

[NEW ZEALAND \(/NEWS/NATIONAL\)](#) / [CRIME \(/TAGS/CRIME\)](#)

## Gloriavale: Details of crimes committed by founder Hopeful Christian made public for first time

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Hopeful Christian died of cancer in 2018 at the age of 92. Photo: Greymouth Star

Gloriavale founder Hopeful Christian was jailed for cruel and bizarre sexual offending under the guise of education or preparation for marriage, court documents show.

Full details of Christian's crimes have publicly emerged for the first time, after being tendered in an Employment Court case brought by six former Gloriavale women (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/484151/gloriavale-employment-court-case-resumes-ahead-of-chief-judge-s-visit-to-community>).

Sentencing remarks describe how Hopeful Christian left a 19-year-old woman in pain and bleeding after forcefully inserting a wooden object inside her.

He was initially sentenced to six years in prison in the Christchurch District Court in September 1994, after being found guilty by a jury of 10 counts of indecent assault between 1980 and 1984 against five young complainants.

Christian was aged between 53 and 57 at the time of the offending.

Following an appeal and retrial, Christian - formerly known as Neville Cooper - was sentenced to five years in prison in December 1995, on three charges of indecent assault for inserting the object inside the 19-year-old over three successive days.

Sentencing remarks by Judge Graeme Noble in 1994 detail offending against young people aged between 12 and 17, including massaging or caressing the naked breasts and genitalia of one complainant on 10 to 20 occasions.

Judge Noble described Christian as the leader of a fundamentalist Christian community.

"All of the young complainants were members of your flock, conditioned to do your bidding. Yours was the pervasive influence on the lives of all of these young people," he said.

"Within that influence were orthodox preachings and teachings but combined with your bizarre sexual activities in relation to the complainants.

"I find that the evidence was overwhelming that you used and abused your position of trust, power and dominion over them to sexually abuse the complainants, while professing to do these things to relieve their tensions, and/or to prepare them for life, or prepare them for marriage, all of the while telling them not to tell."

Judge Noble said emotional harm reports made for "poignant reading" and each of the complainants suffered from one or more of the inevitable well-known outcomes of sexual abuse while young.

"I record the aggravating features of these actions as first the abuse of absolute position of power and trust; secondly, sexual abuse carried out in the guise of education, preparation for life or for marriage on unsuspecting, vulnerable and naive subjects," he said.

Judge Noble said the behaviour represented a persistent course of offending over a lengthy period of time involving a number of complainants, and in one case "these were very serious indecent assaults involving forceful penetration with an instrument leading to injury".

"It does not assist the court in the sentencing process that you continue to deny the offending," he said.

"By any standards, this was reprehensible conduct."

Christian was initially minded to offer a sum of reparation, but withdrew the offer because he believed it was incompatible with maintaining his innocence and did not wish to appear to be buying his way out of jail or a shorter prison term, Judge Noble noted.

In sentencing following the retrial, Christchurch District Court Judge Neil Hattaway said it would be difficult to imagine a more serious case of indecent assault against the woman whose body was invaded with a foreign object.

He said Christian treated the woman as if she was a chattel and was prepared to cause her pain even though there was a real risk of serious, long-term physical and psychological injury.

"You got her to the point where in her ignorance and her naiveté she would submit to virtually anything to get back together with the man she loved and you treated her ... cruelly, most cruelly in the extreme," he said.

"I can think of no greater humiliation to a woman than the degrading acts which you perpetrated on her and you did it not once but three times.

"You penetrated her forcefully with this large instrument. This, as the crown prosecutor said, was the final act of submission by her, the final act of humiliation."

Faithful Pilgrim, who resigned as a Shepherd last May, supported Christian during the trials.

He told the Employment Court hearing he believed Christian was innocent.

"I was not convinced at all that he was guilty of what she was claiming," he said.

"There were so many things about that case that would cast doubt on his conviction. I'm just amazed that he was convicted. For good reason, I did not accept that he was guilty."

Pilgrim said Gloriavale's leaders also did not believe Christian was guilty and he was still seen as the community's leader while he was in prison.

"I think the media made a big fuss of it because he was Christian. The way the media treated him, it would have been impossible for him to receive a fair trial in this country," he said.

"The issue was this idea that our people were just mindless robots doing everything that Hopeful said. The jury could not have convicted him without accepting that premise."

Christian died of cancer in 2018 at the age of 92.