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Sect man jailed for sex abuse of girl

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THE sentencing of Lindsay Ronald Jensen yesterday for abusing a young girl in Albury brings almost to an end a saga of squalor and betrayal that has embroiled the religious sect the Exclusive Brethren and its leadership for four years.

Jensen, 49, an imposing man nearly two metres tall, was sentenced to five years' jail on four counts of indecent assault and one of sexual intercourse without consent. Judge Gay Murrell found the offences occurred when Jensen was in a position of trust and responsible for the girl's welfare. She set a non-parole period of three years.

The girl was nine when the assaults took place in 2002. Her parents were estranged, and according to the iron rules of the Brethren she had little contact with her father. But she was often in close contact that year with Jensen, a leading member of the Brethren in the city.

Judge Murrell found the relationship between the child and her abuser "was brought about because of membership of the church". But the sect did nothing effective when the child complained about Jensen in early 2003. Some months later the child was quizzed by two senior women in the Albury congregation, but still no action was taken.

The Brethren's new spokesman, Tony McCorkell, told the *Herald* that although the women were not "overly convinced" by the accusations, local sect leaders tried to dissuade Jensen from attending board meetings at the Brethren school because they thought him "loose-moralled" and feared "maybe this could be true".

Decisive action was finally taken by non-Brethren teachers at the sect's school when Jensen's presence there one day in mid-August 2003 provoked another young girl to storm out calling: "You touched me up. I'm not going to be here at the school while you're here." Mr McCorkell said teachers reported the incident to the NSW Department of Community Services.

Mr McCorkell said it was only at this point that the world leader of the church, Bruce Hales - a Sydney businessman known to the faithful as the Elect Vessel and the Man of God - learnt what was happening in Albury. "I can confirm - and I believe without a shadow of a doubt - Bruce Hales didn't even know about the situation, according to him, until it had already been reported to DOCS."

Jensen was excluded from the day-to-day life of the church, but his exile lasted only four months. "There is a whole heap of bitching and moaning and fighting and carrying on in Albury church," Mr McCorkell said. "Jensen's wife is running around saying to people 'he's been excommunicated and he hasn't even been arrested yet. This is outrageous. This is slanderous' ... So there's a lot of pressure on the church to restore him back into the church. So that's what happens."

The young girl went to Albury police the next day. Jensen was expelled from the cult after his arrest.

The Brethren are in the process of expelling his wife, Jenny, and all his children. Mrs Jensen told the

District Court yesterday that she had been shunned by the sect.

In a statement issued yesterday, the Brethren extended their sympathy to the victim and her family. "The church shares the community's revulsion of sexual abuse and seeks to do whatever it can to prevent it from occurring and to ensure if further instances occur they are reported to the authorities without delay."

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