The analysis you rely on—now easier to find, explore, and connect.

Welcome to PRA and Religion Dispatches' new website!

Allegations of Sexual Abuse Emerge at Influential Bethel Church

The moral failure is systemic

Keri Ladner (https://politicalresearch.org/people/keri-ladner)

Published on February 25, 2026

Prophet Bob Hartley gives a "talk about a series of dreams about the Hope Healing Journey and the Yellow House." *YouTube*

Heartbreaking allegations of sexual abuse at Bethel Church (https://youtu.be/n27WA81T_Js?si=rIbeeSooJa3Ql7ix), a charismatic megachurch in Redding, California, has recently come to light. Bob Hartley, previously one of the core "prophets" at the International House of Prayer at Kansas City (IHOP-KC), used his spiritual authority to abuse young women, both at Bethel and IHOP-KC. A few weeks after the initial allegations came to light, new allegations surfaced (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCV3OGkTrZE) alleging that one of the pastors sexually assaulted an intern who was also working as a nanny for his children.

When the church's leadership learned of the assault, not only did they cover it up but they turned it into a feel-good story about God's mercy and reconciliation, told in Danny Silk's 2019 book *Unpunishable*. Instances of this kind of abuse in religious communities are relatively common, with experts often pointing to the presence of a contributing factor such as an independent governance structure, the elevated standing of clergy, or the desire to protect the institution above individual victims. With churches and parachurch organizations associated with the New Apostolic Reformation (https://religiondispatches.org/2024/05/23/reporters-guide-new-apostolic-reformation-revised-2025) (NAR), we frequently find a perfect storm of all three, as is the case with Bethel.

While more traditional evangelical and mainline Protestant churches in America have certainly seen their share of sexual abuse scandals, they have structures that make hiding the abuse significantly more difficult. Historically, these churches have been democratically governed by their congregations, who may vote to accept a new pastor or revise a church policy; additionally, a board of deacons and/or broader denomination may provide oversight and training for clergy.

But Bethel Church, a product of the deeply problematic (https://religiondispatches.org/2024/06/10/rising-christian-right-movement-new-apostolic-reformation-emerged-mid-20th-century) Latter Rain revival and epicenter of the New Apostolic Reformation, is different. Rather than decision-making falling to the congregation, a board, or denomination, authority is typically placed in the hands of one or two apostles or prophets. In Bethel's case, best-selling author Bill Johnson and Kris Vallotton wield decision-making power, the very independent, highly-concentrated governance structure that sexual abuse experts point to as a potential red flag.

In addition to this structural vulnerability, the NAR's system of apostles and prophets further exacerbates the potentially problematic issue of an elevated clergy. According to Holly Pivec and Douglas Geivett in *Reckless Christianity* (https://www.amazon.com/Reckless-Christianity-Destructive-Teachings-Practices/dp/1725272474), a book-length critique of Bethel Church:

“The potential for abuse by present-day apostles and prophets is greater than the potential for abuse by other church leaders because they claim to speak directly for God and to exercise unique authority.”

And this state of affairs is even more thorny than it first appears given that: “there is no independent means of verifying the veracity or authority of their claims to be apostles and prophets.” No academic credential is required and there’s no entity overseeing ordination. Johnson, as Bethel’s senior leader, may technically be overseen by a council (or board) of elders, but he also maintains the right to overturn their decisions. In any case, given the widespread belief that submitting to an apostle is required to receive God’s blessings, no one on Johnson’s council has any reason to go against him.

And with Bethel’s global influence and the stunning popularity of the New Apostolic Reformation, this church model has proliferated all over the world.

Culture of honor

Shockingly, the more you drill down the worse this problem gets. Bethel Church promotes a concept known as the “culture of honor,” which effectively protects those in power from the kind of whistleblowing that exposed Bob Hartley’s pattern of abuse at Bethel and IHOP-KC. In 2009, Danny Silk, a part of Bethel’s “apostolic team,” wrote *Culture of Honor* (https://www.scribd.com/document/487104232/Culture-of-Honor-Sustaining-a-Danny-Silk-pdf), a book whose cover features a knight grasping a lance.

According to Silk: “A culture of honor is created as a community of people learns to discern and receive people in their God-given identities.” In other words, if one recognizes the unique authority of the apostle and prophet and gives those individuals the honor they’re due, they will receive God’s blessings or miracles. If those miracles are not forthcoming, the reason may very well be that people are not properly honoring those in power.

Hartley’s son, Jedidiah, who grew up in these charismatic circles, sees it quite differently. Having already called (https://x.com/Jedidiahhartley/status/1764749163756204134) his father “a complete fraud” and his ministry “a con,” in a recent podcast (https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/bethel-wouldnt-stop-him-so-his-son-and-victims-are/id1358056327?i=1000744918679&r=4585.072) Jedidiah told host Mike Winger: “The whole structure of the way the community works is just flawed.

You know, just that they have this culture of honor where they're bringing in these spiritual magicians, putting them on a pedestal. So many of them have been abusers."

For at least a decade before Mike Bickle founded the International House of Prayer in 1999 (along with Bob Jones and Paul Cain), he was promoting the idea of churches being run by prophets and apostles. In 2023 Bickle was accused by numerous women of abuse that, according to a statement (https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article281136673.html), "spann[ed] several decades." His fellow prophet Bob Jones (https://www.amazon.com/Reckless-Christianity-Destructive-Teachings-Practices-ebook/dp/B0CR5R45W3/ref=sr_1_1?adgrpid=185184779966&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.3_dhm_BS9ULAZpxp0Chtad7E-UUSyqU8ggow3DfQO_QLtjvqkyZe5xwYveU2rDYGMJHsTnwvg8z3LnXnJyfmko5BM1ec0_paLG8JD7v0dCBVLVk9-LbPEIuf9O8HG7t-lbNqBWL_nhMHWtoncx2cmLn_NT2uyepsnq8DAyY9qmL4y6f-uNY_fqEqritsPf5BEMPn3eQs7ZMBgWZb2kXp36j1XunOMHGYAIVOqQvyFkk.lk5ypNmclJfzd0MUaZZH6xFJcUBlJbZE3VnzjIJCWzY&dib_tag=se&hvadid=779535749958&hvdev=c&hvexpln=0&hvlocphy=9027289&hvnetw=g&hvocijid=320432103359283862--&hvqmt=e&hvrand=320432103359283862&hvtargid=kwd-2334681985197&hydadcr=7667_13589703_2078027&keywords=reckless+christianity&mcid=c2efefbda7603bc5bc9896da6766708d&qid=1768352340&sr=8-1) (whom Vallotton greatly revered (https://youtu.be/nTaABvdI6-A?si=2nQkTj3Rn1csY7Ye)) was, according to Pivec and Geivett (https://www.amazon.com/Reckless-Christianity-Destructive-Teachings-Practices-ebook/dp/B0CR5R45W3/ref=sr_1_1?adgrpid=185184779966&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.3_dhm_BS9ULAZpxp0Chtad7E-UUSyqU8ggow3DfQO_QLtjvqkyZe5xwYveU2rDYGMJHsTnwvg8z3LnXnJyfmko5BM1ec0_paLG8JD7v0dCBVLVk9-LbPEIuf9O8HG7t-lbNqBWL_nhMHWtoncx2cmLn_NT2uyepsnq8DAyY9qmL4y6f-uNY_fqEqritsPf5BEMPn3eQs7ZMBgWZb2kXp36j1XunOMHGYAIVOqQvyFkk.lk5ypNmclJfzd0MUaZZH6xFJcUBlJbZE3VnzjIJCWzY&dib_tag=se&hvadid=779535749958&hvdev=c&hvexpln=0&hvlocphy=9027289&hvnetw=g&hvocijid=320432103359283862--&hvqmt=e&hvrand=320432103359283862&hvtargid=kwd-2334681985197&hydadcr=7667_13589703_2078027&keywords=reckless+christianity&mcid=c2efefbda7603bc5bc9896da6766708d&qid=1768352340&sr=8-1), found in the early 1990s to have been telling young women to undress and stand naked before the Lord so that he could receive a prophecy for them. There were numerous allegations that Paul Cain (https://stephendeere.substack.com/p/ihopkc-figure-aided-abusers-sought?utm_source=publication-search), who looms large in the IHOP-KC mythology (yet played a less significant role in the actual founding of IHOP-KC), was molesting boys. Surely it's no coincidence that yet another figure involved in the founding of IHOP-KC was a predator.

The latest allegations

According to both Hartley's son Jedidiah, and one of his victims, Michelle Seidler, Bethel's senior leadership had heard from victims (https://youtu.be/n27WA81T_Js?si=kvi_p2LHDnklntuz) as far back as 2017, yet continued to give him access to the young women in their congregation. "Bethel was contacted about this years ago," Seidler said. "And nothing was ever done."

In fact, church leadership continued to pump him up as a prophetically gifted individual. Hartley proceeded to use his "prophecies" to tell women that God had great plans for them, even "promis[ing] a few women that he was going to marry them," Seidler told (https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/bethel-wouldnt-stop-him-so-his-son-and-victims-are/id1358056327?i=1000744918679&r=6275.952) Mike Winger, whose show initially disclosed the abuse story. Seidler, who has spoken with other victims, also recounted how Hartley had attempted to rape her and had forced another young woman who was a virgin to have sex with him.

Despite all this, church leadership didn't just prioritize the *institution*—as is often the case in environments that enable sexual abuse—they chose to prioritize *the reputation of a single prophet* over the safety of his victims. Whether he was preaching at Bethel or renting his houses in Redding to female students Hartley continued to receive a warm reception.

Hartley was by no means the first alleged predator that Bethel's senior leadership knowingly allowed in. They also maintained a relationship with Bob Jones; despite then-Vineyard leader John Wimber saying (https://www.amazon.com/Reckless-Christianity-Destructive-Teachings-Practices/dp/1725272474) that Jones should never return to ministry, both Bickle and Vallotton gave him a platform.

Unfortunately this perfect storm of conditions that enabled sexual abuse to thrive at Bethel isn't an isolated tragedy. Across the US and the world, highly influential megachurches, many associated with the New Apostolic Reformation, have created ecosystems where abuse can, and will, thrive. Until that reality is addressed, each new instance of abuse will continue to be viewed as the "moral failure" of an individual.

Authors

Keri Ladner (https://politicalresearch.org/people/keri-ladner)

Keri Ladner received her PhD at the University of Edinburgh. Her upcoming book, American Dominion: The Rise and Radicalization of a New Christendom, is now available for pre-order from Bloomsbury.

EXPLORE MORE

CHRISTIAN RIGHT (https://politicalresearch.org/research/christian-right)

MISOGYNY & MALE SUPREMACISM (https://politicalresearch.org/research/misogyny-male-supremacism)

NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION (https://politicalresearch.org/taxonomy/term/121)

SEXUAL ABUSE (https://politicalresearch.org/research/sexual-abuse)