



Leading member of Bournemouth's Jehovah's Witness "strongly denies" allegations of child rape and sex abuse

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By Jane Reader

A LEADING member of Bournemouth's Jehovah's Witness community has taken to the stand to defend himself against claims of child rape and sex abuse.

Grandfather Barry Furlong strongly denies all the charges against him, describing them as 'absolutely false' and 'total fabrication'.

The 68-year-old former fireman held a top position in the religion's Kinson congregation at the time of the alleged offences, said to have taken place between December 1979 and November 1996.

A jury at Bournemouth Crown Court has been told Furlong, of Keeble Crescent, Kinson attacked four girls, one of whom was just five-years-old.

They cannot be identified.

He denies four charges of rape, four of indecent assault and six of indecency with a child.

Giving evidence at his trial yesterday, Furlong confirmed that allegations had been made against him in the past, which had been reported to the Jehovah's Witness elders and not to the police. When questioned about one of his alleged victims, he said she had lunged at him and touched him intimately.

"I told her to stop," he said.

The jury heard Furlong, a father-of-two, has been married for 42 years and worked as a fireman in Bournemouth between 1964 and 1970.

He then spent 17 years working for the Post Office before retiring on medical grounds in 1987 due to problems with his hips and shoulders.

Prosecutor Mark Worsley has told the court the victims did not report the offences immediately because they did not think they would be believed.

Speaking of the alleged rape victim, he added: "He was a pillar of the community – who would believe her?"

"She also felt ashamed that this was happening to her.

"She knew what he was doing was not right."

The court also heard one of his victims was told she would not get into the New Order – a term for a kind of heaven – if she told anyone what had happened.

The trial continues.

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