

Jehovah's Witness elder guilty of sex abuse: Now charity watchdog launches investigation

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Mark Sewell

The charity watchdog has launched a probe into a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses where a church elder sexually abused women and children.

Paedophile Mark Sewell, 53, faces a “very substantial” prison term when he is sentenced tomorrow after being **found guilty of eight historic sex offences.**

The disgraced businessman and former Butlins holiday camp driver was found guilty of indecently assaulting two young girls who were fellow worshippers in the Barry congregation in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

'There were 12 elders and not one of them stood up - not one': Victim of Jehovah's Witness rapist describes torment

He was also convicted of raping a fellow churchgoer in an attack which “shredded” her knickers and left her pregnant.

We revealed on Sunday how the **Jehovah's Witnesses destroyed records showing the allegations in the early 1990s.**

In a series of previously unreportable court hearings ahead of Sewell's three-week trial it was heard how the Jehovah's Witnesses had been uncooperative with detectives investigating the case and said the organisation no longer retained any evidence on the abuse claims.

All congregations of the Jehovah's Witnesses are registered charities.

Today a spokesman for the Charity Commission told WalesOnline: “We have opened an operational compliance case into the charity and cannot comment further while the case is live.”

The announcement follows the regulator launching separate but linked statutory inquiries into the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain and also a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Manchester.

The commission revealed last month it had opened an inquiry into the society – the over-arching body behind the Jehovah's Witnesses in the UK – to examine its handling of safeguarding matters, whether trustees had fulfilled their legal obligations and also the safeguarding advice provided to congregations.

At the time the inquiry was launched a Charity Commission spokesman said: “The commission's concerns have been amplified by recent criminal cases concerning historic incidents of abuse involving individuals who appear to have been connected to Jehovah's Witnesses congregations and/or the charity.

“In addition there has been growing public interest in how the charity and congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses deal with safeguarding matters.”

An investigation was also launched into the Manchester New Moston Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses to probe its safeguarding procedures.

The announcement came in the wake of reports a former elder in the congregation, Jonathan Rose, was allowed to grill women he had abused as children in a series of meetings organised by the church.

The 40 year old was allowed to confront his victims following his release from a nine-month jail term for abusing the two women when they were aged just five and 10.

A spokesman for the commission said they had “serious concerns” about the New Moston congregation but added: “The commission stresses that it is not a safeguarding authority and its inquiries will not investigate allegations of abuse or actual incidents of abuse, whether historic or recent. Its concern is with the proper regulation of charities.”

The trustees of both charities intend to challenge the regulator’s decisions to open the statutory inquiries.

The case looking at the Barry congregation will be independent of both of these inquiries.

A Church spokesman said: “As Jehovah’s Witnesses we have an absolute and unequivocal abhorrence of child abuse and [offer] our support for any victim or parent who reports this crime to the authorities. This is in line with what the Bible says at Romans 12:9.

“We feel that the care and safeguarding of children and the promotion of their welfare is extremely important.

“Jehovah’s Witnesses act in harmony with the law and do not condone child abuse in any circumstance or endeavour to shield from the authorities those committing offences of this nature.”

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