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# Jehovah’s Witnesses refuse to change two-witness rule because ‘that’s our stand’

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Jehovah’s Witnesses refuse to budge on 2000-year-old rule.



Rohan Smith, [news.com.au](https://www.news.com.au) @ro\_smith

**CHILD sexual assault is a secret crime carried out by men and women who do everything they can to avoid detection.**

Which is why one passage in the Bible is a Get Out of Jail Free card for offenders, particularly when adhered to so strictly by those within religious organisations.

Timothy 5:19: demands followers “do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses”.

It’s a message echoed in Matthew 18:16: that reads, among other things, “ ... at the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter may be established”.

The two passages became the focus this week of a royal commission into institutional child sexual abuse within the Jehovah’s Witness church in Australia, of which there are 65,000 followers.

Having adopted a number of recommendations in the name of greater transparency, there was only one thing the church refused to change: a 2000-year-old protocol requiring two witnesses before a child sexual assault allegation be investigated.

Before the commission, Jehovah’s Witness spokesman Terrence O’Brien said the church “considered the implications of the finding” that the two-witness rule should be scrapped.



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“And your response is that the two-witness rule is required by the scriptures and can’t be changed or avoided?” he was asked.

“That’s correct. That’s our stand.”

But it’s a stand Dr Cathy Kezelman, who deals daily with victims of child sexual abuse, labelled “ludicrous”.

The president of the Blue Knot Foundation told news.com.au the rule is problematic because abuse of children is so rarely carried out in front of a witness.



Angus Stewart SC questioned Jehovah’s Witnesses at the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Sydney this month. Picture: Jeremy Piper/AAP Source:AAP

“The idea that you need a witness is a ludicrous one,” she said. “Obviously sexual abuse is a secret crime. It tends to be a private crime, which by virtually every definition has no witnesses.

“That’s one of the reasons sexual abuse against children has been able to flourish.”

She said children “rarely” make up stories about being abused and most don’t have the language to describe what happened to them. She said the trauma she sees is long-lasting.

“What we know about sexual abuse is that it is often extreme, it often goes on over a long period of time and during a child’s developmental years. It’s an abuse of power and a betrayal of trust. Within religious institutions we see the betrayal is compounded when the child tries to disclose what they’ve been through.”

Dr Kezelman said it was disappointing Jehovah’s Witnesses refused to change the rule but other churches were making positive steps.

On Sunday, the Uniting Church in Australia apologised to children sexually abused in its congregations.

The president of the church’s general assembly, Stuart McMillan, said he was “deeply sorry”.

“We are, and I am, deeply sorry that we didn’t protect and care in accordance with our Christian values for those children.

“I want to acknowledge the impact that it’s had in the lives of those young people and to say I’m truly sorry.”

The investigation into decades of sexual abuse within the Australian arm of the church is making news around the world.

*The Washington Post* reported that [victims were often forced to confront their abusers in person](#) and that all complaints — which averaged 12 each year for 65

An advertisement for Equifax Complete. The background is dark red. At the top, it says "Equifax Complete™" in white, followed by "Everywhere you can't be." Below this, there are two icons: a magnifying glass over the number "7600" and a fingerprint icon. Under the magnifying glass icon is the text "Credit Monitoring" and under the fingerprint icon is "ID Theft Protection". In the center, it says "FREE 30-Day Trial" in large yellow letters, with "with purchase of Equifax Complete™" in smaller white text below it. At the bottom left is the "EQUIFAX" logo with a small Canadian flag, and at the bottom right is a yellow button that says "Get Started".

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years — were meticulously recorded and sealed.

When there were less than two witnesses, the complaints went nowhere. All because the church invested so heavily and read so literally into Matthew 18:16 and Timothy 5:19.

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