

BishopAccountability.org

Priest "Not Prepared" to Deal with Allegations of Abuse

By Trevor Pritchard
Standard-Freeholder

July 22, 2008

<http://www.standard-freeholder.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1123791>

A North Stormont clergyman told the Cornwall Public Inquiry he was "not at all prepared" to handle abuse allegations he received in the 1950s and 1960s against his fellow priests.

Msgr. Rejean Lebrun, who was ordained by the Alexandria- Cornwall Roman Catholic Diocese in 1962, told a lawyer for a community group he didn't turn over complaints against Paul Lapierre, Lucien Lussier, and Carl Stone to the authorities because of his inexperience.

"I was not at all prepared for that type of situation," said Lebrun, 73.

"It was completely beyond me."

Testifying in French, Lebrun told the inquiry -which is probing how institutions like the diocese handled allegations of sexual abuse from decades earlier -that Lapierre was the vicar in the parish where he grew up.

It was there, Lebrun said, that he first heard rumours Lapierre had assaulted another youth.

Lapierre was found guilty in 2004 by a Quebec judge for assaulting a 13-year-old Montreal boy in the 1960s. He had previously been charged and acquitted in Ontario.

Lebrun said he tried to divulge the rumours to the victim's mother after Lapierre's trial, but she didn't want to hear them.

"That was the end of that story," Lebrun said. "So I did not follow up."

Lebrun said he also received an allegation against Stone in 1965 from a Cornwall high school student.

Stone -who died two years ago - had left the diocese in 1963. Lebrun said when he went to another priest for an explanation for Stone's departure, the priest threw his hands up and said "young boys."

Lebrun also said he learned of a relationship between Lussier and another boy "in very little detail" during a meeting with Lussier's parishioners sometime around 1967.

Lussier was charged in September 2007 and again in January 2008 with indecent assault charges going back five decades. His case is still before the courts.

Peter Wardle, an attorney for the Citizens for Community Renewal, suggested that in the 1960s, the clergy viewed sexual abuse allegations as something "the bishop was dealing with."

It was likely Lebrun wouldn't have felt obligated to go to the police or the Children's Aid Society, Wardle said.

"You're absolutely right," said Lebrun. "I only had three years' experience. I was a very, very new priest."

Lebrun told Dallas Lee, an attorney for The Victims Group, he also learned of an allegation against a fourth priest, Hollis Lapierre, in the 1960s.

A young man in his 20s had come for advice on whether it was all right to sleep with his same-sex lover. When Lebrun said it wasn't, the man replied: "So what do you do with Father (Hollis) Lapierre, who plays with the young people?"

Lebrun said he was "really angered" by the allegation, which he delivered to the bishop's office.

Hollis Lapierre, Paul Lapierre's brother, died in 1975.

Lebrun testified there was still no official protocol in place two decades later when allegations surfaced against another priest, Gilles Deslauriers.

Deslauriers pleaded guilty in November 1986 to four counts of gross indecency and was sentenced to two years' probation.

"We were profoundly shocked," said Lebrun. "It was the first time we had to manage such a crisis. We were lost."

Lebrun was the priest at the former St. John Bosco parish from 1972 until 1987, and knew Deslauriers from the time he boarded there while he was chaplain at la Citadelle, a local high school.

One of Deslauriers' victims told police that Deslauriers would molest him in his office, stopping temporarily as Lebrun walked by.

Lebrun said he never saw the abuse happen.

"The windows were frosted," said Lebrun. "I never saw anything, really. I never heard anything."

After the allegations against Deslauriers became public, rumours spread through the parish without any official statement from the bishop's office, Lebrun said.

Still, then-bishop Eugene LaRocque was saddened by the situation and wanted to take action, Lebrun said.

"I don't remember the exact words but I remember enough to tell you that Msgr. LaRocque was deeply troubled by these events," he told Lee.

Over the next decade-and-a-half, Lebrun would take part in many meetings with the goal of hammering out a protocol for dealing with abuse complaints.

He helped craft the diocese's 2003 guidelines, and said Monday that he regretted not having a similar protocol to refer to decades earlier.

"Had I had the knowledge I have today, the guidelines I have today, the protocol I have today, it's clear that the reactions I would've had would be very different," Lebrun said.