

Press Release

Eight Members of the House of Prayer Christian Churches Indicted for Fraud Schemes in Operation “False Profit”

Wednesday, September 10, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Georgia

AUGUSTA, GA: A federal grand jury, presiding in the Southern District of Georgia, indicted eight individuals connected to the House of Prayer Christian Churches of America (HOPCC) for various fraud schemes and tax charges.

On September 10, 2025, a federal court unsealed a 26-count indictment. The indictment charges:

- **FNU LNU (First Name Unknown, Last Name Unknown) aka RONY DENIS**, age unknown, of Hinesville, Georgia, West Palm Beach Florida, and Martinez, Georgia, with Conspiracy to Commit Bank Fraud, Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud, and Aiding and Assisting in Filing a False Tax Return.
- **ANTHONY OLOANS**, 54, of Hinesville, Georgia, with Conspiracy to Commit Bank Fraud and Bank Fraud.
- **JOSEPH FRYAR**, 51, of Hinesville, Georgia and Martinez, Georgia, with Conspiracy to Commit Bank Fraud and Bank Fraud.
- **DENNIS NOSTRANT**, 55, of Hinesville, Georgia, with Conspiracy to Commit Bank Fraud and Bank Fraud.
- **GERARD ROBERTSON**, 57, of Hinesville, Georgia, with Conspiracy to Commit Bank Fraud and Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud.
- **DAVID REIP**, 52, of Hinesville, Georgia, with Conspiracy to Commit Bank Fraud and Bank Fraud.
- **MARCUS LABAT**, 42, of Hinesville, Georgia, with Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud and Wire Fraud.
- **OMAR GARCIA**, 40, of Palm Bay, Florida, with Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud and Wire Fraud.

The maximum penalties for Conspiracy to Commit Bank Fraud and Bank Fraud are up to 30 years of imprisonment, up to a \$1,000,000 fine, and not more than 5 years of supervised release.

The maximum penalties for Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud and Wire Fraud are up to 20 years of imprisonment, up to a \$250,000 fine, and not more than 3 years of supervised release.

The maximum penalties for Aiding and Assisting in the Filing of a False Tax Return are up to 3 years of imprisonment, up to a \$250,000 fine, and not more than 1 year of supervised release.

According to the indictment, the group's leader posed as "Rony Denis," an identity he allegedly stole in 1983. Using that identity, he became a U.S. citizen in 2002 and went on to establish HOPCC and its affiliate House of Prayer Bible Seminary (HOPBS).

The indictment alleges that Denis and his close associates — Anthony Oloans, Joseph Fryar, Dennis Nostrant, Gerard Robertson, David Reip, Marcus Labat, and Omar Garcia — used their leadership positions to exert extreme control over congregants. The indictment alleges that members were manipulated into turning over personal information, pressured into marriages and divorces arranged by church leaders, and forced to live in properties tied to the defendants that generated rental income.

The defendants are also accused of exploiting military personnel by recruiting them into the church, directing them to enroll in HOPBS, and then using their Veterans Administration benefits to funnel money into church-controlled accounts. Leaders allegedly disguised payouts to themselves as "expense reimbursements," "love offerings," and similar terms, while also using fraudulently gained funds to pay credit card bills for the defendants.

The indictment further describes how leaders maintained a list of "ex-HOPCC traitors," humiliated members for perceived rule violations, and restricted contact with family members who left the church.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is looking for additional victims (see more below).

Bank Fraud Scheme

According to the indictment, in 2004 until the present, defendants Rony Denis, Anthony Oloans, Joseph Fryar, Dennis Nostrant, Gerard Robertson, and David Reip, along with others, engaged in a long-running conspiracy to defraud financial institutions.

The defendants allegedly recruited members of their organization to serve as “straw buyers” in real estate transactions, concealing the true buyers’ identities. They falsified loan applications and closing documents, used forged powers of attorney, and created limited liability corporations to acquire and transfer properties. After seizing control of these properties, they converted them into rental homes, collecting more than \$5.2 million in rental income between 2018 and 2020.

Funds from the scheme were allegedly used to pay mortgages on the properties, cover personal expenses, and benefit members of the conspiracy, while leaving some of the straw buyers with damaged credit and foreclosures.

The Fraudulent Veterans Affairs Education Benefits Scheme

The indictment alleges that beginning no later than 2011 and continuing through 2022, Rony Denis, Omar Garcia, Marcus Labat, and Gerard Robertson conspired to defraud the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and U.S. military veterans of millions in education benefits.

According to the indictment, the defendants fraudulently obtained a religious exemption from state regulators in Georgia to operate two of the five locations of HOPBS. This exemption required that Georgia seminaries not receive federal funds. Nevertheless, the Georgia HOPS applied for and accepted VA education benefits, making it ineligible to maintain the exemption. HOPBS received more than \$3 million in education benefits for its Georgia locations and more than \$23.5 million for all five locations.

From 2013 through 2021, HOPBS officers fraudulently submitted false certifications to Georgia regulators that claimed the seminary did not receive federal funds, despite receiving millions in VA payments each year. The scheme funneled funding from VA education benefits to its seminary and related church accounts, enriching the defendants while exhausting some veterans’ benefits, often without students completing their programs.

Filing False Tax Returns

The indictment also charges Rony Denis with aiding in the preparation and filing of false income tax returns for calendar years 2018, 2019, and 2020. According to the indictment, Rony Denis falsely reported a total income of \$165,601 in 2018, \$155,408 in 2019, and \$247,433 in 2020, despite knowing those figures were false.

The FBI and the United States Attorney's Office are seeking additional victims whose personally identifiable information (PII) may have been misused by HOPCC. If you, your family member, or anyone you know has had contact with HOPCC and would like to report a crime, please complete this online questionnaire: fbi.gov/HOPCCVictims.

"This indictment alleges a scheme in which individuals betrayed the trust of church members for self-enrichment at the members' expense," said U.S. Attorney Heap. "We commend the work of our law enforcement partners in unraveling this fraudulent operation."

"The defendants are accused of exploiting trust, faith, and even the service of our nation's military members to enrich themselves," said Paul Brown, Special Agent in Charge of FBI Atlanta. "This indictment makes clear that using coercion, manipulation, and fraud under the guise of religion will not shield wrongdoers from accountability."

"Safeguarding Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefit funds reserved for deserving veterans remains a priority and our investigators are working diligently in the field to ensure these programs are not exploited for financial gain and greed," said Special Agent in Charge David Spilker with the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General's Southeast Field Office. "These indictments are a clear warning that the VA OIG, alongside our partners, will continue to aggressively pursue those who seek to defraud these vital VA benefits."

"The defendants are accused of fraudulently receiving VA education benefits intended for those who honorably served in our country's armed forces, along with committing other financial crimes," said Special Agent in Charge Demetrius Hardeman, IRS Criminal Investigation, Atlanta Field Office. "IRS Criminal Investigation special agents are diligently investigating those who commit financial fraud on the U.S. government and law-abiding taxpayers."

"Those who abuse the housing finance system for fraud will be held accountable," said Edwin S. Bonano, Special Agent in Charge at the Federal Housing Finance Agency Office of Inspector General (FHFA-OIG). "FHFA-OIG is proud to stand with our law enforcement partners to protect victims and safeguard the integrity of the housing finance system."

"Today's coordinated arrests of individuals connected to the House of Prayer Christian Churches of America and House of Prayer Bible Seminary effectively disrupts a calculated scheme to defraud our military service members and veterans of their hard-earned VA benefits," said Special Agent in Charge Ryan O'Connor of the Department of Army Criminal Investigative Division's Southern Field Office. "This investigation underscores CID's

unwavering commitment to protecting those who have served, and we will continue to aggressively pursue those who seek to exploit their trust and sacrifice.”

“USCIS will hold those that perpetrate immigration fraud accountable, and we will support any DOJ efforts to denaturalize this criminal, who used a stolen identity to fraudulently obtain U.S. citizenship,” said Sarah Posvar, Associate Portfolio Director, with USCIS' Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate.”

This case is being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General, Internal Revenue Service, the Federal Housing Finance Authority, the Department of the Army, CID, and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, with valuable assistance from the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. Assistant United States Attorneys Patricia G. Rhodes and George J.C. Jacobs, III are prosecuting the case.

An indictment is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Contact

For questions, please contact the U.S. Attorney’s Office at (912) 652-4422.

Updated September 10, 2025