



Former Tasmanian Jehovah's Witness tells of guilt for not reporting church child abuse

936 ABC Hobart By Fred Hooper

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A former Jehovah's Witness from Hobart has said he feels guilty for not breaking with the church and reporting claims of child abuse.

Several elders and senior figures represented the Jehovah's Witness church to answer questions before the Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sex abuse.

Gavin (not his real name) said during his 40 years as a Jehovah's Witness, he heard stories and allegations of abuse relating to children which went unreported.

"It could be shame within myself that I never did anything when I heard about things," Gavin said.

"It goes through my mind constantly, but we soldier on because there are greater things ahead to be able to bring about on this earth."

Church offered comfort in desperate times

Gavin joined the Jehovah's Witnesses in his late teens after a few rocky years but does not believe the church approached him because he was vulnerable.

He said he was in a state of desperation for something better when he met a man at his workplace who was a Jehovah's Witness.

"I'd been through a lot in life — drugs and the whole scene," Gavin said.

"He mentioned something about a better life coming.

"Well obviously, being down in the depths of despair, it was certainly something that I could look forward to.

"The friend who actually talked to me, he did it with a genuine concern, there was no doubt about that.

"He was convinced he was doing a good thing in talking to me."

Thinking back to his time spent with the church, Gavin described his commitment to religion as dedicated and zealous and said: "if you ask my children they would say I was very fanatical".

Gavin described life within the church as very formulated and uniform, from clothing to the decisions on his children's higher education.

As the years went on, Gavin began to question his belief in the religion, where previously he would have shrugged off any criticism suggested by others.

"If I'd ever spoken to somebody who was criticising the organisation, I would have parted from them," Gavin said.

"I started talking to some within the organisation and they were very critical of the organisation.

"They were critical of some of the scriptural view points and so forth."

Doubts began to creep in

Gavin has not been a part of the church for the last two years and although he has no regrets, he does not want to be seen as siding with Jehovah's Witnesses.

"Looking back, there were certainly some good times," he said.

"In later years, we started to develop an insight into things that weren't quite right, particularly with the royal commission that's coming on at the moment in relation to child abuse, but there are other facets in there."

The entire time Gavin was with the church, he was completely devoted and committed, so when the doubts began to creep in, it changed his world.

"If your whole life has been a certain thing and then all of a sudden it comes to light that it's not so good, you put your head in the sand or you get out of it," Gavin said.

"Unfortunately, most of them put their heads in the sand.

"They would be, at this moment, saying that it's 'an attack from Satan' — that the world is attacking the Jehovah's organisation."

Gavin said his family had also suffered from his devoted following of the church as Jehovah's Witnesses did not promote higher education or the celebration of Christmas or birthdays.

With the benefit of hindsight, Gavin said there were people within the organisation who would have wanted to report certain activities to authorities.

"Knowing what they know now with the inquest, I suppose there would some [wishing they had reported it] but they would be faithful to the organisation," Gavin said.

"We haven't regretted [leaving the church] because now we can see a clear identification of what's right and what's wrong.

"I see it as a gain, more than a loss."

Topics: jehovah-s-witness, royal-commissions, religion-and-beliefs, family, community-and-society, hobart-7000

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