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Abuse shame of Jehovah's Witness

8:45am Tuesday 7th September 2010

A JEHOVAH'S Witness who sexually abused a young girl for five years confessed to church leaders almost 20 years before he was caught, a court was told.

Frank Burke, aged 67, of Ashworth Lane, Astley Bridge, had pleaded guilty to indecently assaulting the girl on a regular basis, starting when she was just eight.

Bolton Crown Court heard how Burke confessed his crime to his wife and family in 1970, but the matter was not reported to the police.

Again, in 1993, he told a doctor and senior member of his church, but a decision was made not to inform the authorities.

Susan Carter, prosecuting, said Burke was only interviewed by police after the victim, who is now aged 52, made a complaint in February last year.

Burke admitted indecently assaulting the child about once a fortnight until she was 12 and pleaded guilty to six charges of indecent assault at Bolton Crown Court yesterday.

Mrs Carter said the victim believed it was the abuse which led to her teenage behaviour problems and her dropping out of school without any qualifications when she was 15.

Philip Parry said that since the offences, Burke has led a good life and is now the sole carer for his 77-year-old invalid wife.

"He genuinely accepts responsibility for what he did," said Mr Parry. "He has made a determined effort over the last 40 years to become a better person."

The Honorary Recorder of Bolton, Judge William Morris, told Burke: "Clearly what you did to her (the victim) had a significant impact on her."

He said that several factors, including the length of time since the offending and the reliance Burke's wife has on him, had led him to pass a sentence of 20 months in prison, suspended for two years.

Burke will also be placed on the sex offenders register for 10 years and is banned from working with children.

He was also ordered to pay £500 towards prosecution costs.

His victim was not in court but members of her family, who were present, expressed disappointment with the sentence, although they declined to comment further.

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