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Parents join in killing teen son in secretive US church counselling session

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According to the New York Times, the Word of Life church was a curious place; "an imposing but tidy former schoolhouse whose occupants kept to themselves, almost never opening their doors or their mouths, secluded behind a closed entrance."

On 11 October (Sunday) evening, authorities said, two teenage boys - brothers and the sons of two members of the Word of Life - were called into a sanctuary and savagely beaten by at least a half dozen people, including their parents and older sister.

"Both brothers were continually subjected to physical punishment over the course of several hours, in hopes that each would confess to prior sins and ask for forgiveness," Chief Michael S. Inserra of the New Hartford Police Department said at a news conference on Wednesday.

The two boys were punched and kicked in the stomachs, genitals, backs and thighs in a "counseling session" that turned into a case of manslaughter, says the New York Times report.

On Monday afternoon, Lucas Leonard, 19, was pronounced dead at a hospital. Hours later, his brother, Christopher, 17, was found on the second floor of the church, suffering from serious injuries and remains hospitalized.

More arrests are expected in this bizarre case of religious extremism. The teenagers' parents, Bruce T. Leonard, 65, and Deborah Leonard, 59, have been arrested and charged with first-degree manslaughter. Four other church members, including the teenagers' half sister, Sarah

Ferguson, 33, were also arrested. Lawyers entered pleas of not guilty for all six suspects.

At least seven children, from about 2 to 15 years old, had also been taken from the church site, the police said, including four of Ferguson's children, and placed in foster care.

Authorities were trying to determine the exact organization, leadership and teachings of the Word of Life, which had little presence online and has few public records, the New York Times said.

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