

# Leading Jehovah's Witness caught with indecent images of girls as young as three

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The behaviour of highly-respected churchman Ian Ross had shocked his religious community and led to him being excluded, court hears



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Ian Ross leaves Teesside Crown Court

A leading churchman has avoided jail after he was caught with child pornography of the most serious level on his home computer.

Highly respected Jehovah's Witness Ian Ross, from Billingham, had perverted images of girls as young as three.

The 65-year-old pleaded guilty to making indecent images of children between 9 May 2013 and 11 May last year.

The judge said that Ross's behaviour had shocked his religious community and had led to him being excluded.

No details of his church position were made public when he was also given a suspended jail sentence **at Teesside Crown Court yesterday** .

## 'You stand in some disgrace'

Judge Stephen Ashurst told him: "You are 65, you have no previous convictions, and to the outside world you appeared to be a respectable man.

"You held positions of some authority in the community, particularly your religious community.

"You now stand in the crown court in some disgrace because of what you believed was your private interest and has now put you in the public glare."

The judge remarked that Ross had been on police and court bail for 18 months and that the burden had been hanging over him for quite some time.

## Excluded from community

Judge Ashurst added: "First of all is the personal impact on you, secondly the impact on your family and those close to you who are shocked by your behaviour, of a man who has been a leading player in his community who has been accessing this material, and you have been excluded from that community."

The judge said that it was important that the court does not lose sight of the victims of that type of offence. He said that Ross, by accessing it, was fuelling the child pornography trade.

He said he was concerned to read some of the reasons put forward by Ross for accessing some of the material, which "did not really stack up".

He said that Ross had owned up to his feelings and he had undertaken work to start rehabilitation.





Teesside Crown Court

Prosecutor Jenny Haigh said that Ross's computer had stored a total of 593 still and moving images including 28 at the most serious level Category A, another 14 at Level B and 523 at Level C of girls aged between three and 16.

She added: "His particular interest was highlighted in the pre-sentence report."

Julian Gaskin, defending, said: "He is very shameful about what has taken place and he has spoken with some candour in the pre-sentence report.

"He has said I need to sort this out, my family is the most important thing to me and I don't want to lose them."

Ross, **of St Oswald's Crescent, Billingham** , who has been living with his sister in Southend, was given a six-month jail sentence, suspended for two years, with the Sex Offender's Treatment programme, a Sexual Offence's Prevention Order banning him from unsupervised contact with girls under 16 for seven years, banned from accessing the internet except with a device that can be monitored by police, and ordered to register as a sex offender for seven years, after he pleaded guilty to making indecent images of children.

The judge ordered the destruction of his computer's hard drive.

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