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Church elder jailed over sex abuse

Elle Farcie | February 13, 2016, 9:35 am

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District Court judge Troy Sweeney jailed the man for three years. Picture: Neale Prior/The West Australian

A Jehovah's Witness elder who sexually assaulted two vulnerable teenagers he met through the church was sentenced to three years jail yesterday over the "destructive" abuse.

David Frank Pople, 68, met the boys through the Safety Bay congregation of the church and assaulted them between 1989 and 1996.

One of the teens reported the sexual assaults to elders in 1997 but police were not made aware of the abuse until he filed a police report in 2014.

Pople was forcibly ejected from the church for being "insufficiently repentant" in 1997 and readmitted the following year at his request.

District Court judge Troy Sweeney accepted Pople was genuinely remorseful but said he had interfered with his victims' natural maturing process in a "very destructive way".

"A message must be sent that child abuse is abhorrent and will not be tolerated by any civilised society," she said.

"They were vulnerable because they were young and because you were a church elder and their boss."

When Pople admitted assaulting one of the boys during a conversation with an elder in the 1990s, he was told a judicial committee would be formed to deal with the issue.



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The elders spoke to Pople in an apparent attempt to determine his level of remorse and later sent a letter to certain members of the congregation explaining in great detail why he had been ejected.

Pople was in his 40s when he assaulted the boys at work, on his yacht and in his Shoalwater home.

He was close friends with the parents of his first victim and had helped the second victim with his Bible studies.

Defence lawyer Nick Scerri told the court Pople was candid with the leadership of the church and made "very frank admissions" about some aspects of the offending in 1997.

He said his client has been living three lives and was "deeply unhappy" when he assaulted the boys.

"He had the life of the family man, the father, the husband," Mr Scerri said. "At the same time, he was balancing the religious obligations that he had as a leader in that church.

"And thirdly, he had this secret homosexual sort of latency, I suppose."

Pople pleaded guilty to six sex-related charges as well as breaching his protective bail conditions in 2014.

He will be eligible for parole after spending 18 months behind bars.

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