

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of Rudi Dobson

1. I, Rudi Dobson, residing at DPA make this statement to provide the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (the Inquiry) with details requested on the case against Clifford Whitely.
2. The facts stated in this witness statement are within my knowledge, information or belief. I have identified the source of any facts which are within my information or belief.
3. This statement has been prepared following discussions taking place on the telephone (at a time of social isolation due to COVID 19).
4. I have received a copy of the statement produced by DC Endsor, dated 8 July 2020. I am disappointed that the statement fails to state accurately the chronology of DC Endsor's interaction with me and ignores several key facts. I will briefly address those omissions.
5. In paragraph 3 of his statement, DC Endsor states that the most recent occurrence of sexual assault was alleged to have occurred the week prior to the adult victim making her complaint to us as congregation elders, on 25 February 2019. This is the first time I have heard that Mr Whitely is alleged to have also abused the adult victim in 2019. As set out in my 6 July 2020 witness statement, the only matter brought to our attention concerned an allegation from ten years earlier, which occurred in 2008 or 2009.
6. I was first contacted by DC Endsor on 1 March 2019. During that telephone call, DC Endsor said he had a number of questions he wanted me to answer concerning the allegations made against Mr Whitely. I asked DC Endsor to send me his questions in writing so that I could carefully consider his request. I explained that I am a minister of religion (an elder of Jehovah's Witnesses) and that like other religious ministers I have

a duty of confidentiality in relation to anything told to me in my capacity as a minister. I further explained that I would be willing to provide a verbal statement to the police if DC Endors could obtain the consent of the persons about whom he would like me to provide information. DC Endors replied that he fully understood the concept of consent and would be happy to proceed on that basis.

7. I did not hear anything further from DC Endors until sometime in early to mid-July 2019, more than four months after our telephone discussion.
8. Meanwhile, sometime around 18 March 2019 I was contacted by [Mother] the mother of the adult victim. She said that her other adult daughter [Sibling] had been told by DC Endors that the elders were delaying in providing information to the police. I explained to [Mother] that this was not accurate and that we had asked the police to send us their questions in writing. [Mother] later told me that [Sibling] had contacted the police, which I understood to mean DC Endors, and told him "the ball is in your court", meaning that they would have to follow through with putting their request for information in writing and obtaining written consent.
9. The next communication I had with DC Endors was a telephone call in early to mid-July 2019. Rather than providing me the list of questions, as I had asked for on 1 March 2019, DC Endors proceeded to threaten and intimidate me, ridiculing my faith and my activity as a religious minister. He told me that I should resign as a religious minister so that I could then reveal confidential information. When I told him I would not do so, he said: 'how can you sleep at night?' I found his actions and threats to be offensive and disturbing.
10. During that telephone call with DC Endors in early to mid-July 2019, I confirmed we would comply with any search warrant or production order.
11. At paragraph 19 of his statement, DC Endors says that he "advised" me during that telephone call that he required any document held by the elders in relation to Mr Whitely and that he would "obtain a warrant to seize this." In reality, DC Endors's language was far more offensive and threatening. I vividly recall that he said that if I did not voluntarily disclose the document he sought, then he would get a "court order, break down the door [of our place of worship] and crack open the safe." I replied that

if he got such a court order, breaking down the door would not be necessary because we would fully comply with such a ruling. I felt intimidated and offended by these threats.

12. I again asked DC Endor to put his questions in writing, repeating the request I had made four months earlier on 1 March 2019.
13. It was not until several weeks later, on 24 July 2019 (and nearly five months after my initial request made on 1 March 2019), that DC Endor finally responded in writing with his disclosure request.
14. As explained at paragraph 15 of my 6 July 2020 witness statement, we as congregation elders promptly replied to DC Endor's 24 July 2019 disclosure request. In our correspondence dated 2 August 2019, we stated that the congregation did hold a relevant document which summarised the information the ecclesiastical judicial committee received from Mr Whitely in this matter. We also explained in our subsequent correspondence that because the document in question was a confidential religious communication, we would need the consent of Mr. Whitely. Further, as I had confirmed in my telephone call with DC Endor in early to mid-July 2019, we would also comply with a production order.
15. On 5 September 2019, my legal representative wrote to DC Endor and stated that it would be appropriate to seek a production order from the Court (which confirmed what I had already told DC Endor in our telephone discussion in early to mid-July 2019).
16. DC Endor obtained a production order on 1 October 2019.
17. Once the production order was granted, we as congregation elders immediately complied and provided all relevant documents that were in our possession.
18. In paragraph 24 of his statement, DC Endor stated that he became aware that David Clifford (a fellow elder) and I visited the adult victim "sometime in February." This is not correct. I am certain, due to a WhatsApp message I have retained, that the meeting with the adult victim and her adult sister was on 22 March 2019, rather than a date in February.

19. In paragraph 33 of his statement, DC Endsor criticises the elders for not providing evidence of the confession sooner. This is an inaccurate characterisation of the facts. In summary, as explained above and in my 6 July 2020 witness statement, the facts are as follows:

- **25 February 2019 (evening):** I first learned of the allegation that Mr Whitely had abused his step-daughter (now an adult) some ten years earlier. Along with another elder, I informed the adult victim and her mother of their absolute right to report the matter to the police.
- **26 February 2019:** We sought advice from the Britain Branch Office of Jehovah's Witnesses (the Branch Office). Shortly before or after that call, I received a telephone call from the adult victim who informed me that she had already reported the matter to the police.
- **27 February 2019:** Mr Whitely was arrested and released on bail. I was informed that he was restricted by the police from going back home or being in any home where there were under-16-year-olds present.
- We provided pastoral support to the adult victim and her mother.
- The Branch Office directed us not to pursue our Scriptural determination of whether Mr Whitely should be disfellowshipped from being one of Jehovah's Witnesses until after the police had had sufficient time to conduct their initial criminal investigation.
- **1 March 2019:** I was contacted by DC Endsor who requested that I provide him with information concerning the allegations against Mr Whitely. I asked DC Endsor to put his questions in writing so that I could give them careful consideration. I received no response from DC Endsor to my request until more than four months later, in early to mid-July 2019.
- **15 March 2019:** An ecclesiastical judicial committee composed of three elders met with Mr Whitely and decided that he should be disfellowshipped from being one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

- **Early-mid July, 2019:** In a telephone conversation with DC Endsor, I confirmed that we as congregation elders would comply with any search warrant or production order.
- **24 July 2019:** Nearly five months after my 1 March 2019 telephone conversation with DC Endsor, I received a written disclosure request from the police. In my subsequent correspondence, I explained that the congregation held a confidential religious communication regarding Mr Whitely and we would need the consent of Mr Whitely (which we learned he declined to provide) to disclose such communications. Further, as I had confirmed in the telephone call a few weeks earlier, we would also comply with a production order.
- **5 September 2019:** My legal representative wrote to DC Endsor and stated that it would be appropriate to seek a production order from the Court (which confirmed what I had already told DC Endsor in our telephone discussion in early to mid-July 2019).
- **1 October 2019:** DC Endsor obtained the production order.
- **3 October 2019:** The congregation elders immediately disclosed the relevant document to the police.
- **13 March 2020:** I was informed by the police that Mr Whitely had pleaded guilty and was remanded in custody for sentencing.

20. I trust that the above will be of assistance to the Inquiry.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

SIGNED: _____

DPA

Rudi Dobson

Dated: 2nd August 2020