

tvnz.co.nz**Brethren abuse claims investigated**

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Police have confirmed a senior member of the Exclusive Brethren church is under investigation after claims he has been sexually abusing children for decades, despite a spokesperson for the church denying all knowledge when the claims were publicised.



Following a six-month ONE News investigation, it was revealed on Thursday that four women, all former members of the church, laid complaints against the man, claiming they were abused when they were aged between five and 10.

The alleged abuse stretches back decades. The eldest complainant is now 61 years old, and the youngest in her mid 20s.

Neither the man nor the house where he allegedly sexually abused a six-year-old girl can be identified, but police say they are investigating the senior member.

"These are serious allegations of sexual...of course we're interested in the activities of a person we're investigating, just like any offence. They could still be committing offences," says Superintendent Grant O'Fee.

The police investigation was launched five weeks ago. So far two of the four complainants have been interviewed.

As the alleged abuse stretches back 40 years, police say they will need co-operation from those inside the secretive church.

"We will have discussions with the church I'm sure as the inquiry unfolds, but as yet that's not an issue for us," says O'Fee.

In a ONE News interview on Thursday, the Exclusive Brethren officially denied any knowledge of the abuse claims. The church's Australia based spokesperson Tony McCorkell, who is currently in New Zealand, said he was "not aware" of the allegations.

However, after McCorkell asked the cameras to stop rolling, he admitted he had just come from a meeting where the sexual abuse claims were discussed - and said "I haven't even formulated my opinion on it yet".

On Friday, the Exclusive Brethren attempted to discredit the ONE News story.

"I feel it's a trial by media. I think Mr Tornquist from ONE News has done a hatchet job on the Brethren. I'm disappointed. I'm very disappointed and would urge the members of the public not to react to this issue," says McCorkell.

However, O'Fee is asking anyone with knowledge of abuse within the church to contact police

"If they think or they have information about people that were abused, or if they were abused...this may go back 40 years ago, we would like to speak to those people and we would urge them to come forward and to bring their stories to us".

Source: One News

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