

The Northern Echo

Former Jehovah Witness from Hartlepool agrees to be interviewed as part of nationwide investigation into the church

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By Chris Webber

A FORMER Jehovah's Witness from Hartlepool calling for changes in the way the church deals with victims of sex abuse has been interviewed as part of a major national investigation.

The church is reeling after a Royal Commission in Australia made 77 adverse findings about the way the church dealt with sex abuse accusations in Australia and in the UK in October campaigners wrote to the Government arguing it should be mandatory for the church to go to police whenever an allegation is made.

That follows two high profile North-East cases where Jehovah Witnesses were criticised in court in the last two years for not going to the police when allegations were raised within tight-knit church communities in Washington and in [South Shields](#).



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Now Hartlepool man and campaigner, Steve Rose, has been interviewed by the Charity Commission which is conducting a long-term investigation into the religious group's safeguarding procedures.

Mr Rose has previously been featured in The Northern Echo after raising concerns about practices in the church. On that occasion he claimed he had been 'shunned' and 'disfellowshipped' from the church after falling out with other members. He said that for younger and more vulnerable members with fewer friends outside the group the effect can be devastating.

But now he is campaigning against the Jehovah Witnesses' so-called "two-witness" rule which means the church only investigates internally if a claim is corroborated by a second testimony, very unlikely in sex abuse cases.

Mr Rose, who was interviewed by the Charity Commission in early December, said he was pleased the Charity Commission were investigating and was happy to help. He said: "It is very difficult for people, maybe young people, in the church to go to the police. The church says it monitors convicted sex offenders. But what other church sends its members from door to door like that?"

In a detailed defence a spokesman for the Jehovah Witnesses stressed the organisation abhorred child abuse which occurred across society and pointed out the organisation has no paid clergy and did not separate children from parents with youth clubs and Sunday schools and the like.

In a prepared statement he said: "The victim and his or her parents have the absolute right to report the matter to the governmental authorities.

"Congregation elders do not shield abusers from the authorities or from the consequences of their actions.

"Anyone who commits the sin of child abuse faces expulsion from the congregation. If such a person is serving in a position of responsibility, he is removed."

The Charity Commission confirmed it was investigating.

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