

PRESS RELEASE

Superseding Indictment Returned for New Jersey Pastor and Self-Proclaimed Prophet Who Compelled Labor and Sex from Congregants

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For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

A grand jury in the District of New Jersey returned a superseding indictment yesterday charging Treva Edwards, 61, Orange, New Jersey, with two counts of sex trafficking by force, fraud, or coercion, three counts of forced labor, and conspiracy to commit forced labor. The superseding indictment also charged his wife, Christine Edwards, 64, also of Orange, with conspiracy to commit forced labor.

According to the superseding indictment, Treva and Christine Edwards were the founders and pastors of a church they named "Jesus is Lord by the Holy Ghost," which they operated out of a multi-unit apartment building in Orange, where they conspired with each other and others to obtain the compelled labor of church members.

As charged in the superseding indictment, between 2010 and 2025, the defendants identified and recruited victims who were facing struggles in their personal lives, including financial and familial, to join the church and live and worship at the church building. Treva Edwards told the victims that he was a prophet who could communicate directly with God and that disobeying him would result in spiritual retribution, as well as physical, emotional, and financial harm.

The Edwardses secured labor contracts to provide manual labor in and around Orange, including cleaning and gutting commercial and residential properties, shoveling snow, removing bulk trash, moving furniture, cleaning raw sewage, and exterminating rodent infestations. The Edwards couple dispatched the victims to perform the contracted labor. They did not pay wages to the victims for their work and kept the money earned from their labor.

Treva Edwards preached to the victims that he communicated God's will, that it was God's will for them to work, and that members had to perform labor to serve God. The defendants convinced the victims that they would lose favor with God and "the Prophet" if they did not perform the prescribed labor. Treva Edwards spread fear among the victims through verbal and emotional abuse and threats of reputational harm, homelessness, hunger, spiritual retribution, punishments, and additional hard labor to gain their obedience and compel them to perform unpaid labor. The Edwardses instituted and enforced strict rules about when and whether the victims could eat or sleep, when and for how long they were to pray and work, and whether they could speak to non-members or leave the church building. They isolated the victims, monitored their communications and whereabouts, and convinced them that non-members were evil or possessed by the devil. They also deprived the victims of sleep and typically fed them only once a day after they completed their work.

According to the allegations in the superseding indictment, Treva Edwards controlled and subjected two victims to repeated physical and sexual assaults, impregnating one victim and instructing her to get an abortion, and telling the other victim that having sex with him was God's will and would prevent her from becoming mentally ill.

The charge of sex trafficking by force, fraud, or coercion against Treva Edwards carries a mandatory minimum penalty of 15 years in prison and a maximum penalty of life in prison. The forced labor charge against Treva Edwards carries a maximum penalty of 20 years or life in prison if the violation included aggravated sexual abuse. The conspiracy to commit forced labor charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors. There is no parole in the federal system.

Assistant Attorney General A. Tysen Duva of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Robert Frazer for the District of New Jersey, Special Agent in Charge Michael S. McCarthy of the Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Newark Field Office, and Inspector General Anthony D'Esposito for the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General made the announcement.

HSI Newark Field Office and the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General Newark Field Office are investigating the case.

Trial Attorney Francisco Zornosa of the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Trevor Chenoweth and Susan Millenky for the District of New Jersey are prosecuting the case.

HSI Newark is asking anyone with information about Treva Edwards, Christine Edwards, or their organization known as Jesus is Lord by the Holy Ghost (JLHG), to contact its tip line at (866) 347-2423 or email HSINewarkHumanTrafficking@hsi.dhs.gov. The tip line is monitored 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Additionally, there is an online tip form.

If you or someone you know is a victim of human trafficking, please call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1 (888) 373-7888.

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