



Church Leader Coerced Women Into Forced Labor That Aided Fraud Scheme: DOJ

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A federal jury in Chicago convicted the founder of a Pennsylvania ministry of forcing church members to work multiple jobs while pocketing their wages and directing them to defraud hotels as part of a lucrative scheme that lasted almost a decade.

Tracie Dickey, 55, of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was found guilty Friday of single counts of wire fraud and labor trafficking, according to a statement from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois.

Dickey, who is also known as Tracie Williams, served as the self-appointed bishop of Deliverance Tabernacle Ministries, a religious organization she founded that claimed to offer faith-based services in Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Florida, prosecutors said. Additionally, Dickey ran a sham travel agency called World Ambassador Travel.

Over the course of her trial, prosecutors presented evidence that Dickey recruited young women to the ministry and urged them to work multiple jobs, namely as desk clerks at hotels. Dickey instructed the women to have the hotels pay reservation-commission fees to her purported travel agency through a bank account she controlled.

In total, hotels paid Dickey roughly \$86,000 in commissions between 2005 and 2013, prosecutors said. However, World Ambassador Travel never actually booked reservations for hotel guests.

All the while, Dickey emotionally and physically abused the members she enlisted to aid in the scheme, coercing them to follow her rules and pocketing roughly \$333,000 they earned, prosecutors said. Dickey's abuse included starving and humiliating church members and threatening that God would hurt their families if they didn't follow her rules.

Some church members were ultimately forced into homelessness, prosecutors said. Several of the women testified during the her trial.

Dickey's sentencing hearing is scheduled for Aug. 7, prosecutors said. She faces up to 40 years in prison.