

Former Jehovah's Witness jailed for historical sex offences against young sisters

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A Canberra man has been jailed for historical sex offences against two teenage girls in his church in 2004.

The 56-year-old former Jehovah's Witness pleaded guilty to touching one's backside as she leaned in to log on to their home computer for him.

He also pleaded guilty to lifting another girl onto his lap and placing his hand on her genitals for two to three minutes. The sisters were at his home after his wife had offered to babysit for their parents.

After the incidents the church launched an investigation and the man was "reproved" - disciplined within the church, the ACT Magistrates Court heard. He wrote a letter of apology to the girls and delivered it to their home. He did not return to the church.

It wasn't until 2014 that one of the victims approached the police and made a complaint.

Sentencing magistrate Bernadette Boss said it was "most unfortunate" that, as has happened before, a church failed to notify the authorities about an allegation of sexual abuse.

It made the church complicit and "appears to have exacerbated the effect on the victims of the offence," Dr Boss said.

The two women provided victim impact statements to the court that were read out by the prosecutor. They described moving away from Canberra and struggling with their health and relationships with friends, family and God.

The elder sister said she took medication to sleep and would into the future, and even though she wanted a family it was dangerous to fall pregnant while taking the drugs.

She was unable to look at any child without being reminded of what happened.

The younger sister said she feared older men and had to end a serious relationship because the man looked similar to the offender.

"I was young and innocent and unable to defend myself," her statement read.

Dr Boss sentenced the man to a two-year good-behaviour order and 200 hours of community service for the first offence.

He was jailed for nine months for the second, more serious offence, with two months of that to be served in full-time custody and the rest suspended on another two year good behaviour order.

The magistrate noted that as a result of the convictions the man would lose his job working in IT in the public service and had already lost his security clearance. He would be listed on the sex offender registry.

She noted the man had no criminal history. But she said that was unfortunately not unusual in this kind of offending where often it was a person's good character that gave them access to positions of trust.

"Our children are the most valuable asset of our community," Dr Boss said in sentencing. "They must be protected almost at all costs."

This story was found at: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/former-jehovahs-witness-jailed-for-historical-sex-offences-against-young-sisters-20170724-gxhjcb.html>

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