

Jehovah's Witness leaders ordered to give evidence in sex scandal trial after claiming they had a 'duty to God not to breach confidence'

- Court heard Gordon Leighton confessed to the abuse to church elders
- Elders were ordered to testify by judge after months of legal wrangling
- For three years trio knew about admission but refused to co-operate

By [Anna Edwards](#)

PUBLISHED: 18:33 GMT, 16 July 2013 | **UPDATED:** 00:57 GMT, 17 July 2013

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Gordon Leighton was found guilty of the sexual abuse of a child d

Church elders refused to comment on a child abuse scandal because they had a 'duty to God' to keep the sex attacker's confession a secret, a court heard.

Jehovah Witness ministerial servant Gordon Leighton admitted sexually abusing a child when he was confronted with allegations before elders at his church, Newcastle Crown Court heard.

But during the official police investigation the 53-year-old, who hit the headlines in the 1990s when his wife Yvonne, 28, died after refusing a blood transfusion after childbirth on religious grounds, denied any illegal wrongdoing.

When detectives asked elders Simon Preyser, Harry Logan and David Scott to make statements about the confession, all three refused and said what they had heard was confidential.

The elders knew about the admissions for three years, but refused to cooperate with the criminal investigation, the court heard.

The trio kept that stance when the case was brought before Newcastle Crown Court. Each was then issued with a witness summons.

They then launched a court battle against the summonses but were ordered to testify by Judge Penny Moreland after months of legal wrangling.

Their barrister Richard Daniels said the men had a 'duty to God' not to breach confidence.

He added: 'Privileged communication between members of the congregation and ministers is an absolute right and duty and there is no power in law to breach such a confidence.'

Judge Moreland made an order that the men must reveal what they heard and said: "It is apparent that the three elders who were present when this conversation took place are in possession of relevant evidence as to a point which is of real significance in this case.

'They claim the right of confidentiality, they claim that what they heard said by the defendant during the course of that meeting ought to be subject to privilege, as ministers of religion.'

Judge Moreland refused to withdraw the summonses and said: 'Public interest is clearly in favour of this evidence being given.

'What was said by the defendant on that occasion is of great significance in the trial.'



Jehovah Witness church elder Harry Logan and Simon Preyser (right) who gave evidence in the trial of Gordon Leighton who was found guilty



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Jehovah Witness Church Elder David Scott at Newcastle Crown Court

Despite the judge's ruling, the men refused to make statements to police until just hours before they were called as witnesses before the jury.

Leighton, who has since been expelled from the church at Lampton Kingdom Hall in Washington, Wearside, denied two charges of indecency with a child and seven of indecent assault.

He was yesterday found guilty of two charges of indecency with a child and six of indecent assault.

He was found not guilty of one indecent assault charge, on the direction of the judge.

Judge Moreland remanded him in custody until August 23, when he will be sentenced.

The judge told him: 'You know, I am sure, that the inevitable sentence is one of immediate and lengthy custody.'

'You will be remanded in custody in the meantime.'

Prosecutor Katherine Dunn told the court it was in 2009 the victim broke her silence about what Leighton had done to her.

The court heard at a special meeting, aimed at 'keeping the congregation clean', Leighton 'admitted sexual abuse' and made excuses for his vile behaviour.

Miss Dunn said: 'The elders conducted their own investigation.'

'A meeting was arranged and the defendant was confronted with the allegations.'

'After initially denying the allegations he broke down and admitted sexually abusing the complainant.'

The court heard Leighton, from Ayton, refused to answer any questions when interviewed by detectives and claimed his confession at the meeting was limited to masturbation and reading pornographic material.

Throughout the six day trial Leighton denied all allegations against him and denied he had confessed to the elders.

He told jurors: 'It never happened.'

'It's all untrue.'

Leighton had also denied unrelated assault charges, which he was found guilty of.

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