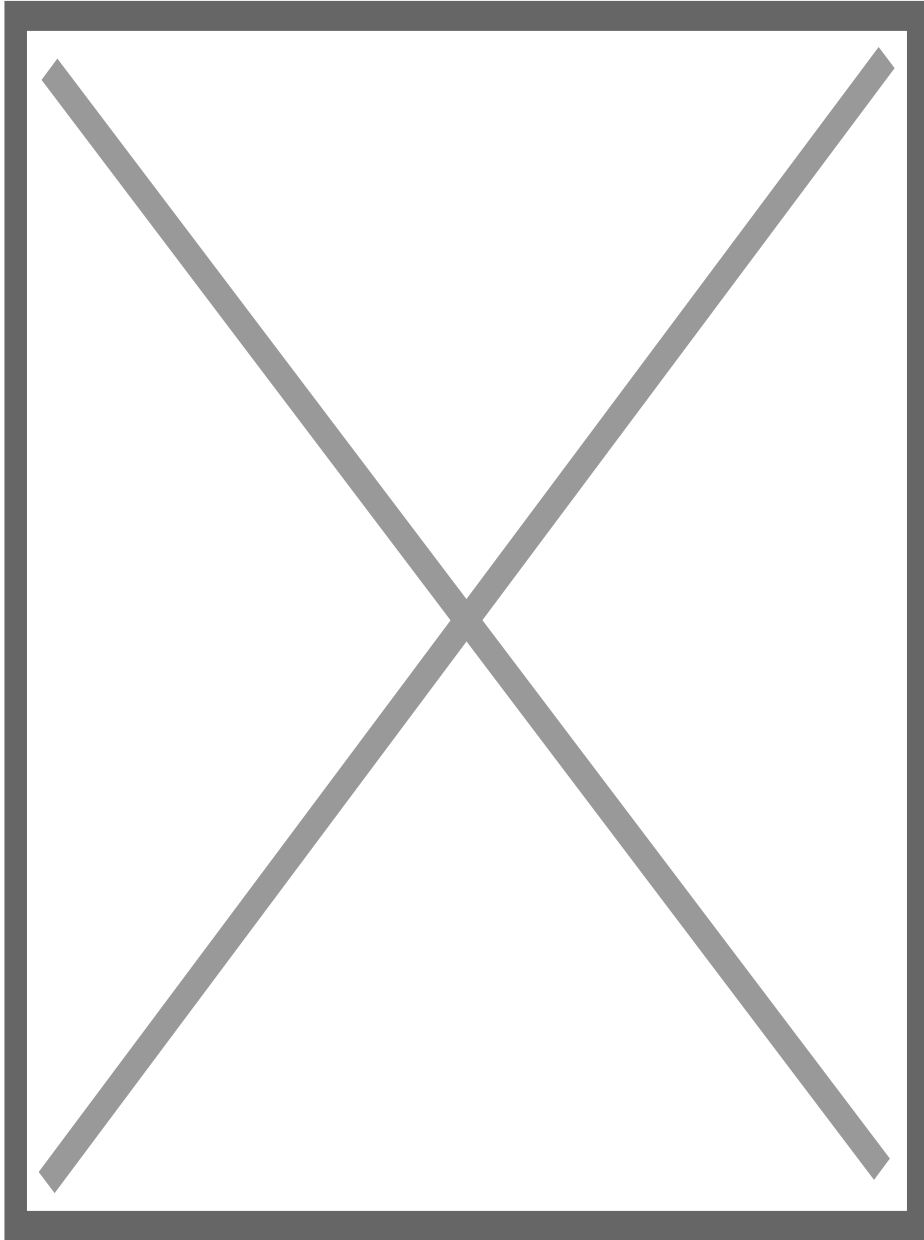


Facebook group helps women find healing after alleged abuse at Baptist counseling facility

by [Tracy Simmons](#)

February 4, 2026



Abigail Degnan (courtesy photo)

More than 100 women have found refuge in an online support group that exists because of trauma they say they experienced at a place meant to heal them.

Vision of Hope, a residential counseling facility in Lafayette, Indiana, operates under the independent Baptist congregation Faith Church and treats women struggling with eating disorders, mental health crises, unplanned pregnancies, and other life challenges. But according to former residents, interns, and staff, the ministry's approach—rooted in “biblical counseling” that rejects licensed mental health care—left many worse off than when they arrived.

Unlike traditional counseling that relies on psychological research and evidence-based treatment, biblical counseling approaches mental health issues primarily as spiritual problems. Faith Church's website describes biblical counseling as “the process where the Bible, God's Word, is related individually to a person or persons who are struggling under the weight of personal sin and/or the difficulties with suffering.”

In practice, former residents and staff say, this meant conditions like depression and anxiety were relabeled as sin, trauma was minimized or ignored for months, and the Bible was used as a tool for shame.

“Instead of becoming a Vision of Hope for the residents, the program sucked the life out of the residents, instilled a fear of authority, and turned many of them away from the Savior they desperately needed for their healing,” wrote Abigail Degnan, a former intern, in an August 2025 letter to Faith Church's senior pastor.

Now, survivors like Degnan are breaking their silence, building community with one another, and confronting the institution they say harmed them through two federal lawsuits and a rapidly growing support network.

The support community, which includes former residents, interns, and staff, has become a lifeline for women processing their experiences. The three women leading the community—Degnan, Elayna Baranova, and Rachel Longshore—each came to Vision of Hope as young adults either to seek help or to offer it.

Degnan arrived in July 2020 as a 20-year-old college graduate from a conservative Christian college, hoping to become a counselor. The unpaid internship promised certification through the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, free meals and housing, and the chance to help hurting women.

Within months, her mental health had deteriorated. The constant surveillance, the pressure to be perfect, and watching residents suffer under the policies she was forced to enforce took a severe psychological toll. When she told staff she was thinking about harming herself, the only response was to ask what Bible verse she was meditating on, she said.

“By the time I left, I was suicidal. I walked away from Christianity completely, wanted nothing more to do with it,” Degnan said. “I left with an eating disorder that took me two and a half years to recover from”—ironic, she noted, for a facility that treats eating disorders.

Baranova first arrived when she was 19, sent by Bob Jones University after struggling with self-harm. Over three separate stays between 2015 and 2018, totaling more than a year, she cycled through Vision of Hope's rigid program structure, each time reaching “phase two” before crashing out.

Each time she tried to address her trauma from growing up in an abusive home, counselors redirected the conversation to her salvation.

“My issues with VOH are that there was just a denial of trauma until you brought it up, and you had to read a book on trauma,” Baranova told the *Lafayette Journal & Courier*.

When she returned to South Carolina for traditional counseling, she was labeled as “leaving in rebellion.”

Longshore came in 2020 with a psychology degree from Liberty University and a desire to help people in crisis. Though she had studied secular psychology, she'd been exposed to biblical counseling and wanted to see if it could be effective.

The red flags appeared immediately. She said she watched as interns were groomed from day one to distrust residents, told they would try to manipulate them. She saw staff dismiss residents' genuine medical needs as attention-seeking. She witnessed the constant surveillance and control that extended even into church services.

Within three months, she wanted to leave, Longshore said. But she'd signed on for a one-year commitment. She ultimately stayed nearly three years—seven months as an intern, seven months as part-time staff, then a year and a half as full-time staff handling fundraising and counseling—watching the same harmful patterns repeat.

According to the support group's organizers, Vision of Hope residents receive approximately one hour of individual counseling per week—but trauma work is often delayed for months.

First comes the “salvation packet,” a 100-page workbook on Christian doctrine that takes three to four sessions to complete. Only after completing multiple theological modules—covering salvation, the character of God, suffering, and “idols of the heart”—will counselors address the issues that brought residents to the program.

In Vision of Hope's framework, “idols of the heart” refers to anything residents prioritize over God—which staff interpret broadly to include desires for safety, control, or comfort. These human needs, particularly common in trauma survivors, are reframed as sinful attachments that need to be broken.

“I think it wasn't until my fourth or fifth month that I even talked about my trauma,” Baranova said. When she did, it took two sessions, followed by a book on suffering and little further processing.

Punishment for “heart idols” ranged from forced silence to carrying backpacks filled with rocks for days. Roxann “Max” Morrison, a former Vision of Hope resident, said she spent three weeks of her three-month stay forbidden to speak with peers or staff except in urgent situations. “I apparently had been using my voice selfishly because I was talking about myself,” she told the *Journal & Courier*.

Women with eating disorders were forced to finish every meal and often had portions added to their meals until they ate everything—a practice contrary to standard eating disorder treatment protocols. The facility employs no dietitians or nutritionists.

Much of the food was donated, and it was sometimes served past expiration dates. Degnan said sometimes the food was spoiled.

Meanwhile, residents spent hours daily on unpaid labor: cleaning Faith Church's sanctuary, library, and community center; maintaining landscaping; and working at the Reclaimed Hope thrift store. Unpaid interns—many just out of college—ran the house day-to-day while staff conducted counseling.

According to a lawsuit filed by former intern Jennie Calvache, interns worked 53 to 62 hours per week without pay. The lawsuit alleges Vision of Hope and Faith Church violated federal labor laws by classifying the women as interns while requiring them to perform work that primarily benefited the church.

After one week of training, interns supervised residents, managed crises, and enforced an extensive policy manual that ran approximately 30 pages. The policies covered everything from when residents could refill water bottles (not after 8 p.m.) to how long they had to wash their hands (at least 30 seconds). Forgetting a policy detail could result in consequences.

The sheer volume of rules made it nearly impossible to comply perfectly, creating a system where residents and interns alike constantly failed to meet expectations.

The control extended beyond the facility. Degnan recalled being monitored at church and questioned after a man she was seeing briefly rested his arm on her chair. Staff members lived in the intern apartment, tracking the interns' behavior even off-duty. Interns who questioned policies or expressed concerns were accused of gossip and sin, Degnan said.

Degnan's breaking point came in May 2021. Sitting in a Walmart parking lot, unable to face returning to Vision of Hope, she broke down. Her parents flew her home, claiming medical issues to avoid retaliation.

Baranova's exit took longer. After three attempts at the program, she finally gave up. "If they couldn't fix something, then it was always, 'Maybe you're not saved,'" she told the *Journal & Courier*, "because they're not equipped to deal with someone who came from a cult or someone who spent 16 years of their life being abused."

Longshore stayed the longest, eventually becoming staff. But watching the patterns repeat wore her down. She left and relocated to Florida, where she now works as a tattoo artist.

Two federal lawsuits now challenge Vision of Hope and Faith Church.

Calvache filed her lawsuit in July 2024, challenging the unpaid internship structure under federal labor laws. She also seeks class-action status. In May 2025, former residents Hosanna Miller and Faith Russell, filed suit alleging forced labor, trafficking, and obtaining labor through threats of psychological and reputational harm. Attorney Jason Ramsland is seeking class-action certification, which would allow any woman who was a resident in the past 10 years to join the case.

Faith Church responded to both lawsuits by denying most allegations. In a statement to the *Journal & Courier*, the church said it has been "reviewing broader issues about Vision of Hope's operations since well before any legal action occurred."

Faith Church has not publicly detailed specific changes to Vision of Hope's operations, though it indicated that interns are now paid.

In September 2025, attorneys for Faith Church and Vision of Hope filed responses denying that interns were employees or subject to federal labor standards, and denying that interns received no training or education. The church did not address whether educational requirements were met for residents under 18.

Faith Church's senior pastor, Rob Green, did not respond to requests for comment.

In Degnan's letter to Green, copying multiple church leaders, she outlined 17 specific instances of abuse, requested biblical reconciliation, and called for the church to take accountability.

"Faith makes members publicly repent and seek forgiveness, and you should be held to the same standards," Degnan wrote. "VOH is your church's ministry, and you must take responsibility for it by repenting and seeking forgiveness from the residents, interns, and staff."

At the time this issue went to press, the letter had received no response.

Meanwhile, the online support community continues growing. The group has grown steadily, with new members joining as they discover it through connections with other former residents. Members share their stories, process their trauma, and work to rebuild lives and faith after Vision of Hope.

The three organizers have also expanded their mission beyond Vision of Hope survivors, launching Hope Restored, a broader community for anyone who has experienced religious abuse. The initiative includes a website and social media presence to connect survivors and provide resources for recovery.

“We know there are more out there that just haven’t found us yet,” Degnan said.

Sydney Scott was a minor when she entered Vision of Hope in March 2015, struggling with depression, anxiety, self-harm, and some drug use.

Last year, Scott joined the Facebook support group after being invited by other former residents she’d stayed in touch with over the years.

The group has helped validate her experience. “There’s times that I was kind of like, ‘Am I crazy? Did I make that up, or am I overreacting?’” she said. “It’s just really refreshing to be able to talk with people about it, about their time there, how it affected them now.”

For the women in the group, healing means both recovering from what happened and ensuring others know the truth about their experiences. The community they’ve built offers what Vision of Hope never did: genuine support, validation, and hope for recovery.

As these women continue their recovery journeys through Hope Restored and their Vision of Hope-specific group, they’re redefining what hope looks like after religious trauma.

A previous version of this article erroneously stated that Jennie Calvache filed her lawsuit in July 2025. Calvache filed her lawsuit in July 2024.