

Attachment B - Correspondence

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]@abc.net.au>
Sent: Friday, 10 September 2021 10:24 AM
To: InboxPID.AU
Subject: Re: Four Corners request

Please be cautious: This message came from outside our e-mail system.

Many thanks [REDACTED].

From: [REDACTED]@jw.org>
Date: Friday, 10 September 2021 at 8:19 am
To: [REDACTED]@abc.net.au>
Subject: RE: Four Corners request

Hi [REDACTED],

We cannot comment on [REDACTED] allegation. Nevertheless, the general records retention policy of Jehovah's Witnesses (like most other organisations) requires that only certain records be retained, and only for a limited period of time. This is required by data protection legislation. However, that general records retention policy does not apply to information concerning allegations of child sexual abuse. It has long been the policy of Jehovah's Witnesses that information concerning individuals associated with a congregation and accused of child sexual abuse (established or not) is placed in a sealed envelope and retained indefinitely.

The letter dated 28 August 2019, to which you refer, only confirms this policy. In paragraph four of the letter, elders are advised to prepare a 'summation.' Once the relevant information from any personal notes has been transferred to the 'summation,' the personal notes serve no religious purpose. However, the 'summation' is retained. And according to the elders' handbook, which is referenced throughout the letter, information regarding an accusation of child sexual abuse should be retained indefinitely.

Kind Regards,
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]@abc.net.au>
Sent: Thursday, 9 September 2021 11:53 AM
To: [REDACTED]@bethel.jw.org>
Subject: Re: Four Corners request

Please be cautious: This message came from outside our e-mail system.

Hi [REDACTED]

Thankyou very much these responses. It is most helpful.

There was an extra question I sent yesterday if it is possible to address this quickly regarding the 28 August 2019 congregation records letter:

Can you please tell me why the Jehovah's Witnesses are advised elders to destroy personal notes?

Our reporter also sent a question to [REDACTED] at Head Office as it involved a US case, but they wrote to us that they forwarded it to you. I am not sure if you are able to give a response on this one:

Former Missouri Jehovah's Witness elder [REDACTED] says that in June 2019 after investigating a case of child sexual abuse involving congregation members he was called by a member of the Watchtower legal department and told to destroy all notes and legal documents relevant to the case.

My questions:

Is this true?

Why was [REDACTED] instructed to destroy these records?

Please let me know if you can respond today?

With thanks and best regards, [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@jw.org>

Date: Thursday, 9 September 2021 at 9:53 am

To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@abc.net.au>

Subject: RE: Four Corners request

Hi [REDACTED],

Thank you for your questions.

- **What steps have been taken to address the findings and criticisms made by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual abuse?**
- **What changes have been made to address the Royal Commission's three recommendations to the Jehovah's Witness organisation (two-witness rule, involvement of women and shunning)?**
- **If changes have been made to address these practices, what evidence can you provide to demonstrate that this is happening in practice?**

The Royal Commission's Final Report made just three recommendations in relation to Jehovah's Witnesses specifically, all of which exclusively relate to our Bible-based beliefs. As such, they are beyond the scope of the Royal Commission's terms of reference. In making their recommendations, the Royal Commission showed a distinct lack of understanding of the beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses. Not surprisingly, the Australian Government reacted to these specific recommendations by stating that they should be left to the consideration of the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The so-called "two-witness rule" has nothing to do with whether elders will report an allegation of child sexual abuse to the statutory authorities. The Bible requirement of two witnesses is related solely to a religious determination whether an ecclesiastical judicial committee can be formed to determine whether the accused should be expelled from being one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Elders will report an allegation of abuse to the statutory authorities as required by law, or in the absence of a mandatory reporting law, whenever it appears the victim or any other minor is in danger of abuse from the accused. The elders will make that report even if there is only one witness. The report of the Royal Commission on Case Study 29 indicated that from 1992, Jehovah's Witnesses established a procedure to obtain advice in order to ensure that elders complied with mandatory reporting laws. The "two witness rule" has no bearing on this procedure. It bears mentioning that, unlike Jehovah's Witnesses, most religions do not have any ecclesiastical process to determine whether an adherent accused of child abuse should remain in the congregation. Therefore, criticisms of Jehovah's Witnesses' ecclesiastical process are all the more unfounded and unfair.

In accordance with the Bible-based beliefs and teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, elders are male. That religious belief and teaching is not unique to Jehovah's Witnesses. For example, in the Roman Catholic Church there are no women serving as cardinals, bishops, or priests, as there are no female imams guiding mosques, nor female rabbis in Orthodox Judaism. Women are actively involved in the community of Jehovah's Witnesses, share regularly in their religious services, and may be included by elders in pastoral visits where the adherent is a female. A female

confidante may be present when a victim chooses to inform the elders of her experience of abuse. In some cases, elders may discreetly ask a mature female in the congregation if she is in a position to help an abuse victim who is struggling with emotional pain.

- **Why has the organisation still not joined the redress scheme to compensate victims of child sexual abuse? Why did the organisation belatedly agree to sign up the scheme?**

Jehovah's Witnesses are in the final stages of completing the onboarding process. If you have questions about the length of time it takes to complete this process, you should direct your enquiry to the Scheme Operator.

The Scheme was a major recommendation from the Royal Commission to provide redress to victims of institutional child sexual abuse. The religion of Jehovah's Witnesses does not and has not sponsored any activities that have resulted in children being under its care, custody, supervision, control or authority. The Royal Commission acknowledged that Jehovah's Witnesses do not have the institutional settings that exist in many faith-based institutions. The religion of Jehovah's Witnesses does not provide or sponsor crèches, playgroups, boarding schools or Sunday schools, youth groups, choirs, clubs or any programs for children; neither do they run orphanages, day-care centers, hospitals, youth centres, home care or any other activity where they assume responsibility for the care of children. Nor do they provide or sponsor any extra-curricular activity, such as choirs, camps, outings, sports, outdoor walks, parties, and similar activities for youths or adolescents.

Further with regard to the Royal Commission's review of Jehovah's Witnesses, the attached copy of Professor Holly Folk's recently published review, found on bitterwinter.org, states the following: "It is important to clarify an important methodological decision made by the Royal Commission with special regard to the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Commission elected to conflate family child sexual abuse with institutional abuse. . . . There is actually no evidence that the Jehovah's Witnesses are guilty of what is typically considered institutional abuse, which we see in many other religious organizations, and which was the focus of Australia's Royal Commission."

Nevertheless, Jehovah's Witnesses consider it their moral and Scriptural obligation to extend spiritual comfort and assistance to child abuse victims and their families and we do so. Although Jehovah's Witnesses did not initially join the Scheme, as a faith-based community we continued to respond directly to any claim for redress in a caring, fair and principled manner. On February 25, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Amendment (2021 Measures No. 1) Regulations 2021 was passed making it mandatory for charities to join the Scheme. Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses started the onboarding process.

- **Former Jehovah's Witness ██████████ has lodged a statement of claim against Watchtower and the Mt Isa Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. What is your response to her allegation that elders were aware of the criminal conviction of her alleged abuser when ██████████ and her siblings lived in his home?**
- **When ██████████ mother complained to elders about the alleged abuse what action, if any, was taken by the congregation to investigate her claims?**

As the matter is currently before the courts, it would be inappropriate to comment.

- **What responsibility does the organisation take for acts of abuse within the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses?**

Elders make it a priority to take a loving interest in the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of congregants, including victims of sexual abuse. One of the ways they do so is by offering pastoral support at no charge. However, they respect the victim's choice of whether to accept the offer. Elders will determine whether the accused, if one of Jehovah's Witnesses, should be expelled from being one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

- **Former Jehovah's Witnesses say that the practice of "shunning" is highly damaging to them and is effectively a form of psychological warfare used to punish those who leave. What is your response to this allegation?**

Jehovah's Witnesses do not automatically disfellowship someone who breaks the Bible's moral standards. If, however, a baptized Witness makes a practice of doing so and is unwilling to change, he or she will be

disfellowshipped and shunned. This practice is based on Bible principles. All Jehovah's Witnesses agree to live by those standards when they make a conscious decision to get baptized. Individual congregants exercise their personal religious conscience and apply the Bible's admonition to limit or cease their association with a disfellowshipped person.

Disfellowshipped individuals may attend our religious services and may receive spiritual assistance from congregation elders. For further information, see the following links to articles on our official website: [Do Jehovah's Witnesses Shun Those Who Used to Belong to Their Religion? \(jw.org\)](#) and [Can a Person Resign from Being One of Jehovah's Witnesses? \(jw.org\)](#).

A number of scholars have examined disfellowshipping and shunning as practiced by Jehovah's Witnesses. One such scholar, Dr. Massimo Introvigne, founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions, wrote: "By defending the rights of their judicial committees to remain free from state interference when they decide whether a member should be disfellowshipped or otherwise, and their right to interpret the Bible in the sense that it mandates shunning those who had been disfellowshipped, the Jehovah's Witnesses are, once again, defending the religious liberty of all, precisely in the area where today it is mostly under attack."—The Journal of CESNUR, Vol. 5, No. 1, January–February 2021, pp. 54-81 (www.cesnur.org).

Courts have upheld the right to religious freedom in this area. The European Court of Human Rights ruled: "[The State] should accept the right of such communities to react, in accordance with their own rules and interests, to any dissident movements emerging within them that might pose a threat to their cohesion, image or unity. It is therefore not the task of the national authorities to act as the arbiter between religious communities and the various dissident factions that exist or may emerge within them."—Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights, Fernández Martínez v. Spain, 2014.

Regarding Jehovah's Witnesses' religious practice of disfellowshipping, the High Court of England and Wales held: "[I]t is to be expected that a religious body which is guided by and which seeks to apply Scriptural principles will have the power to procure that in an appropriate case a sinner can be expelled. Among other things, this is sensible, if not essential, because someone who is unable or unwilling to abide by Scriptural principles not only does not properly belong as a member of such a body but also, unless removed, may have an undesirable influence on the faithful."—Otuo v. Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain [2019] EWHC 1349 (QB) at par. 122.

- **Lawyers and former Jehovah's Witnesses have told Four Corners that the Jehovah's Witness organisation has a practice of bitterly contesting efforts to seek compensation for abuse committed by congregation members. They say this practice retraumatizes survivors. What is your response?**

For allegations of institutional abuse, Jehovah's Witnesses, as a faith-based community, respond directly to any claim for compensation in a caring, fair and principled manner. May we assure you that Jehovah's Witnesses are committed to protecting children and providing spiritual comfort to any who have suffered from the terrible sin and crime of child sexual abuse.

Kind Regards,
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]@abc.net.au>
Sent: Friday, 3 September 2021 4:06 PM
To: [REDACTED]@bethel.jw.org>
Subject: Re: Four Corners request

Please be cautious: This message came from outside our e-mail system.

My apologies [REDACTED]—I left two questions off the list as follows:

Former Jehovah's Witnesses say that the practice of "shunning" is highly damaging to them and is effectively a form of psychological warfare used to punish those who leave. What is your response to this allegation?

Lawyers and former Jehovah's Witnesses have told Four Corners that the Jehovah's Witness organisation has a practice of bitterly contesting efforts to seek compensation for abuse committed by congregation members. They say this practice retraumatizes survivors. What is your response?

Could you please confirm that you have received these.

Best wishes and thanks, [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]@abc.net.au>
Date: Friday, 3 September 2021 at 2:52 pm
To: [REDACTED]@jw.org>
Subject: Re: Four Corners request

Hi again [REDACTED]

Here are the follow-up questions we would like responses to for our forthcoming program.
Please respond by close of business next Tuesday.

With thanks, [REDACTED]

1. What steps have been taken to address the findings and criticisms made by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual abuse?
2. What changes have been made to address the Royal Commission's three recommendations to the Jehovah's Witness organisation (two-witness rule, involvement of women and shunning)?
3. If changes have been made to address these practices, what evidence can you provide to demonstrate that this is happening in practice?
4. Why has the organisation still not joined the redress scheme to compensate victims of child sexual abuse? Why did the organisation belatedly agree to sign up the scheme?
5. Former Jehovah's Witness [REDACTED] has lodged a statement of claim against Watchtower and the Mt Isa Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. What is your response to her allegation that elders were aware of the criminal conviction of her alleged abuser when [REDACTED] and her siblings lived in his home?
6. What responsibility does the organisation take for acts of abuse within the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses?
7. When [REDACTED] mother complained to elders about the alleged abuse what action, if any, was taken by the congregation to investigate her claims?

From: [REDACTED]@abc.net.au>
Date: Wednesday, 30 June 2021 at 4:42 pm
To: [REDACTED]@jw.org>
Subject: Re: Four Corners request

Hi [REDACTED]
Thanks for sending through this information.
We'll come back to you in a couple of weeks with questions.
Best regards,
[REDACTED]

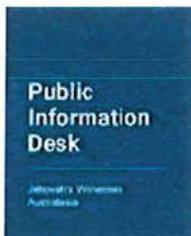
From: [REDACTED]@jw.org>
Date: Wednesday, 30 June 2021 at 9:25 am
To: [REDACTED]@abc.net.au>
Subject: RE: Four Corners request

Hi [REDACTED],

Thank you for the invitation to participate in a proposed documentary about Jehovah Witnesses' response to the Royal Commission. Although we understand that an on-camera interview is your preference, to avoid any misunderstanding on what is a complex topic, we prefer to provide written answers. For your information, the Royal Commission in its "Final Report: Recommendations" made 409 recommendations, of which only 3 dealt with the religious beliefs and practices of the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. In relation to those 3 recommendations, the response of each of the Federal, State and Territory Governments was "to note" the recommendations and comment that they were matters for the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses to consider.

Since the Royal Commission published its final report, material has been published on the official website of Jehovah's Witnesses, www.jw.org, to provide further education on the subject of child protection. In 2018, Jehovah's Witnesses published a worldwide child safeguarding policy document, entitled "Jehovah's Witnesses' Scripturally Based Position on Child Protection". That worldwide policy is explained and expanded on in The Watchtower of May 2019, Study Articles 18 to 20, which were considered by all congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide over three consecutive weekly one-hour religious services, beginning on 1 July 2019. For your convenience we attach electronic copies. Additionally, we enclose four articles by Professor Holly Folk published on www.bitterwinter.org. We also provide a link to her online video presentation ([link](#)).

Kind Regards,



[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Address: Box 280 Ingleburn NSW 1890
Phone: 02 [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]@jw.org
Website: www.jw.org

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From: [REDACTED]@abc.net.au>
Sent: Thursday, 24 June 2021 10:23 AM
To: [REDACTED]@bethel.jw.org>
Subject: Re: Four Corners request

Please be cautious: This message came from outside our e-mail system.

Hello [REDACTED]

We're looking into the response of the Jehovah's Witnesses to the Royal Commission and can't provide more detail than that at this stage. We're interviewing a range of people with relevant interest and expertise.

If there are any government or internal documents you think could assist in our research, please do point me to them.

Best regards and thanks, [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]@jw.org>
Date: Wednesday, 23 June 2021 at 4:40 pm

To: [REDACTED]@abc.net.au>

Subject: RE: Four Corners request

Hi [REDACTED],

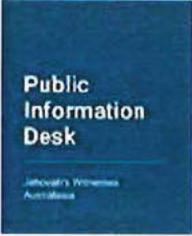
Thank you for your inquiry. I understand from your brief phone conversation with [REDACTED] that you require a response to your interview request by this Friday.

To assist us in considering whether to participate in an interview, and who might be the best person for that, could you please provide some additional details.

1. *What is the main message your program wishes to convey in relation to Jehovah's Witnesses?*
2. *Who else will be interviewed?*
3. *Why do you "believe it is timely to report on the way the local JW branch has changed internal systems"? We ask this question because the Royal Commission's Final Report made just three recommendations in relation to Jehovah's Witnesses specifically, all of which exclusively relate to their Bible-based beliefs. The Australian Government reacted to these specific recommendations by stating that they should be left to the consideration of the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses.*

Thank you for providing these clarifying comments.

Kind Regards,



[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Address: Box 280 Ingleburn NSW 1890
Phone: 02 [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]@jw.org
Website: www.jw.org

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From: [REDACTED]@abc.net.au>

Sent: Monday, 21 June 2021 3:19 PM

To: [REDACTED]@bethel.jw.org>

Subject: Four Corners request

Please be cautious: This message came from outside our e-mail system.

Hello [REDACTED]

I am a journalist at the ABC's 'Four Corners' program.

We are researching a story that is looking at the Jehovah's Witness organisation response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Nearly four years on from the Commission's final report, and ahead of signing up to the redress scheme, we believe it is timely to report on the way the local JW branch has changed internal systems and processes to enhance child protection.

We would very much like to include the voice of a senior person in your organisation to explain to our audience the scripturally based response to the Royal Commission's recommendations; as well as what training or information has been provided to elders dealing with reports in recent times.

Could you put forward a Service Desk Minister for an on-camera interview in early- to mid-July?

We would also like to film a tour of Bethel, if that might be arranged.

I look forward to hearing from you and am very happy to chat further.

Best regards and thanks,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Four Corners

+ [REDACTED]

