

Servants of the Word Response to the Lathrop GPM Report



9 February 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are grateful for this opportunity to respond to the Lathrop GPM independent review which was released on January 26, 2024. We are also grateful for the work of the Lathrop team and for the opportunity to now offer a more comprehensive response to their report.

We recognize we cannot restore the lives of children who have been abused, nor can we repair the damage that impacts them and their families even today. For those harmed by our former brothers, we pray for their healing, and we desire justice to be done. It is our intention and prayer that by examining our steps, recognizing and admitting our mistakes, identifying our blind spots, and working to repair any harm caused by our two brothers, we can contribute to healing and restoration.

This statement is just one piece of our effort to address the events that have brought us to this place. If you would like a fuller picture, please read the other documents we have posted: my Opening Statement, Apologies, Steps We Are Taking, Frequently Asked Questions, and the full Lathrop GPM report, all which you may access [here](#). You may want to read those documents first, as they provide context for this response.

The Servants of the Word and the Sword of the Spirit jointly engaged the national law firm Lathrop GPM (Lathrop). Lathrop was commissioned to conduct an external independent review of our handling of child safety matters involving Ed Conlin and Jamie Treadwell, two former members of the Servants of the Word. The firm was also asked to review the child safeguarding policies and procedures of both the Sword of the Spirit and the Servants of the Word.

The Sword of the Spirit and the Servants of the Word are closely associated in some ways but distinct entities in other ways. In this document, we are speaking only for Servants of the Word. The Sword of the Spirit has published their own response on their website, which you may access [here](#).)

We fundamentally agree with Lathrop's findings regarding how we responded to these matters. In what follows, we describe how the review was conducted, what the principal findings and recommendations were, and how we are responding. Some of the recommended changes we have already made; others are in process. We also want to provide clarification on some points that may cause confusion. We are not in any way questioning the validity of the review.

Our Intent in Commissioning the Independent Review

The Sword of the Spirit and the Servants of the Word commissioned Lathrop to review and provide an objective assessment of how the organizations responded to the matters involving Conlin and Treadwell.

We also asked them to examine our then-current child safeguarding policies and procedures. We sought objective input on how we could improve the safety of children and youth. Lathrop has pointed out ways that we can strengthen child safeguarding policies and practices. Most of these policies and practices had already been implemented, as described below in the section Recommendations to Improve Child Safety.

The Method of the Review

Lathrop provided the following services:

- Lathrop determined the method of their review.
- Their team “reviewed documents relating to the response to the matters involving Ed Conlin and Jamie Treadwell. These documents included email correspondence, communications, written statements, and other documentation that were created close in time to actual events.” (p. 1)
- They determined who to interview. They reached out to the families of alleged victims who “expressed interest in speaking with [them] as part of the review.” (p. 1) Only one Servants of the Word brother was interviewed.
- They did not provide the Servants of the Word with a list of who they interviewed or a list of which specific documents they relied upon.

Recommendations for Servants of the Word Leaders Involved in the Conlin and Treadwell Matters

Lathrop made specific recommendations regarding the leaders of the Servants of the Word (p. 7).

- “Lathrop GPM recommends that all of the leaders who were aware of child safety concerns in either of those matters and failed to take appropriate responsive action receive individualized training. The training should include a discussion of the missteps they made so that they are better equipped to respond to child safety reports in the future.” (p. 7)
 - We fully accept this recommendation and have already begun implementing it. Training for all Servants of the Word members has already occurred, and the individual leaders involved have already had substantial discussions about the missteps noted.
- The report also recommends “those leaders take appropriate steps to seek reconciliation with those who were harmed by their actions.” (p. 7)

- We have begun reaching out to victims and affected families with the hope of speaking with them personally if they so desire. We pray and hope that this may bear some fruit in the process of healing. It is our desire to listen well, apologize, and learn from our past missteps.
- “Lathrop has recommended that five of these leaders be ineligible to serve in leadership positions within Sword of the Spirit and be ineligible to serve as Presiding Elder, Regional Elder, and Child Protection Officer in Servants of the Word.” (p. 7)
 - The five leaders are Dave Quintana, John Yocum, Dan Keating, Ken Noecker and Volodimir Bezulowsky. Below is what each has done:
 - Dave Quintana, John Yocum and Dan Keating have stepped down from all governmental roles within the Sword of the Spirit and from their previous roles as Presiding Elder and Regional Elders for the Servants of the Word.
 - Ken Noecker has stepped down from all governmental roles within the Sword of the Spirit and as the European and Middle East (EME) Regional Elder for the Servants of the Word.
 - Volodimir Bezulowsky has stepped down from the role of Regional (EME) Child Safeguarding Officer for the Servants of the Word.

Recommendations to Improve Child Safety

Lathrop made specific recommendations related to thirteen aspects of the prevention and response efforts of Sword of the Spirit communities, including Servants of the Word. (pp. 6-7) Well before we contracted with Lathrop, the Servants of the Word had been working with Praesidium, a leading organization with expertise in child safeguarding policies and procedures. Through this process the Servants of the Word had already implemented, or are in the process of implementing, many of the Lathrop’s recommendations.

We have a revised Safeguarding Policy for Children which was crafted in consultation with Praesidium. The policy calls for the appointment of external Review Boards, which we have implemented. We also have appointed Child Protection Officers in all our regions, and they have all received training through Praesidium. The policy also strengthens our onboarding process for new brothers including screening processes which emphasize child protection. All the brothers throughout the world have received safeguarding training. You can find our current safeguarding policy for children [here](#).

Findings Regarding Dismissal of Conlin and Treadwell

On January 21, 2024, we published a comprehensive statement for our handling of the Conlin and Treadwell matters. You may access that statement [here](#). We also want to address some specific areas of failure pointed out by Lathrop.

Lathrop found that Conlin and Treadwell should have been dismissed from the Servants of the Word, and thus the Sword of the Spirit, when inappropriate conduct or repeated violations of child safeguarding policies came to light. We accept their judgment. We have recently adopted

policies about repeated violations of child safety policies or a confirmed case of sexual abuse of a minor. The policy states that a confirmed case of sexual abuse of a minor by a brother is grounds for the brother's immediate dismissal from the brotherhood. For a more detailed description of our policy, please refer to Steps We are Taking -- Disciplinary Measures, which is under the Apologies et al heading [here](#).

Lathrop found that Conlin and Treadwell should have been removed from all Communities and they were not. We want to clarify that they were not allowed to participate in Sword of the Spirit communities either for a period of time or permanently, as described below. After allegations were brought, they were only allowed to continue as members of the Servants of the Word – that is, to the religious brotherhood to which they had made life-long commitments.

- In 1998, Conlin was not allowed to participate in any Sword of the Spirit community for his first 30 months in the U.S. It was only after this period of reform and repentance, and after consulting with Sword of the Spirit leaders, that he was re-integrated into a community in Michigan but with restrictions in place.
- After allegations were made in the autumn of 2016, Treadwell was not allowed to participate in any Sword of the Spirit community. He resided at the Brotherhood Center in rural Michigan and was put under substantial restrictions until he left the Servants of the Word three years later, in December 2019.

Clarification of Conlin-Related Points

Regarding the allegations against Conlin in the 1990s, from the Lathrop report:

Instead of conducting an appropriate investigation into the concerns about Conlin's relationship with minors... and removing Conlin from all Communities as it should have, Servants of the Word moved Conlin to the United States. (p. 3)

There appears to be a misunderstanding in the report regarding the process in which Conlin was removed from the youth organization. And the description in the text above could be taken to imply that we moved Conlin to the U.S. as an alternative to dealing with his wrongdoing.

Regarding the process: In 1996, after we initially heard concerns of Conlin's association with a teenaged girl, Conlin was admonished for how he interacted with young people. But we failed to initiate a safeguarding investigation at the time. Two years later, in 1998, after more concerns were raised, the youth organization, led by local leaders that involved the Servants of the Word, began a dismissal process. A law firm and the Labor Relations Agency were consulted about the process. A disciplinary hearing was convened, Conlin attended but did not speak, evidence was presented, and he was dismissed from the youth organization.

Also, in 1998, the youth organization reported Conlin's activity to the Northern Ireland Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Social Services. The police declined to pursue the matter, said no

further action was required, and informed Social Services that Conlin could leave the country. It was then that Conlin returned to his home country of the United States.

Regarding restrictions placed on Conlin after he moved to the U.S., the Lathrop report states:

The restrictions placed on Conlin were inadequate, were not appropriately monitored, and compliance was not consistently enforced. In addition, there were no consequences when Conlin violated the restrictions. (p. 3)

We should have placed more restrictions on Conlin and monitored them more closely. The primary restriction we placed on Conlin was that he would not be assigned to youth work—that is, to serve as a youth worker with minors—and this restriction was maintained throughout. We recognize that Conlin was allowed to be present at certain youth events or in youth environments. These were failures in our oversight of Conlin: we did not make a firm restriction against Conlin’s presence at all youth events.

We also learned that Conlin had related to some adult women in ways that were inappropriate and did not properly guard emotional boundaries. Here, Conlin failed to adhere to the Servants of the Word guidelines for relating with women. Because we did not oversee Conlin properly, we did not adequately recognize these were occurring.

Clarification of Treadwell-Related Points

Regarding our handling of Treadwell, the Lathrop report observes:

Servants of the Word brothers and others in the Sword of the Spirit community in London knew of concerns involving Treadwell during his time in London but failed to take adequate responsive action. These concerns included allegations that Treadwell engaged in conduct that violated the child safety rules on multiple occasions. (p. 4)

We acknowledge some individuals in London raised concerns about Treadwell’s interactions with children, but no one in the Servants of the Word understood those concerns to be safeguarding issues; and we did not hear from any person an allegation regarding sexual abuse. We agree with Lathrop that every safeguarding concern should be formally documented. Where there are violations of child safety policies, we will follow our Safeguarding Policy for Children, which can lead to a brother being dismissed from the Servants of the Word.

Lathrop rightly asserts that, after Treadwell moved to the U.S.:

We found no evidence that there were any disclosures made to the groups he interacted with or that there were any restrictions regarding his interactions with children. Although restrictions on Treadwell’s ability to interact with children were put in place, those restrictions were inadequately monitored and enforced, and there were no consequences when he violated them. (p. 4)

To elaborate and clarify, prior to leaving London, Treadwell agreed with the Regional Elder on restrictions regarding his interactions with children and families. He was not to spend unsupervised time with children and was to limit time spent at the homes of families with young children. These restrictions were documented by the regional Child Protection Officer, but they were not forwarded to the Servants of the Word or Sword of the Spirit communities in the U.S. when Treadwell returned there. In 2015 and 2016, he participated in Sword of the Spirit communities and, unfortunately, also interacted with children contrary to the restrictions he had agreed to. We recognize that we did not adequately communicate and enforce those restrictions. Soon after reports of his inappropriate interactions with children in 2016, he was removed from Sword of the Spirit community life and required to live at the Servants of the Word Brotherhood Center in rural Michigan, with restrictions put in place prohibiting interaction with children that, to the best of our knowledge, he followed.

Conclusion

To conclude, we hope that acknowledging our mistakes will allow us to embrace Lathrop's findings and to make progress toward creating safer communities, better accountability, and healing. We are deeply sorry for what we failed to do or did not properly do, and we ask your forgiveness.

We accept the findings and recommendations of the Lathrop report. We view this important work as an opportunity to recognize our mistakes and to improve our response to child safety issues. We know that these words must be backed by changes in practice, policies, and attitudes. We will continue to study and consider more ways we can respond to Lathrop's findings and recommendations.

I close by thanking the team of Lathrop GPM for assisting us in accomplishing the goals of the independent review. We are grateful for their hard work, objectivity, and even-handedness.

Your brother,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David A. Mijares". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Your brother,".

David Mijares
Presiding Elder, Servants of the Word