

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you for your presence here today.

I am Bishop Raymond Lahey of the Diocese of Antigonish.

Before I say anything else here today, as Bishop of Antigonish, I want to formally apologize to every victim and to their families for the sexual abuse that was inflicted upon those who were entitled instead to the trust and protection of priests of the Church.

I want them to know how terribly sorry we are; how wrong this abuse was, and how we are now attempting to right those wrongs. Money can never compensate fully, but we are trying throughout this process to be fair, responsible, respectful, and most of all, compassionate.

*Above all, we want to do the right thing.*

*If this was your own son or daughter, your brother or sister, your mother or father who was abused, you would expect and demand nothing less.*

I want to particularly acknowledge Ron Martin, the lead Representative Plaintiff in the legal proceedings. Ron is sitting beside me here today. He is a devout Roman Catholic who has remained an active lay leader within our Diocese, while at the same time he has held firm in his demand that the Diocese be legally accountable for the abuse that took place.

Ron, in this public forum, I want to express to you in a personal way my most sincere regrets for the abuse that you and other members of your family have suffered. I would say the same to every other victim who has similarly suffered and who may hear me today, and to the members of their families who share their pain.

This Settlement Agreement is a covenant between the Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Antigonish, which includes the Diocese of Antigonish and its various parishes, and those persons who were victims of sexual abuse by certain former priests of the Diocese. It covers cases since 1950. Legally it is a first step, which is subject to Court approval in early September.

Apart from being legally binding, this Agreement is also symbolically important.

I believe that in this Settlement, by avoiding adversarial procedures, we have created a fair and respectful process. We have worked together to achieve genuine mutual agreement. To the extent that we can, we want to correct the wrongs of the past. While we have not short-circuited due process — we have learned from other situations and we have been very sensitive to ensure a procedure of verification that is truly respectful.

At the same time we recognize that it is today's parishioners who will be called upon to make the very real sacrifices to finance this settlement.

It will take some time to get a clearer picture of the complete financial impact this will have for us. The money required will have to come from the Diocese and from our local parishes, and very clearly there will be significant financial sacrifice required of parishioners.

There is no insurance to cover this, and there is no bailout money. And if we look at the seven counties that form our Diocese, we are talking about a part of our province that is not affluent and has suffered real economic hardship. However, while this will be challenging, we are satisfied that we can meet our obligations under this Agreement without bankruptcy. And all of us are well aware that no financial hardship can ever equal the pain and suffering the victims of sexual abuse have experienced.

Nor will financial compensation remove the need for spiritual healing. Since our earliest discussions, Ron Martin has spoken eloquently about having a Service of Reconciliation and Healing. I look forward to that Service. I look forward to the healing of the emotional scars that have separated some victims from our Church, and have also, though in far lesser ways, scarred our parishioners.

*No matter how many years have gone by, we have to do what is right today.* Sexual abuse, indeed any abuse, is wrong. It is a crime, and it is a serious sin in the eyes of God. I want to assure you that for some time our Diocese, like others throughout Canada, and like other organizations, have been proactively taking steps to protect children and youth. That responsibility has been accepted and embraced by both our priests and our parishioners. We hope never again to have to face such reprehensible misconduct.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Mr. Martin will now speak to you, following which we are prepared to answer your questions.