

Ex-Jehovah's Witness elder jailed for sex assaults on schoolgirl

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Elder shunned after indecent assault charges

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A FORMER Jehovah's Witness elder has been jailed after he indecently assaulted a schoolgirl on three occasions nearly 40 years ago.

Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court heard how John Winkle performed an indecent act on the child and kissed her.

The victim reported the assaults in 2013 and the defendant went on to admit two charges of indecent assault.

The 58-year-old denied a third allegation of indecent assault, but was convicted after a trial last month.

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Now Winkle has been jailed for four years at Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court.

Peter McCartney, representing Winkle, said he has carried a 'burden of guilt' since committing the offences when aged between 19 and 21.

Mr McCartney said: "He recognised what he did to the victim was wrong and he has carried it with him for all these decades.

"He is of previous good character and has been happily married for 30 years."

Mr McCartney added that Winkle has now been 'disfellowshipped', which means he is no longer considered to be part of the Jehovah's Witness congregation.

He said: "His admission of the counts he did admit has caused him to be extremely isolated.

"The religion he has followed for all these decades has cast him out. He must arrive after it starts and leave before it finishes and he is not allowed to speak to any of those that are there."

Winkle, of Birkholme Drive, Meir Heath, has been placed on the sex offenders' register indefinitely and barred from a range of activities involving children and vulnerable adults. He was also made the subject of a restraining order, preventing him having any contact with his victim for five years.

Judge Paul Glenn said: "The issue at trial was whether you had performed oral sex on that child and the jury were sure that you had on a single occasion.

"She was a child when you did that. You were an adult. She described feeling confused and scared."

The judge described a second indecent assault in which Winkle touched the girl's private parts as 'outrageous conduct'.

He added: "Your actions have had a significant effect on her life. She suffered from depression and has undergone counselling. She speaks of flashbacks, the effect on her relationship with other people and her life having been scarred.

"This was about sexual gratification and you are a hypocrite because you became an elder and you investigated a sexual matter even with this in your sexual background."

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