

Abuse report given to bishop

CANADAEAST NEWS SERVICE

BATHURST ► Two men who were sexually abused by a northern New Brunswick priest as children are calling for an overhaul of Catholic Church practices which they allege still present the potential for the sexual abuse of children to remain hidden.

Lowell Mallais and Conrad Brideau said Monday that financial compensation does not ensure that such abuse will never happen again.

The comments came as former Supreme Court justice Michel Bastarache met privately on Monday with the bishop of the diocese of Bathurst, which includes Roman Catholic churches in eastern Restigouche county, to present his recommendations for compensation for victims of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy in northern New Brunswick.

Bastarache, now an Ottawa-based lawyer, was tasked in April with preparing a compensation package for the victims, including those abused by Lévi Noël, the retired Roman Catholic priest who pleaded guilty last October to 22 sex-related charges involving 18 boys stemming as far back as the 1960s.

He was sentenced to eight years in prison. The report will advise Bishop Valery Vienneau how much should be paid to the victims. Mallais and Brideau were two of Noël's victims.

"We don't want this to happen again

and there is nothing to say that it won't happen again," Mallais said on Monday from his home in Tracadie-Sheila.

"There are too many risks.

"We don't want any altar boys or altar girls serving mass or in that confession box until they are 18 years old."

Brideau added: "I cannot trust the people that are responsible for these crimes to fix them."

Mallais and Brideau were among roughly 45 people who contacted Bastarache over the past few months, stepping forward as victims.

But, dissatisfied with the process, both are a part of a group of nine who decided to forgo Bastarache's recommendations and are likely to seek compensation through the courts.

"We were not asked to participate in the review of protocol," Mallais said.

"I want all people that Lévi Noël abused to get help, like we're getting right now," Brideau said.

Michael Jensen, formerly of Dalhousie, who has also stepped forward as a victim, hopes the diocese will make Bastarache's report public while also pushing for further criminal investigations.

"I fully expect that Bishop Vienneau will make the report public and that he will hand over the names of all the accused to the RCMP immediately," Jensen said Monday.



Bishop Valery Vienneau

"I also expect and hope that he will remove any priests who may still be practising and then tell the public why this has been done."

It is unknown whether the report will be made public.

Jensen, who did not want a publication ban placed on his name by the court, testified that Charles Picot, who is in his 60s and worked as a priest throughout the northern part of the province until the 1990s, allegedly committed indecent assault against him as a 13-year-old boy in Dalhousie

in 1975. Court of Queen's Bench Justice Jean-Paul Ouellette found Picot not guilty of the allegation in March. The acquittal was appealed by the Crown to the New Brunswick Court of Appeal. The appeal was heard in October. The court has reserved its decision. Picot faces similar charges against another alleged victim from Dalhousie in a separate trial that is scheduled to begin in the Court of Queen's Bench in Campbellton on Jan. 25, 2011.

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In 1993, Picot was found guilty of two counts of sexual assault and one count of indecent assault. He was sentenced to seven months in jail.

On Tuesday, Fr. Wesley Wade, Vicar General of the diocese, released a prepared written statement indicating that other victims abused by priests in the diocese would have more time to come forward.

"The diocese, on recommendation by Mr. Bastarache, has agreed to extend the date for submitting new applications to the process to Dec. 1, 2010. Before completing the process, Mr. Bastarache will attempt to meet with the victims who hesitate to participate and invite them to consider their options.

"While regretting any abusive circumstance, the diocese is encouraged to learn that most of the reported cases occurred many years ago. Hopefully, the lack of recent cases can be attributed to greater societal awareness of the problem of abuse of any kind. By establishing new policies

for all members of the clergy, all diocesan and parish employees and volunteers, the diocese hopes that these efforts will ensure a healthy and secure environment for all children and vulnerable people. Thus, our Church will be able to concentrate more on its mission of evangelization."

The release stated that "a few" priests had been identified who were "either dead or no longer in ministry within the diocese."

In an interview with *The Tribune* on Wednesday, Wade refused to quantify what exactly "a few" priests meant, saying only "that is a very valid question," and "we can't give you that at this time."

He said however that they were named in the report, and quantifying those known to date would simply be a matter of adding up the individual names. Asked if any of the priests complained of were doing ministry outside of the Diocese of Bathurst, he said "Our main concern is that they

were not doing ministry in our diocese,"

Asked if some kind of action would be taken to ensure no priest named in the report is possibly still serving somewhere in the world, Wade said "That is forthcoming. That is part of our job to do that."

Wade said that given the length of time that had passed since some of the incidents were alleged to have taken place, it was probable that the priests in question would no longer be in the ministry.

"Most have passed away because it was many years ago."

Bastarache's recommendations will start the process for the second major class-action settlement over abuse committed by members of the Roman Catholic Church in Atlantic Canada.

In August 2009, the diocese of Antigonish in Nova Scotia settled a class-action lawsuit over abuse claims with \$13 million set aside for the victims of Hugh Vincent MacDonald. He was facing 27 charges involving 18 children when he died in 2004.