

Bishop issues apology to abuse victims

DIOCESE: Durocher follows up on recommendations made in final report of Cornwall Public Inquiry

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Bishop Paul-André Durocher has apologized to victims of clergy sexual abuse and offered to assist other abuse survivors with healing and reconciliation.

Durocher took immediate action Tuesday on two of the recommendations contained in the Cornwall Public Inquiry's final report by issuing a public apology and an appeal to help others in need. Durocher made the statements just minutes after inquiry Commissioner Normand Glaude wrapped up his statement on the report.

"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," said Durocher while reading from a prepared statement.

The bishop also revealed that over the last few years, the diocese has settled 14 different lawsuits with victims of sexual abuse to the combined tune of about \$1.5 million. The cost was covered through the diocese's insurance companies, and the suits deal with historic sex abuse cases dating back 30 to 50 years. Durocher said there is still four outstanding lawsuits at this point.

Glaude's report contains nearly two dozen recommendations aimed at strengthening the reporting, record keeping, training and screening practices in the area of sexual abuse within the Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall. Durocher said many of the recommendations have already been put into practice within the diocese, and he pledged to work on the rest of them in the months ahead.

"I promise to keep the public informed as the diocese engages in this process of implementation," he said.

In his statement, Durocher acknowledged the past response of institutions -- including the Catholic church -- "was flawed, inadequate and well beneath the standards expected today."

Durocher said he hopes the community can build on the past and move forward with reconciliation.

"It is important to note the following: no allegation of sexual abuse of minors involving clergy of this diocese claims any wrongdoing by a priest in the last 25 years. Keeping that in mind, I believe that the time has come for our entire community to heal, rather than continue the anger and division that has so characterized this ongoing story," Durocher told the audience.

The bishop had offered a similar apology while testifying at the inquiry.

Meanwhile, Community Safety and Corrections Minister Rick Bartolucci also satisfied one of Glaude's requests by offering his own apology on Tuesday.

"Ladies and gentlemen, what happened is a tragedy," said the minister. "That tragedy would have been all the worse had no one listened to the victims and no changes were made to prevent something similar from ever happening again. So on behalf of the people of Ontario, I sincerely apologize to those who have been affected as a result of these events, not only the victims, not only the victims' families, but their friends and the community."