

Former church youth face off against leadership

◀ **FORMER** from A1 Mollenhauer also related a story about Felicia Masopust “knowingly” giving her two vertigo pills instead of allergy pills, then “lied about it ... and made it into a joke.”

She closed her post about “manipulation and abuse” at the church by saying there were many more stories just like hers, and encouraged people to “believe the victims coming out.”

The comments on her post contained several similar stories, but the floodgates opened Feb. 2, when Sean Masopust was arrested and charged with fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct. He is accused of having sexual contact with a member of the church’s youth group in 2018.

Since his arrest, at least five more young people have posted their experiences at Northridge Church.

None of them have alleged sexual abuse, but all of them described control, manipulation and “cult” behavior.

That includes Jordan Travis, who had shared Mollenhauer’s post in December.

After that, Travis said, “someone from the church made false claims to CPS (Child Protective Services) about me.” She is the mother of a 14-month-old.

Travis left the church in August, citing her belief that Mark Perryman and Felicia Masopust are “homophobic and racist.” She recalled a time when Masopust said “Soma-lians ‘smell,’” then said “my husband told me not to say that because it’s racist.”

Though Travis left the church, she continued to work at Sunshine Tree, the daycare affiliated with Northridge Church, but said she started looking for a new job in October, when an anonymous letter revealed Masopust’s alleged abuse.

When Tammy Perryman – the minister’s wife and the director of the daycare – learned Travis was job-hunting, the two had a conversation.

According to Travis, “she told me her husband



Grace Karsten

knew about Sean three years ago, but Sean lied about the severity of it. She even told me she was worried that (Sean) might do it again, and that she was humiliated about it.”

An hour later, Felicia Masopust sent Travis a message, “basically telling me her husband did nothing wrong ... All she did was victim-blame and say horrible things about the (alleged) victim, who I know personally.”

Within a week, Travis was blocked from all communication with the church, and said she “no longer felt safe or welcome there.” She left her job soon after.

Travis, too, referenced an issue with prescrip-



Jordan Travis

tion medication; she said Felicia Masopust once offered her a Xanax pill, which she declined.

Grace Karsten, another former youth group member, said she’s angry at herself for not recognizing “all the red flags. They drew in as many vulnerable children as they could, to control and manipulate.”

Karsten, too, said she left the church because of Perryman’s “homophobic, hurtful sermons.”

She learned of the allegations against Sean Masopust in October, when the anonymous letter arrived.

Karsten posted about it on Owatonna Moms Facebook page, then called the Assemblies

of God district counsel, Northridge Church’s state-level governing body.

Mark Dean, the Assemblies of God superintendent who eventually went to Owatonna Police with the allegations, told Karsten “it’s a process to report to the police.”

“Nope,” Karsten said. “He was and is a mandated reporter; he had first-hand knowledge about Sean’s abuse and did nothing but put Sean’s pastor license on hold. We purposely went to the higher-ups in hopes they’d do more than the Northridge Church board.”

She said during their phone call, Dean referenced the three-year time limit since the alleged abuse, possibly referencing the statute of limitations for sexual abuse charges.

There is no statute of limitations for the sexual abuse of minors.

Karsten also called the state’s youth director for Assemblies of God, who reportedly told her he had no knowledge of the situation, “strength-

ening my belief that they were also trying to cover this up.”

Dean went to Owatonna Police two months later, “after I called him out on his crap,” Karsten said.

“It shouldn’t take pressure to protect children, hold a predator accountable and do the right thing.”

Both Travis and Karsten spoke about a social media post that appeared Saturday, a photo of Felicia Masopust and four other female church members, including a public school teacher, a paraprofessional and one of the teachers at Sunshine Tree.

Across the photo are the words “Love being part of a cult,” and “Kool Aid is the only juice I can have.”

“It hurts so bad that people I thought were my friends are making Instagram stories, mocking the victims,” Travis said.

“Completely mocking them,” Karsten said.

“And every one of them are mandated reporters, and in charge of children every day.”

DQ video goes viral; employees respond

◀ **DQ VIDEO** from A1 the door. Instead, she missed the bag, slipped on a patch of ice and fell onto her back. Laughter could be heard in the background.

The customer has never been identified.

That’s the end of that video, which was posted to Snapchat, a photo- and video-sharing platform on social media. The employee who tossed the food posted the video; she and another employee at the business then made a follow-up video mocking the woman and posted it on TikTok, another video-sharing platform.

Within an hour, the original videos were both removed from the employees’ social media accounts, but as we’ve all learned: If it’s on the Internet, it’s there forever.

And by then, the damage was done.

The video was shared multiple times on Facebook, usually accompanied by comments about disrespect and rudeness, suggestions to “call corporate,” press charges, file a lawsuit and more.

That was just the beginning, though. Within two hours, two of the employees received death threats, threats of rape and suggestions to kill themselves.

They are 17 and 18 years old. Both are seniors in high school; one works two jobs and attends post-secondary classes to get a jump on

her college degree; the other balances school and sports, excelling in both. Both had worked at DQ for about two years when the incident occurred.

And now, both have quit their jobs – along with three other employees; they said – out of fear for their safety.

“I regret it,” said the employee who threw the bag of food. “I’m not proud of that moment; I’d been dealing with it for 30 minutes, but I know I’m accountable for everything I do. Now we’re dealing with the consequences.”

But as the saying goes, no matter how flat you make a pancake, it still has two sides.

Before the video According to three employees – two 18-year-old managers and a 17-year-old shift leader who spoke to the Steele County Times – the incident began about 20 minutes before the video started rolling.

The woman ordered burgers, fries, drinks and ice cream, then advanced to the pick-up window. She paid and received her change, then had to wait for the hot food, which is cooked to order, they said. The employee at the drive-thru window – one of the 18-year-old managers, handled the order.

The woman was upset about the wait time, the manager said, became angry and drove away without the burgers and fries. Moments later, she

pulled back up to the drive-thru order board and began “yelling at us that she deserved a refund,” the manager said.

The manager told her to pull around to the pick-up window again, where she could get the rest of her food as well as the refund. Instead, the girls said, she pulled up to the front doors of the business.

The lobby of the business has been closed for years because there aren’t enough employees to staff both the drive-thru and the lobby, the employees said.

“We aren’t trying to play innocent. We do take accountability and are sorry for our actions and are now just doing the best we can.”

Former DQ Shift Leader

They didn’t realize the woman was there until they “heard banging on the front door,” the shift leader said, and “when I walked up, she was just cussing me out and telling me how she’s late and how we’re unacceptable,” and wanted a refund.

“I tried explaining to her multiple times that I can’t let her in the store, but if she went to the drive-thru, or just walked up to the (drive-thru) window, we’d be happy to give her the refund,” the shift leader said, “but she wouldn’t cooperate and wouldn’t listen.”

As the conversation through the locked doors continued, the employees said the woman continued “cussing at us, kicking the door, grabbing the handle and trying to open it.”

“Usually, when someone’s acting like that, for the safety of us and especially the younger ones, we can’t let them in,” the shift leader said.

Three other employees, ages 15 and 16, were also at the store that day. One of those employees ran to get the second 18-year-old manager, who was in the office.

That manager repeated the policy of not letting people into the lobby and told the woman she could pick up the rest of her food and the refund at the drive-thru window.

“She was using the ‘F’ word every other word, said she had kids in the car, and said her kids were already late,” the manager said and soon started recording the employees.

“That’s when I told the girls to record her,

get her license plate and call the cops, and I told her if she didn’t leave, we’ll have her trespass because we asked her multiple times to leave.”

The woman eventually said she didn’t want the rest of her order, which is when the manager opened the door and tossed the bag of food onto the ground.

The woman steps forward to kick it, slips and lands on her back.

The video ends there, with the girls first gasping, then laughing at the fall.

By 7 p.m. – about five hours after the altercation ended – Fourteen Foods, the corporation that owns more than 240 DQ stores, including the one in Owatonna, had contacted the local store.

A corporate rep told the manager to close early and “to let her know when we were safe.”

By the end of the night, the two managers and the shift leader had quit.

The fallout

The Owatonna Dairy Queen hasn’t reopened since it closed early the night of Jan. 30. The website says it’s temporarily closed, and the corporation has issued this statement:

“Fourteen Foods shares your concerns about what was shown in the video ... We are in the process of conducting an internal investigation, including talking with employees at the restaurant, reviewing security footage, and talking with the customer in the video. Know that we are taking this matter extremely seriously. The store will remain closed until the investigation is complete. Our number one goal is to be able to continue to serve the Owatonna community to the best of our ability.”

None of the three employees who spoke with the Steele County Times had spoken to Fourteen Foods since the night of the incident.

They’ve heard nothing from Owatonna police about the incident – but have since reported the threats they have received, including a particularly brutal one about raping one of the young managers.

Police are investigating, she said.

A larger problem?

This isn’t the first video to go viral because of poor behavior by customers and members of the workforce.

There’s no shortage of help-wanted signs; businesses of all kinds are desperately seeking employees. Tempers are short.

“Some comments are right,” one of the 18-year-old managers said of the feedback on social media. “The place was basically run by kids. Once you turn 18, they consider you an adult and make you a manager; you can open and close and count the till.”

The shift leader, a high school senior, was scheduled for 35 hours last week, with one day off.

Before the girls quit, they said there were nine employees – at least

six of them 18 or younger – to run the store, which was open nine hours a day, seven days a week.

Starting pay was \$10.50 per hour, they said. One manager made \$14.75 per hour and the shift lead made \$12.50 an hour.

But weekly, they dealt with upset and unruly customers.

“It’s not our first time getting people like this,” one manager said of last week’s altercation. “It’s typical, and we’ve learned to deal with it. Usually, it’s done within five minutes, where they yell at us and leave.”

The lesson

“We take full responsibility for the TikTok,” the shift leader said. “We regretted it and deleted it not long after posting it. We aren’t trying to play innocent. We do take accountability and are sorry for our actions and are now just doing the best we can.”

In addition to worrying about finding new jobs and how the incident may affect their future, they’re also worried about how their parents have been portrayed.

“I want people to know that it’s not our parents’ fault,” one of the managers said. “They did raise us right. We’re responsible for our own actions, so those are the comments that hurt the most. My parents have done whatever they could to raise me the best they could. One action doesn’t define who I am or what they taught me.”

The shift leader agreed.

“I looked at my mom and said, ‘please don’t think this is your fault. I’m so sorry.’”

Their parents, they said, are disappointed in them.

The manager who was at the drive-thru window has maintained her anonymity online because she remained at the window.

“It makes me really sad to see people saying such awful things about genuinely good people,” she said of her coworkers. “The nicest person in the world has had a moment where they get upset. I don’t know whether it’s because we’re in the service industry or because we’re teenagers, but we’re not supposed to show we’re upset?”

Most importantly, the internet is forever and often unforgiving, the shift leader said.

“It definitely made us more aware of what social media can do – and how quickly.”

Jensen 256-4712
Heating, A/C, & Plumbing
Geneva
Registered Showroom

- Quality plumbing & heating products for your remodeling or new home construction.
- Serving our area for over 40 years.
- We'll treat your home as if it were our own.

THE BOLD LOOK OF KOHLER

Loken Excavation & Drainage
YOUR DRAINAGE PROJECT PARTNER

WE CAN HELP YOU WITH:
Aggregate Products • Waterway Cleaning
All Excavation Projects • Hauling & Septic

Call DALLAS for your DRAINAGE needs!
507-451-2873

LOKEN
Excavation & Drainage Inc.

3695 Hoffman Drive NW • Owatonna
loken@qwestoffice.net | Toll-free 855-298-2568