

Campaigner's 'grave concerns' over new directives for Jehovah's Witnesses



Steven Rose

A former Hartlepool Jehovah's Witness who campaigns for tougher child protection policies of the church says he has "grave concerns" about updated directives to elders.

Steve Rose says the new instructions to local leaders on dealing with allegations of child abuse features some improvements but believes they do not go far enough.

Mr Rose, 52, who used to be a member of Hartlepool's Kingdom Hall in Ashgrove Avenue, believes the guidance could put child victims at risk.

He said: "All child abuse that is reported to the elders must be reported to the service department of Jehovah's Witnesses and not the secular authorities (police).

"This puts the child in danger because the elders are not qualified to handle such delicate matters."

The document says alleged victims and parents have an "absolute right" to report allegations to the authorities.

But Mr Rose claims that is frowned upon by church elders for fear of being ostracised.

Under the updated guidance, a child alleging abuse no longer has to face their abuser in front of elders.

Mr Rose said: "This is an improvement but the child still has to see the abuser at the congregation meetings."

The leaked document states if abusers are repentant they will be reproached to the congregation.

But Mr Rose said: "This does not protect the congregation as the congregation doesn't know what the abuser has been reprovved for. This leaves the child abuser to mix with its members."

And Mr Rose said although elders keep a close eye on people guilty of abuse, members of the congregation are not told.

"This puts the congregation in danger as child sex predators cannot be monitored 24 hours a day," he said.

A spokesman for the Jehovah's Witness church said it does not comment on leaked documents but said: "As we have said before the protection of children is so important and we are constantly trying to improve ways in which we can safeguard children."

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