

LOCAL NEWS • Investigative

SUBSCRIBER ONLY

Former Anaheim Vineyard church members sue pastors for alleged 'spiritual fraud'

Lawsuit says Alan and Kathryn Scott used deception to control church's \$62 million in assets



Alan Scott preaches at Dwelling Place in Anaheim (Youtube)

By **SCOTT SCHWEBKE** | sschwebke@scng.com | Orange County Register

PUBLISHED: December 19, 2022 at 7:05 a.m. | UPDATED: December 19, 2022 at 7:27 a.m.

The co-founder of the Vineyard religious movement and eight former board members are suing two pastors for \$62 million, accusing the married couple of engaging in "spiritual fraud" to gain financial control of the sect's flagship Anaheim church before seceding from the denomination in 2021.

In a lawsuit filed last month in Orange County Superior Court, Carol Wimber Wong and the other plaintiffs allege Alan and Kathryn Scott deceitfully sought positions as senior pastors with Vineyard Anaheim in 2017 to control tens of millions of dollars of assets. Then, in February, the Scotts left the umbrella organization Vineyard USA and renamed the church Dwelling Place.

"They had no intention of applying for the vacant senior pastor position until learning of Anaheim Vineyard's



Alan and Kathryn Scott did not respond to emails and phone calls placed to Dwelling Place seeking comment.

Jay Pathak, national director of Vineyard USA, said he regrets that the Scotts have removed the Anaheim church from the organization but believes the lawsuit is reasonable.

"While we are beyond grieved to have been informed of Vineyard Anaheim's decision to end this process, we recognize the Scotts, their board and this church as our brothers and sisters in Christ," he said in a statement. "We are praying that God will give them favor for the sake of their city and the kingdom."

2,400 churches worldwide

Vineyard USA is an association of charismatic Protestant churches, noted for a spiritual awakening described as the "Vineyard Movement," along with modern worship music. There are more than 2,400 Vineyard churches in 95 countries, including about 550 in the United States.

Wong's husband, John Wimber, who died in 1997, was a founding leader of the Vineyard Movement. In 1982, the couple established the Anaheim Vineyard church.

In December 2017, Anaheim Vineyard recruited a new senior pastor following the resignation of its prior senior pastor, Lance Pittluck, who had served more than 20 years, according to the lawsuit.

The church formed a search committee and the Scotts, who had served as pastors of a Vineyard church in Northern Ireland, became candidates for positions as senior pastors at Anaheim Vineyard.

Settled in OC in 2017

Kathryn Scott and her husband relocated to Orange County in 2017, purportedly to further the wife's musical career, the suit says. The Scotts socialized with Mike Safford, who was senior associate pastor of Vineyard Anaheim, and his wife, Liz Safford, and often discussed the church's future, according to the suit.

"Mike Safford asked defendant Alan Scott in early 2017 whether he would be interested in becoming the Senior Pastor of Anaheim Vineyard once Pastor Lance Pittluck retired," says the complaint.

"On multiple occasions, defendant Alan Scott represented to Mike Safford that he had no intent to continue affiliating with Vineyard USA and the Vineyard Movement following his resignation from the Vineyard church in Northern Ireland due to his dissatisfaction with the organization," the suit states. "Defendant Alan Scott expressed his belief that he needed to launch a new Christian church that did not involve affiliation with Vineyard USA."

Were assets the lure?

However, Alan Scott's disinterest in the senior pastor position at Anaheim Vineyard allegedly changed in April 2017, when Mike Safford confided that the church had nearly \$74 million in assets.

"At the time, Mike Safford initially thought the conversation was merely 'shop talk' but Liz Safford discerned that the conversation was very concerning, as though defendant Alan Scott had an ulterior motive," the suit states.

Then Alan Scott, despite his dissatisfaction with Vineyard USA and the Vineyard Movement, applied to replace Pittluck when he retired. The Scotts were quickly hired by the church's search committee as senior pastors.

The suit claims that neither the search committee nor the board of directors were aware of Alan Scott's previously expressed dissatisfaction with the Vineyard Movement. It also alleges that throughout the job interview process, the Scotts made it clear they would keep Anaheim Vineyard in the Vineyard Movement and Vineyard USA, despite knowing those representations were false.

"Defendant Alan Scott has sought to avoid any financial accountability to Anaheim Vineyard members for his decisions," the suit states. "He has implemented a campaign to exert spiritual manipulation and deception over staff and its members."

Then, on Feb. 25, 2022, without the knowledge of Vineyard USA officials, Alan Scott publicly announced that Anaheim Vineyard would be leaving the worldwide movement.

"Plaintiffs allege that the Scott defendants always intended to remove Anaheim Vineyard and its \$62 million in assets from the worldwide Vineyard Movement," the suit alleges.

According to the lawsuit, Alan Scott publicly stated on March 25 that he doesn't know why Anaheim Vineyard left Vineyard USA and the worldwide movement. "Instead," the complaint alleges, "he simply asserts that he uniquely hears from God and that he is told to leave the Vineyard Movement and Vineyard USA with its millions of dollars in assets."

[Newsroom Guidelines](#)

[News Tips](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Report an Error](#)



The Trust Project

Tags: [fraud](#), [lawsuit](#), [religion](#), [SoCal Watchdog](#), [Top Stories OCR](#)

Author **Scott Schwebke** | Investigative Reporter

Scott Schwebke is an investigative reporter for the Orange County Register and the Southern California News Group. A native of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., he was previously a breaking news and multimedia reporter for the Ogden, Utah, Standard-Examiner. Scott has also worked at newspapers in Utah, Colorado, North Carolina and Virginia covering everything from methamphetamine trafficking cops to hurricanes. He has also accompanied police on undercover drug buys and also provided an award winning, eyewitness account of the execution of a North Carolina death row inmate. Scott was part of the OC Register's investigative team that in 2017 produced the year-long, award winning Rehab Riviera series, examining problems in Southern California's drug rehabilitation industry. He also teamed up with reporter Joe Nelson in 2019 on Bad Apples, an award winning investigation that exposed years of sex abuse cover up in the Redlands Unified School District. Having spent two years living in England including Liverpool, he is an avid Beatles fan and memorabilia collector.

sschwebke@scng.com

Average Retirement Savings By Age: Are You Normal?

The shocking amount some people have saved, and why speaking with a financial advisor could help increase your returns and alleviate stress.

SmartAsset | Sponsored

15 Actors That Hollywood Banned For Life

ItsTheVibe | Sponsored

Train, play, recover at Life Time.

Welcome to our healthy living oasis. Do it all. Train, play, recover, and rejuvenate at Time's athletic country clubs.

Lifetime | Sponsored

Definition | Sponsored

Killer New EVs With Longest Range And Most Power

New Electric Cars | Search Ads | Sponsored

Cadillac Has Done It Again. This Year's Lineup Has Left Us Speechless

All Things Auto | Sponsored

Search Now

Pierce Brosnan's Wife Lost 120 Pounds - This Is Her Now

Noteabley | Sponsored

After Weight Loss Lavell Crawford Looks Like An Entirely Different Person

Dads news | Sponsored

The Killer New Cadillacs Will Leave You Breathless

Cadillac SUVs | Search Ads | Sponsored

The New Hyundai Palisade Is Nearly Unrecognizable

Hyundai Palisade SUV Sales | Sponsored

At Almost 101, He is the Oldest Living Star

I Am Famous | Sponsored

Gwen Stefani, 53, Takes Off Makeup, Leaves Us With No Words

Finance Wealth Post | Sponsored

New York: Unsold Never-Driven Cars Now Almost Being Given Away: See Prices

SUV Deals | Search Ads | Sponsored



SPONSORED CONTENT

Penny Hoarder Issues “Urgent” Alert: 6 Companies Are Overcharging You

By The Penny Hoarder



How many times have we fallen for this?

