



## UPDATE: Jehovah's Witness jailed for five years for indecently assaulting young girls

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By Will Frampton

A RESPECTED Jehovah's Witness has been jailed for more than five years for indecently assaulting young girls.

Barry Furlong was convicted today of four counts of indecency with a child and four counts of indecent assault, offences which took place during the 1970s, 80s and 90s when he was a ministerial servant in the faith's Kinson congregation.

Bournemouth Crown Court heard the 69-year-old grandfather had indecently touched the four girls – one of whom was nine years old – over their clothing in all but one of the offences. On that occasion he put his hand in the victim's underwear.

Jailing Furlong for five years and three months, Recorder Stephen Climie said: "These offences involved, in my judgement, an extreme abuse of trust.

"You were highly regarded within the local congregation you attended within the Jehovah's Witness faith."

The judge said Furlong had taken advantage of the naivety of his four victims, which he said was instilled in them by their religious community "as was perfectly proper".

He said there had been "a significant impact" on each of them.

The jury of six men and six women took eight hours and 51 minutes to decide their verdicts, three of which were passed by a majority of 10-2.

Furlong, a former fireman and Post Office worker who strongly denied all the charges against him, was acquitted of four counts of rape and two of indecency with a child.

Speaking in mitigation, James Newton-Price said the convictions had been a "devastating blow" to his client and his family.

He said the father-of-two and his wife of 42 years had "effectively lost" their home "because of the publicity" surrounding the trial, and that the defendant suffered from back pain and depression which would make any prison term a greater hardship.

"I don't in any way wish to minimise the mental anguish of the complainants as a result of his actions," he said.

"That said, with the exception of count three, all are offences in which there has been either touching or rubbing over clothing."

Furlong, of Keeble Crescent, Bournemouth, received a Sexual Offences Prevention Order prohibiting unsupervised access to minors for an indefinite period, and was ordered to sign the sex offenders register for life.

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