

RYAN HOPES SUIT WILL 'SHED LIGHT' ON HALE'S CHURCH

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Author: Jimmy Greenfield, Tribune Staff Writer. The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Illinois Atty. Gen. Jim Ryan today filed a lawsuit against the World Church of the Creator, the East Peoria-based white supremacist group to which alleged spree killer Benjamin Smith belonged.

The suit, filed in Cook County Circuit Court, asks a judge to determine whether the church meets the definition of a charity and, as such, must register with Ryan's office. Matthew Hale, founder of the church, also is named in the suit.

"We want to shine a light on the financial dealings of this organization," Ryan said. "The ultimate aim is to determine the legal status of the World Church."

Ryan would not say whether he thinks the church violated any laws, but he did say he found its teachings "repugnant."

Under Illinois law, charitable organizations must be registered with his office and provide annual reports explaining their fund-raising and spending. Ryan said Hale has never registered his group with the state.

"No organization has the right to exploit the protections and benefits the law affords charities," Ryan said.

If the group is declared a charity, Ryan wants it to halt all activities until it accounts for its funding. He said his office also could "look at whether or not there is any alleged common law fraud ... that solicitations are made and donations given under false pretenses."

Ryan also said his office will work with the Illinois Department of Revenue in investigating whether the church violated any state tax laws.

State and federal officials have been taking a hard look at the church ever since Hale was linked to Smith, the avowed white supremacist accused in a two-state shooting rampage that killed two people and wounded nine during the July 4th weekend. All of the victims were black, Asian or Jewish.

Hale today said he believes his group followed Illinois law. He said he chose not to register the church with the state or pay any taxes based on informal talks he had with an attorney four years ago.

"It's my understanding from attorney consultation in the past that you don't have to file paperwork with the state," Hale said. "We're going to find that out very soon through the court system."

Meanwhile, Gov. George Ryan today ordered the state's first-ever Commission on Discrimination and Hate Crimes to write a package of recommendations within the next few weeks to help government and schools fight hate-based crimes. The commission held its first meeting today.

"Last week's shootings ... were more than a mere wakeup call on the danger before us," Ryan said, referring to Smith's alleged crimes. "It was a painful reminder that one person full of hate can terrify entire neighborhoods, congregations, towns and the whole state."

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