

Canadian bishop apologizes for clergy abuse as report is released

OTTAWA - Bishop Paul-Andre Durocher of Alexandria-Cornwall, Ontario, apologized for the clergy sexual abuse in his diocese and urged remaining survivors to come forward.

His public statement came as the Cornwall Inquiry, which looked into the response of public institutions to decades of sexual abuse allegations that first became public in 1992, was released at a Dec. 15 news conference.

Led by Normand Glaude, an Ontario court justice, the four-year inquiry offers more than 200 recommendations for public agencies and the church on dealing with abuse cases.

"We know that there were some appalling occasions a few decades ago when people in authority, including priests, sexually abused young people," Bishop Durocher told reporters. "I have had the occasion a number of times to listen first hand to the painful stories of survivors of sexual abuse and have been shaken by their testimony.

"I repeat what I have said on previous occasions: I am truly and deeply sorry for the pain that has been visited upon some of our young people and their families," the bishop continued. "On behalf of the Catholic diocese that I lead, I want to apologize to you for the suffering and indignity caused by those in a position of trust and authority who have robbed you of your innocence. That should never have happened. Period."

Bishop Durocher also invited sexual abuse survivors to continue meeting with him in order "to engage in any steps that will lead to healing and reconciliation."

The bishop welcomed Glaude's recommendations for ongoing healing and reconciliation in the community that could cost the province another \$9 million.

The Cornwall Inquiry failed, however, to put to rest rumors of a pedophile ring operating in the industrial city on the St. Lawrence River.

“I am not making a pronouncement on whether a ring existed or not,” wrote Glaude in his 1,600-page report. “It is not within my mandate to say what would have come from this information had it been explored more fully.”

Glaude’s mandate instead focused on the response to decades of sexual abuse allegations against public institutions, including the local police, Ontario Provincial Police, schools, Children’s Aid Society, and the Alexandria-Cornwall Diocese.

“It was well known that there were connections between some of the alleged perpetrators and that there was some evidence that certain alleged victims had been passed between abusers,” Glaude wrote, noting that most of what he heard had not been proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

Bishop Durocher said he, like many others, had expectations of the Glaude’s commission that it was not set up to meet. “He (Glaude) does say there is no evidence to support a broad-based network that sought to suppress the investigation into allegations of sexual abuse,” the bishop said.

The bishop added that Glaude’s report contained no surprises, though it still needs to be studied. “The findings of misconduct were those which we had recognized,” he said.

Glaude offered 25 recommendations for the diocese including better record keeping of abuse allegations; better training for prevention; better screening of volunteers and seminary candidates; and a written policy that no priest who has committed sexual misconduct be transferred to another diocese or a religious order.

Glaude recommended that Bishop Durocher ask the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to develop a national protocol for dealing with sexual abuse. Such a protocol should include the sharing of information among dioceses about abuse allegations, a policy of not transferring priests and a prohibition against confidentiality clauses in settlements with victims.

Bishop Durocher said he planned to bring the inquiry’s recommendations to his fellow bishops and “will push to have some discussion among the membership.”