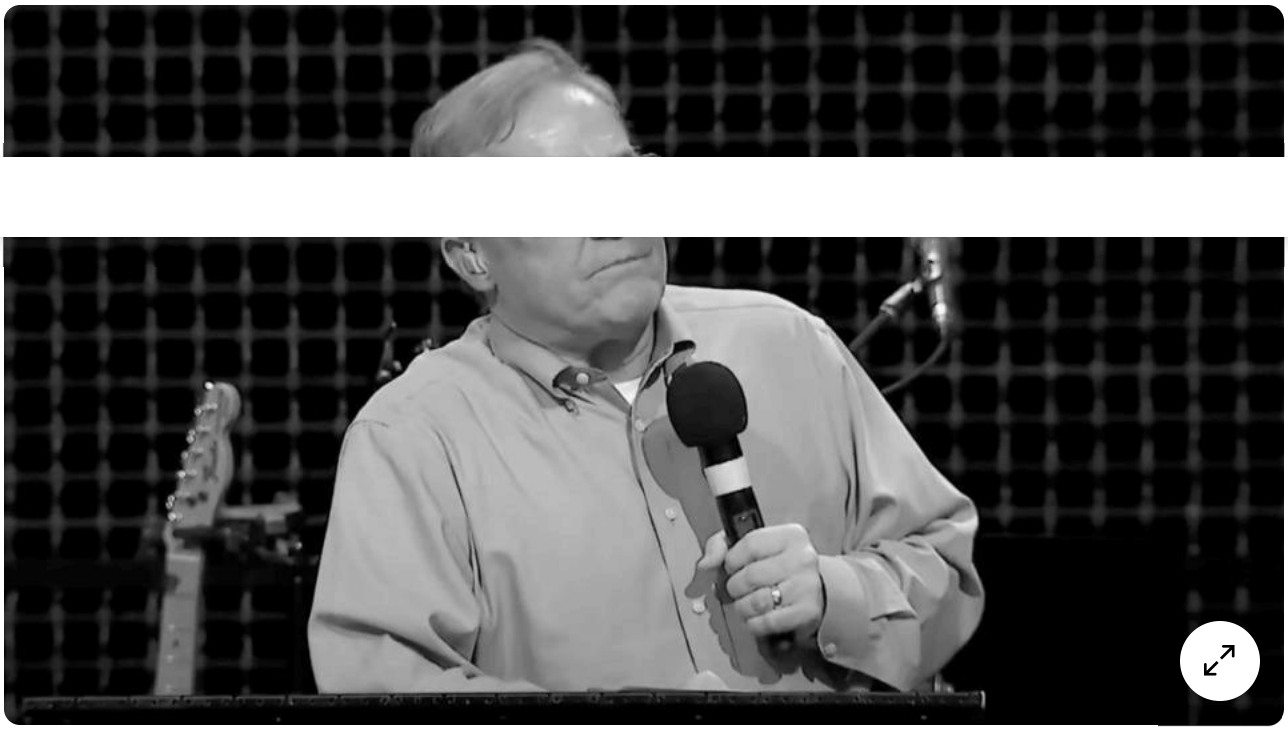
The Advocate Group expects the investigation to cost at least $100,000 and is asking for donations to help pay for it. Fundraising will be handled by Tikkun International, with all donations going through the National Christian Foundation. Tikkun said it would not receive any part of the donations and also plans to donate to the fund through the NCF.

"We want to ensure transparency and will publish a complete financial report," Tikkun said in its statement. An external financial audit will be conducted as well, it said.

The sexual abuse allegations against Bickle were made public in late October, leading IHOPKC to "immediately, formally and permanently separate" from him and causing upheaval in the charismatic prayer movement. Bickle is accused of using prophecies to groom, sexually abuse and manipulate women over multiple decades, one starting when she was just 14.



Mike Bickle, founder of IHOPKC

Bickle, 69, issued his only public statement on Dec. 12, admitting that he had "sinned" and "my moral failures were real." But he was vague on details. In a lengthy note posted on X, Bickle said his "inappropriate behavior" occurred more than 20 years ago, but he did not admit to engaging in any sexual misconduct.

A 'long and painful' year

The Advocate Group said the investigation had been a long time coming.

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"Since allegations of sexual misconduct were made against Mike Bickle in October 2023, there has been an ongoing call throughout the Body of Christ for an independent, third-party investigation into both Mike Bickle's misconduct and the handling of all other situations of sexual misconduct at IHOPKC," members said in a statement.

The past year, they said, "has been long and painful as many victims and eyewitnesses to wrongdoing have come forward and told their stories publicly to journalists and privately to advocates."

"It has become increasingly evident to more and more that we need a trusted investigation where survivors can tell their stories to a trauma-informed investigator that establishes the facts and produces a public report."

Members of the Advocate Group realize that they, too, will come under scrutiny during the investigation. They talked about it when a group of them got together in December and made a series of videos about the IHOPKC crisis and again in June when they made some Q&A videos about why a third-party investigation was needed and what it would entail.

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"If that neutral third party comes, guess who's going to be investigated as much as anyone?" asked Allen Hood, former associate director of IHOPKC and a member of the Advocate Group. "Me. I was the associate director for almost 20 years. Do I want that? Absolutely. Because I want to be clean — I want to repent of anything that was unwise or sinful or harmful. It's the only way to move forward."

Former International House of Prayer-Kansas City leaders (from left) Jono Hall, Allen Hood, Wes Martin and Dwayne Roberts are seen in a video discussing sex abuse allegations against IHOPKC ...More

The former leaders noted their frustration that IHOPKC declined to help with the investigation.

repeated meetings with representatives of IHOPKC leadership who have continually stated they are open to a mutually agreed upon investigation but then, after long deliberations, have repeatedly not backed up their initial overtures with any agreement of substance," they said.

The Advocate Group members said they asked Tikkun to oversee the project because without IHOPKC's commitment, the investigation would not be seen as independent if the Advocate Group was the contracting party.

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"We also do not want our history as former leaders of IHOPKC to inhibit any victims of sexual abuse and misconduct to share their stories with the investigator," they said.

IHOPKC's current leaders did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the investigation. But last month, they issued a statement saying IHOPKC had hired Telios Law, a Colorado firm, to investigate how leadership responded to allegations years ago that former youth group leader and musician Larry Lucky engaged in inappropriate sexual contact with teenage boys.

The statement came a day after The Star published the story of Justin Werner, who said he was sexually abused by Lucky in 2010, and others who described alleged sexual misconduct by Lucky. IHOPKC said it had hired Theresa Sidebotham of Telios Law weeks earlier "to help us build a culture that prevents sexual harassment and child endangerment." IHOPKC said Sidebotham would begin leading a training series in September on how to ensure children are safe and protected.

Scope of the investigation

The scope of the new third-party investigation, according to Firefly's website, is to examine any and all allegations of clergy misconduct by Bickle and other

IHOPKC leaders, whether IHOPKC had any knowledge of such allegations and if so, how IHOPKC responded. Firefly also will investigate allegations of sexual misconduct perpetrated by IHOPKC staff and/or volunteers, whether IHOPKC

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"The investigators will not look into every aspect of IHOPKC's management over the past 25 years," Firefly said. "However, allegations of clergy sexual abuse and cover-ups are serious in nature and cannot be ignored. In addition, it is reported by the Advocate Group that there are more than a few alleged victims who have not yet spoken to an investigator."

Elizabeth Herder, a member of the Advocate Group, said on one of the videos made in June that they've heard many stories "that the public has no idea of, even that IHOP leadership has no idea of."

"For a long time, there was just a kind of constant march of stories coming to us," she said. "It was utterly overwhelming for us, and we had to say to many of them, 'We need you to wait ... I am not trauma informed. I don't want to hurt you by taking your story.'"

Herder said the issue goes "far beyond Mike Bickle."

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"And that's been something that has been our heart to make sure that the public understands that there's kind of this flagship horror, which is the Mike Bickle horror, but there's many others," she said. "And a system was built that allowed terrible, terrible abuse to happen to people and have it not only not dealt with, but because it wasn't dealt with, more abuse happened."

Firefly has posted a confidential survey on its website to help identify those who may have information relevant to the investigation.

Among the questions are whether the person responding has any knowledge of alleged misconduct committed by Bickle, other IHOPKC leaders or any staff

member or volunteer, whether the alleged misconduct was reported to IHOPKC leaders and if so, how it was handled.

When the investigation is complete, it said, Firefly will produce a detailed report that will be made public.

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Tikkun said it will gather "a group of senior leaders in the Body of Christ" to review the results of the investigation. Any potential criminal activity that is uncovered will be referred to law enforcement, it said. The review group will then make recommendations to IHOPKC for corrective actions.

Tikkun said when the Advocate Group asked it to oversee the investigation, it was reluctant at first.

"It has been difficult for us even to consider being involved in such a sensitive and time-consuming task, particularly while our own country is at war," Tikkun said. But board members met and prayed about it, Tikkun said, and decided to help.

"We are not policemen or judges," it said. "Like many of you, we simply want to see the cloud dissipate and for clarity to emerge, so we can all move forward."

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Tikkun said it had been close to IHOPKC and its leadership for decades and contacted the board to ask if it was open to endorsing the investigation. Tikkun met several times with IHOPKC leaders, it said, telling them that "the investigator was solid" and that the Advocate Group "was fully submitting to this investigation and is turning over all material they have to the investigator."

Tikkun said IHOPKC leaders had more questions and concerns, and some met with them to interview the investigator together.

"As the process continued, we let the IHOPKC board know that we felt it was right for us to move forward with the investigation," Tikkun said. "We explained our belief that the best thing for all involved would be a thorough and

But during its meetings with the IHOPKC board, Tikkun said, "it became apparent that it was too difficult for them to come to an agreement to endorse this investigation."

"We are hopeful that they might embrace it at a future point."

Conflict of interest?

Tikkun said the IHOPKC board raised a conflict-of-interest concern because Tikkun had received significant financial support from IHOPKC over the years. Tikkun said it was grateful for the support and had sent "quite a few of our young people" to participate in internships at IHOPKC.

But it said that "the Advocate Group trusted us and believed that our relationship with IHOPKC would increase the probability that the results (of the investigation) would be accepted." And it noted that IHOPKC was going through "a difficult time financially and has informed all our emissaries that they will no longer be able to support us."

"Simply put," Tikkun said, "this is not about money but about victims of sexual misconduct, calling leaders to high character standards, and believing God for purification in the Body of Believers."

The International House of Prayer-Kansas City, Nov. 11, 2023.

The Firefly investigation is the first to examine the sex abuse scandal at IHOPKC that doesn't involve a law firm.

IHOPKC originally hired the Stinson LLP law firm to investigate, but quickly reversed that decision after critics questioned whether it could be impartial. Then it hired Kansas City attorney Audrey Manito, who had close ties to IHOPKC, to conduct interviews with those alleging abuse.

When that action was heavily criticized, IHOPKC in December hired Rosalee McNamara of the Lathrop GPM firm to conduct an outside investigation. But Bickle's alleged victims and the Advocate Group declined to talk to McNamara, saying she couldn't be impartial because her firm has represented defendants in sex abuse cases, including those involving clergy.

At the end of January, IHOPKC released the results of McNamara's investigation, which found Bickle "more likely than not" engaged in inappropriate behavior that included sexual contact and clergy misconduct. That behavior was "an abuse of power for a person in a position of trust and leadership," a report of the findings said.

Though IHOPKC called it an independent investigation, critics — including the Advocate Group — complained that it was far from impartial. They said the alleged victims did not participate in the investigation because they didn't feel

Shane Holden, an IHOPKC board member who resigned on April 17, said he tried for months to broker an agreement between IHOPKC and the Advocate Group to get a new investigation going. But he said IHOPKC's perspective was that "'we have done an independent third-party investigation, and on top of that, we have permanently separated from Mike Bickle. Let's move on, you know, let's just get on with what we need to do next.'"

Holden, senior pastor of First Free Church, a congregation of several thousand in Onalaska, Wisconsin, told The Star that he resigned in part out of frustration that the talks were going nowhere.

Who is Firefly?

Firefly was founded by Jim Holler, a former police chief with the Liberty Township Police Department in Adams County, Pennsylvania.

The company conducts "discrete investigations into allegations of sexual abuse," according to its website.

"Using highly skilled investigators," it says, "we aim to provide a consistent, competent, and comprehensive response to sexual abuse and related crimes."

Holler specializes in crimes against children, training thousands of attorneys, judges, social workers as well as law enforcement and medical, mental health and public health professionals on issues related to crimes against children and social worker safety.

He also has conducted independent sex abuse investigations for several large religious organizations in the country, the company's website says.

"Our loyalty in any investigation lies in exposing the truth."

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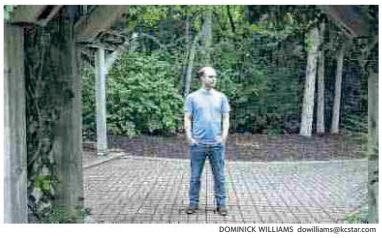
No criminal charges for former IHOPKC youth leader



DOMINICK WILLIAMS dowilliams@kcstar.com

Justin Werner, 31, alleges that a former volunteer youth group leader at the International House of Prayer-Kansas City sexually assaulted him when he was 16.

BY JUDY L. THOMAS
jthomas@kcstar.com

Criminal charges will not be filed against a former volunteer youth group leader and musician at the International House of Prayer-Kansas City accused of sexually abusing a teen in 2010 during private counseling sessions.

The Jackson County Prosecutor's Office is declining to charge Larry Lucky because of a lack of evidence, spokesman Michael Mansur told The Star on Wednesday.

"The yellow sheet, which is what we send over to the police when we decline a case, cites insufficient evidence to prove the victim's age at the time of the events beyond a reasonable doubt," Mansur said.

Justin Werner, who filed a police report with the Kansas City Police Department in July 2022, told The Star he received a call from an assistant prosecuting attorney on Tuesday notifying him that charges wouldn't be filed.

"It's disappointing," he said. "Of course, I had hoped there would be charges. But I think at the end of it all, I knew it was going to be his word versus mine."

SEE LUCKY, 3A

Mayor Quinton Lucas' official X account, @MayorLucasKC

Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas celebrates the approval of a new five-year labor contract with members of Local 42 of the International Association of Fire Fighters in August.

REALITY CHECK

New KC firefighters will lose right to sue for discrimination

BY MIKE HENDRICKS
mhendricks@kcstar.com

Future Kansas City firefighters will not have the right to file the kind of discrimination lawsuits that have cost city taxpayers millions of dollars in settlements and jury verdicts in recent years, The Star has learned.

Local 42, the union that represents most fire department employees, has agreed to deny future members the right to file suit for discrimination claims not directly tied to wages and benefits, a move that several employment lawyers say will make it harder for the city to be held accountable for firefighters' experiences of discrimination and harassment on the job.

Firefighters hired after next

SEE FIREFIGHTERS, 4A

Police arrest suspect in Betty Rae's Ice Cream break-in

BY NATHAN PILLING
npilling@kcstar.com

Police arrested a person Wednesday who they said was suspected of burglarizing the Betty Rae's Ice Cream shop in Kansas City's River Market earlier this week.

Captain Jake Becchina, with the Kansas City Police Department, confirmed the person was arrested in Kansas City, Kansas, and on social media the department said meth was found at the property where the arrest occurred.

Becchina said details of the investigation were not yet public, and said police planned to work with prosecutors Thursday as they consider charges.

"Detectives have poured time and effort into this investigation, as they have with the investigations of other small businesses that criminals have preyed upon," the department said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"The work continues, and the commitment to seek justice by our detectives and officers is

SEE ICE CREAM, 3A

Hamas leader killed in Gaza fighting, Israeli military says

BY RONEN BERGMAN AND AARON BOXERMAN
NYT News Service

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

The Israeli military confirmed Thursday that Yahya Sinwar, the powerful and elusive Hamas militant leader who has been the No. 1 target for Israel since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip, had been killed in battle.

Sinwar was viewed as the architect of the brutal Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel that set off the 13-month war that has plunged Gaza into a humanitarian crisis and began a wider conflict that now includes fighting in Lebanon.

After a firefight in Gaza on Wednesday with Hamas forces, Israeli soldiers retrieved a body that appeared to be that of Sinwar. A sample of his DNA was tested to confirm his identity, according to an Israeli official with knowledge of the matter. Police in Israel said they had also used Sinwar's dental records and fingerprints, both of which were on file, for identification purposes. There was no immediate response from Hamas.

Sinwar's dental records and fingerprints, both of which were on file, to identify the body. There was no immediate response from Hamas.

Since launching the assault on Hamas in Gaza in October 2023 in retaliation for Hamas' cross-border raids, in which about 1,200 people were killed and more than 200 abducted, Israeli officials have repeatedly said their goal was nothing less than the destruction of the militant group.

But no target loomed larger for Israel than Sinwar himself. Over his past year in hiding in the devastated enclave, he was believed to still be closely overseeing Hamas' military operations.

Sinwar's death raises hopes for an end to a conflict that has killed tens of thousands of Pal-

SEE HAMAS LEADER, 3A

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FROM PAGE 1A

LUCKY

Werner, now 31, said he provided police with a Facebook message that showed he and Lucky were to start meeting weekly for counseling starting in February 2010, when he would have been 16. But he said Lucky gave police messages between the two that indicated he and Werner had met when Werner was 17 and 18. The legal age for consent in Missouri is 17.

Werner acknowledged that he did meet with Lucky then, but said it was because he had tried to block out the abuse and move on with his life in as normal a way as possible, which for a while included maintaining contact with Lucky.

Werner said the assistant prosecutor and one of the police investigators told him that Lucky "did not deny my story."

"The distinction is he said I was 17 and it was consensual, versus 16, when I wasn't in a position to give consent so it would have been illegal," he said.

Werner said he was told that if the case went to trial, it's likely that arguments would be made about how old he was when the incidents occurred. And the assistant prosecutor said proving he was 16 at the time would be difficult, Werner said.

"She said there's just not enough there, in terms of evidence, to get over that hump," he said. "She definitely thought I was taken advantage of. But even with that said, there's not enough evidence to prove it."

Lucky, a sound design engineer, declined to comment and referred The Star to his attorney. In August, he called the allegations "fabrications" and said in an email to The Star that Werner was not 16, but 18, at the time of their meetings.

On Aug. 9, The Star reported the allegations by Werner, who publicly said for the first time that Lucky sexually assaulted him in early 2010 when he was 16. At the time, Werner alleged, he was attending Lucky's small youth group at IHOPKC and seeing him at his south Kansas City duplex for private counseling. Werner and other former IHOPKC youth also told The Star that Lucky would take boys to the gym, then ask them to shower nude with him, telling them he needed to cleanse them of their sins.

Current IHOPKC leaders, still dealing with the aftermath of a sex scandal involving founder Mike Bickle that surfaced last fall, told The Star in early August that it was the first they'd heard of the allegations involving Lucky.

After checking their records, they said Lucky had no official role in IHOPKC's Student Ministries department, did not lead any youth groups and had volunteered a few hours a day for just six weeks in January and February 2010.

They said Lucky played music sets in IHOPKC's 24/7 Prayer Room and worked in the IT department for four months. After a parent reported inappropriate contact "alleging that he met up with teen boys at a local community center where they showered together," they said, Lucky was "terminated" from the Prayer Room and IT positions on Feb. 28, 2010. And two former leaders told The Star that Lucky was banned from the entire missions base.

But archived videos from the Prayer Room show Lucky performing there years later. In one, dated Sept. 3, 2018, Lucky is playing bass guitar.

Another video shows Lucky playing on stage during IHOPKC's 2011 Onething conference, an annual event that was held every December at Bartle Hall, drawing thousands of young adults. And Lucky's fiancee — who later became his wife — posted on Facebook in 2020 and 2021 that he was playing in the Prayer Room.

OUTSIDE INVESTIGATION MOVES FORWARD

Meanwhile, a third-party investigation into sexual misconduct at IHOPKC and coverup by its leaders is in its second month.

And the law enforcement expert conducting the investigation has already interviewed dozens of witnesses, the organization overseeing the investigation said.

An update was posted Monday on the website of Tikkun Global, a network of Messianic Jewish congregations and ministries that serves eight congregations in Israel and about 30 in the U.S.

"Our investigator, Jim Holler, has interviewed over 60 brave individuals who came forward as of last weekend," the update said. "These have been on Zoom, phone calls, email, and in-person — at the interviewee's request.

" ... We are greatly encouraged that people are sharing their experiences; we recognize that trust is a process and must be earned. We know this is a difficult step for many, and we applaud your courage."

Tikkun Global announced the outside investigation on Sept. 11, saying it had hired Firefly Investigations, a Pennsylvania company with law enforcement expertise, to do the work. The announcement followed a nearly yearlong push by former IHOPKC leaders, known as the Advocate Group, for an independent investigation into allegations against Bickle and others in the 24/7 global prayer ministry.

Tikkun is overseeing the investigation, the Advocate Group said, to ensure independence.

Founded by Holler, a former police chief with the Liberty Township Police Department in Adams County, Pennsylvania, Firefly Investigations has a team that includes current and retired law enforcement investigators, experienced therapists and forensic interviewers from across the country, its website says.

Tikkun said it has engaged attorney Rachael Denhollander as a communications and educational consultant. Denhollander, a former gymnast, is widely known as the first woman to publicly accuse USA Gymnastics' team doctor Larry Nassar of sexual abuse and pursue charges against him.

Tikkun also said that it had expanded the scope of the investigation to include incidents that occurred before 1999 — the year IHOPKC was formed. It did so, Tikkun said, because after talking to survivors and advocates, "we recognized that the 1999 time frame of the scope excluded reporters (of alleged sexual abuse and mishandling) whose stories are relevant but took place earlier."

Werner is among those who have contacted Firefly. After his interview with Holler, he wrote on X, formerly Twitter, that he "felt confident in the investigator's impartiality and felt comfortable meeting with them."

"Their approach was respectful and thorough," he said. "If you're considering meeting with FireFly, I highly recommend it. They're committed to uncovering the truth and have been a valuable ally in that pursuit."

Judy L Thomas: 816-234-4334, @judylthomas

Betty Rae's Ice Cream

A screenshot of surveillance video showing a burglar leaving the Betty Rae's Ice Cream shop in the River Market with a safe early Sunday morning during a break-in.

FROM PAGE 1A

ICE CREAM

steadfast. The suspect's involvement in other crimes is currently under investigation. Once they submit a case file, charges will be pending," police said.

The break-in was the second at the Betty Rae's River Market location in about a month.

Owner and chief executive officer Matt Shatto said earlier this week the most recent burglary occurred around 3 a.m. Sunday, and in that incident a man broke out a window with a rock and left with a safe and a couple thousand dollars in cash. In the earlier break-in last month, a burglar entered through the location's back door and stole cash, a cooler, peanuts and pints of ice cream, he said.

Shatto, who also owns Shatto Milk Company, has been vocal in his criticism of city leadership in the wake of the break-in's. Over the last month, he and Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas have sparred in public posts on social media, going back and forth over crime in the city.

Shatto says the incidents have him rethinking the future of the River Market shop.

Nathan Pilling: @ByNatePilling

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SAMAR ABU ELOUF NYT

Yahya Sinwar, left, the leader of Hamas, in Gaza City on April 14, 2023. Sinwar, viewed as the architect of the brutal Oct. 7 attack on Israel that set off the 13-month war, is dead, according to the Israeli military, which confirmed his death on Thursday.

FROM PAGE 1A

HAMAS LEADER

estinians in Gaza and plunged many more into a humanitarian crisis.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel stopped short of declaring total victory against Hamas in a statement, and vowed to get the remaining hostages in Gaza released. He made an offer to those holding hostages, promising to let them "leave and live" if they set aside their weapons and returned the captives.

Sinwar's death might encourage Hamas to agree to Israeli demands, and might also offer Israel a military success that could lead the Netanyahu government to ease its negotiating stance. Hamas and the Israeli government have remained far apart on key issues during months of negotiations over a truce.

On Oct. 7, some 3,000 Hamas operatives crossed into Israel for their long-prepared and well-rehearsed killing and abduction spree.

According to Bloomberg News, in some of his early messages from hiding, Sinwar told associates that the brutality of the attack, including its targeting of Israeli women and children, had surprised him. "Things went out of control," Sinwar said in one of his messages, the Journal reported. "People got caught up in this, and that should not have happened."

The Israeli military hit back with air raids and a ground invasion that over the following year reduced much of Gaza to rubble. Around 42,000 people have been killed by Israel's operations in Gaza, according to the Hamas-run health ministry there, which doesn't distinguish between civilian and combatant casualties.

As the war began, Sinwar disappeared into the sprawling tunnel network under Gaza, where, according to Israeli authorities, he likely surrounded himself with hostages for his protection, according to Bloomberg News. From the tunnels, and taking measures to avoid detection by Israeli surveillance, Sinwar commanded the fight against Israel and represented Hamas in the months-long failed negotiations over a cease-fire and hostage-exchange deal.

At one point, Israeli soldiers entered a tunnel where they said Sinwar had been recently staying. Weapons and piles of cash were abandoned in his haste to escape, according to the military, and the coffee on the table was still warm.

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