

The New Zealand Herald

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Religion and beliefs Story

Lawyers ponder sex charges

5:00AM Tuesday June 19, 2007

By [Jarrod Booker](#)

Police are awaiting a legal opinion before deciding whether to prosecute an elderly member of the Exclusive Brethren for sexual abuse against five women.

The Nelson man, in his 70s, was interviewed by police recently and is awaiting their decision on whether he will face charges.

The five women claim they were abused by the man as far back as 50 years ago.

Since the allegations arose, the Exclusive Brethren have asked the man not to attend church and to avoid being anywhere with unsupervised young people.

Superintendent Grant O'Fee said the length of time since the alleged assaults meant the matter was "not quite as simple as it sometimes appears".

That was why police had asked for an opinion from their legal section.

"There's no forensic evidence or [crime] scene to speak of, and time has eroded some people's memories."

Police would not be bound by the legal opinion, but it would carry considerable weight.

"I would be disappointed if we haven't got a decision by the end of next week, at the latest," Mr O'Fee said.

The Exclusive Brethren have offered to co-operate with police.

Church spokesman Tony McCorkell has said the man should feel the "full force of the law" if convicted.

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NZH1Venom | 19 Jun 2007 11:56:28 | 2,687