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Jehovah's Witness whose wife died after refusing blood transfusion is jailed for 13 years over child sex abuse covered up by religion's elders

- **Gordon Leighton, 53, confessed to the church he had abused a child in 2009**
- **But abuse was covered up and he later denied the allegations**
- **Judge tells Leighton he manipulated his victim with 'a combination of affection and attention and violence and threats'**

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Jailed: Gordon Leighton who admitted sexually abusing a child and then had his wrongdoing covered up by the church

A Jehovah's Witness who sexually abused a child and then had his wrongdoing covered up by the church has been jailed for 13 years.

Gordon Leighton, 53, admitted sexually abusing a child when he was confronted with the allegations by church elders at Washington, Tyne and Wear.

The elders knew about the 53-year-old's admissions for three years but refused to co-operate with the criminal investigation, and said what they had heard was confidential.

Leighton hit the headlines in the 1990s when his wife Yvonne, 28, died after refusing a blood transfusion after childbirth on religious grounds.

Judge Penny Moreland said that he had subjected his victim to 'untold damage' as she sentenced him at Newcastle Crown Court today.

The judge said: 'You manipulated her with a combination of affection and attention and violence and threats.'

The defendant was found guilty of two charges of indecency with a child and six of indecent assault after a trial.

Prosecutor Katherine Dunn told the court it was in 2009 the victim, who is now an adult, broke her silence about what Leighton had done to her.

The court heard that at a special meeting at Lambton Kingdom Hall 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, of Washington, refused to answer any questions when interviewed by detectives and claimed his confession at the meeting was limited to reading pornographic material.

Throughout the six-day trial Leighton, a Jehovah's Witness ministerial servant, denied all the allegations against him and denied he had confessed to the elders.

Leighton, who has since been expelled from the church, had also denied unrelated assault charges of child cruelty, grievous bodily harm and actual bodily harm, which he was found guilty of.



Sentencing: Judge Penny Moreland gave Leighton 13 years behind bars when he appeared before Newcastle Crown Court today

Throughout the criminal investigation, church elders Simon Preyser, Harry Logan and David Scott refused to make statements about Leighton's confession, keeping their stance when the case was brought before Newcastle Crown Court.

Each was then issued a witness summons which they launched a court battle against, but they 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.

Leighton was also given a sexual offences prevention order and was ordered to sign the sex offenders' register for life.

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