

Former fundamentalist minister in B.C. found not guilty of historical sexual abuse

Lee-Ann McChesney acquitted on charges of sexual assault and sexual exploitation dating back to 1989

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Lee-Ann McChesney, a former 2x2s minister, has been acquitted in B.C. Supreme Court of historical sexual abuse. (David Horemans/CBC)

A former minister in the 2x2s Christian fundamentalist sect was found not guilty of historical sexual assault and sexual exploitation dating back to 1989.

In acquitting Lee-Ann McChesney, Justice Michael Stephens said Crown had not proven the charges beyond reasonable doubt. Stephens described the case as “difficult” due to the subject matter.

Only one witness, complainant Lyndell Montgomery, was called to give evidence during the trial in B.C. Supreme Court in New Westminster, about incidents alleged to have taken place in Terrace, Delta and Surrey when she was 14 and 15 years old.

The court heard Montgomery was adopted as an infant into a devout 2x2s family, and had been sent to live under the care of McChesney, a minister in the church, during the time of the allegations.

Montgomery requested her name not be under a publication ban. Publication bans are common in cases involving the alleged sexual abuse of a child or youth.

McChesney declined comment outside of court and no 2x2s leader was present.

Montgomery was supported at trial by over a dozen people in the gallery. In a statement sent to CBC News after the trial, she said she wasn't sorry for choosing to engage the court.

"Telling [my story] was for my own healing, sure, but it was also for everyone who can't — whether they're silenced by a statute of limitations, by death of their perp or by fear. This was my story, but now it's a part of others as well," she wrote.

FBI 2 years into 2x2s investigation

The case in New Westminster is one of a handful in Canada where 2x2s complainants have gone to police seeking criminal charges against church members, although hundreds of allegations of child sexual abuse and abuse have been recorded by independent researchers.

Two years ago, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation opened an investigation into the 2x2s and issued a public appeal for help in identifying victims or individuals with knowledge of abuse and/or criminal behaviour within the sect.

In an email to CBC News, the FBI said the investigation remains open, but no details could be shared in order to preserve the integrity and capabilities of the investigation.

The email said 2x2s victims of abuse from outside the U.S. are encouraged to contact the FBI.

“In coordination with our Legal Attaché Offices around the world, we routinely share information and intelligence with our international law enforcement partners in an effort to identify and mitigate threats,” said an FBI spokesperson.

The 2x2s operate globally. The faith teaches that it is the only true way to salvation. Former members who have spoken to CBC News described the church as high-control, insular and secretive.

Although commonly referred to as 2x2s, the organization is officially nameless. It doesn't keep official records or publish a leadership structure, and own no places of worship, according to multiple sources.

Ministry is conducted in the homes of the faithful, known as “friends,” or in rented spaces. Ministers, known as “workers” have no formal training and live in the homes of friends who are expected to provide financial and material support. Senior workers called “overseers” control a geographical region and are exclusively male.

The FBI investigation was sparked by an outpouring of abuse allegations that emerged after an overseer named Dean Bruer was found dead in an Oregon motel room in 2022, according to multiple sources CBC News spoke to.

Following his death, a letter written by an overseer named Doyle Smith described Bruer's double life, calling him as a “sexual predator” whose “actions include raped and abuse of underage victims.” The letter has been posted publicly, including by the organization Wings for Truth, which documents activity within the 2x2s organization.



Lyndell Montgomery poses with supporters outside of B.C. Supreme Court in New Westminister. From left to right: Cynthia Liles, Lyndell Montgomery, Judy Scheller and Jen Barth. (Karin Larsen/CBC)

After the revelations about Bruer, Cynthia Liles, a former 2x2s member and private investigator in Oregon, launched a non-profit called 2x2s Church Accountability. It runs an independent reporting hotline to document allegations of abuse within the 2x2s that Liles says has received reports of over 1200 alleged perpetrators.

Liles believes from the information collected that leaders in the 2x2s church have been ignoring allegations of child sexual abuse within the sect and protecting perpetrators for years.

“I thought when [church leadership] became aware of the amount of abuse we were hearing about that they would be shocked and do something about it. But they already knew about it and they had no intention of changing,” she said.

Liles travelled to New Westminister to support Montgomery during the trial. So did Jen Barth, a former 2x2s member who was drawn into an earlier criminal trial

involving former 2x2s minister Aaron Farough, who pleaded guilty to possessing and distributing child pornography in 2023.

Farough was living in the Barth family home in Courtenay, B.C., during a portion of the time he committed the crimes.

“Originally, I, Jen Barth, was under investigation because the [internet service provider] for our household is in my name,” she said.

Barth says the 2x2s organization has shown little accountability.

“They are avoiding, they are minimizing, they are concealing. They are denying these allegations. And we all know, these things need to be taken seriously.