

Charisma News Brief: Brian Houston Acquitted of Cover-Up

Hillsong Church co-founder and former senior pastor Brian Houston has been acquitted by an Australian court of charges for concealing his father's sexual abuse and not reporting it to the police.

The verdict was announced on Thursday, two months after closing arguments on the case.

The Sydney Magistrate Gareth Christofi ruled that Houston, 69, had a reasonable excuse for not reporting his father's offenses to police. The court accepted that Houston believed the victim, Brett Sengstock, did not want the abuse that occurred in the 1970s reported to the police.

The court found that while Houston might have used euphemisms when he spoke publicly about his father's abuse and removal as minister, his meaning was obvious and speaking "widely and freely" about his father's abuse indicated that he wanted people to know what had happened.

"That is the very opposite of a cover-up," the court said.

Media outlets have reported that Sengstock testified at the trial, which began in December, that he never told Houston not to report the abuse. He told reporters that the verdict virtually blamed him for the church's failure to report Houston's late father, Frank, to the police.

He also told reporters that his life will be scarred forever.

"Frank Houston was no pioneer for Christianity," Sengstock says. "His legacy remains a faded memory of a pedophile."

"Regardless of today's outcome, I received a life sentence. Blaming the victim is as repulsive as the assaults

themselves.”

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A teary-eyed Brian Houston, who faced five years in prison if he had been convicted, also spoke to the media.

“I want to express my sadness to Brett Sengstock, genuine sadness about what my father did to him and all his victims,” Houston says. “He was obviously a serious pedophile. We will probably never know the extent of his pedophilia.”

Houston became aware of his father’s abuse of Sengstock in 1999, when Sengstock was seven. Houston’s father confessed later and was defrocked as an Assemblies of God pastor.

Houston resigned in January 2022 to fight the charge of covering-up his father’s indiscretions.

A couple of months later, the Hillsong board released a statement that its cofounder had sent inappropriate text messages to a staff member and spent time in a woman’s hotel room.

Earlier this year, Houston admitted to a DUI charge in California. {eo}

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