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Jehovah's Witnesses attacked by Charity Commission over paedophilia cover-up



A Jehovah's Witness charity has been attacked by the Charity Commission

By **Camilla Turner**, EDUCATION EDITOR

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A Jehovah's Witness charity has been attacked by the Charity Commission for covering up allegations of paedophilia against one of its former leaders.

In a damning report by the charities watchdog, Manchester New Moston Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses was criticised for failing to report its members claims of sex abuse to the police.

"The inquiry found that the trustees of the charity did not report the allegation of child sexual abuse to the police or to other authorities," the report said. "Nor did it report the matter as a serious incident to the Commission."

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It added that the charity "badly let down" victims of child abuse in its handling of allegations against Jonathan Rose, a former trustee who was subsequently convicted of indecent assault against a member of the congregation.

Rose was arrested in 1994 after a "child beneficiary" of the charity made allegations about sexual abuse to Church elders

After Rose was released from prison in 2014, the elders of the congregation bought his accusers face-to-face with him. His alleged victims were forced to attend a meeting during which they were cross-examined by Rose and seven elders.

The inquiry was told that the one alleged victim was asked by the panel, "did you ever egg him on? Goad him on?" while Rose asked her "What was I supposed to have done to you that night?" and pushed her to go into detail about what happened.

Rose was arrested in 1994 after a "child beneficiary" of the charity made allegations about sexual abuse to Church elders, and later the police. He stood trial but was acquitted.

The report found that trustees had dismissed this incident as "a matter between two teenagers" - he was 19 at the time and his accused was 15 - rather than "child abuse". As such they had "failed to demonstrate a sufficient understanding of child sex abuse", the report found.

After Rose was released from prison in 2014, the elders of the congregation bought his accusers face-to-face with him CREDIT: CROW TV

Rose was arrested again in 2012 and appeared in court charged with sexual offences. He was convicted in October 2013 of indecent assault and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment.

The commission found the charity did not deal adequately with allegations of child sexual abuse in 2012 and 2013 against Rose.

The report made findings of misconduct and mismanagement against the charity's trustees. It said the charity had improved its child safeguarding policy and its procedures for handling misconduct allegations since the inquiry was opened.

Harvey Grenville, head of investigations and enforcement at the Charity Commission, said: "The victims of abuse were badly let down by the charity".

“The inquiry found that the trustees of the charity did not report the allegation of child sexual abuse to the police or to other authorities”

Charities Commission report

He said the charity has now "improved its procedures around the handling of child safeguarding concerns and its internal disciplinary process.

"They also state that protective restrictions must be put in place to protect the charity's members from people found guilty of child sexual abuse by the criminal courts."

He said that the charity has now changed its policies and procedures to ensure that "victims of child sexual abuse are not required to make their allegations in the presence of the alleged abuser".

The commission's inquiry into another Jehovah's Witnesses charity, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain, is ongoing.

A spokesperson for Jehovah's Witnesses said: "Jehovah's Witnesses abhor child abuse in all of its forms and do not shield wrongdoers from the authorities or from the consequences of their actions.

"All allegations of abuse are thoroughly investigated and appropriate restrictions are imposed on any person who is guilty of child sexual abuse.

"The trustees will continue to concentrate on doing all that they can to safeguard children and to care for the spiritual needs of the congregation."