

Abuse victims win landmark lawsuit against Redemptorist Order

Victims seeking additional \$16M in exemplary damages

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Seventy men who launched a class action lawsuit against clergy accused of sexual abuse have been awarded compensation.

It's the first time in Quebec that this type of case has gone to trial, instead of being settled out of court.

After three months of deliberation, Superior Court Judge Claude Bouchard ordered the Redemptorist Order of Catholic priests, the Séminaire St-Alphonse and Rev. Raymond-Marie Lavoie to pay \$75,000 to each claimant.

Carlo Tarini, a spokesman for the Quebec Association of Victims of Priests, welcomed the ruling.

"We're very pleased by the judgment that Judge Claude Bouchard issued today. It's a first in Quebec. This was the first-ever class action suit filed and was successful and it should have a major impact on many other victims in Quebec and perhaps even in Canada," Tarini said.

According to the decision, the victims can make an application for that amount to be doubled if they believed the abuse suffered and the resulting damage was significant enough that it justifies additional compensation.

Tarini said he's met dozens of victims of the Redemptorist priests.

"The effects have been disastrous. There is no such crime as injuring and changing the life of a child. Many of these victims have fallen into the usage of alcohol and drugs. Many quit school at a very early age because they had problems with authority."

The main claimant, Frank Tremblay, who has already spoken publicly about the abuse he suffered as a student at Séminaire Saint-Alphonse was automatically awarded the doubled amount.

Lawyers representing the men who attended the private boarding school in Saint-Anne-de-Beaupré near Quebec City alleged there was systemic abuse and a cover-up at the school during the '70s and '80s.

Serge Létourneau, a lawyer in the case, said that two of the alleged abusers were once principals at the school and also sat on the provincial executive committee of the Redemptorist Order.

In 2011, Lavoie pleaded guilty to sexually abusing 13 children and is serving a five-year sentence.

During the trial, 12 men testified about being molested regularly in their youth.

The victims said the abuse happened in their dorm rooms — located in a house where five priests stayed — and at a chalet the Redemptorist Order owned.

Once the victims receive their compensation, the court will also have to determine the amount the Redemptorist Order will have to pay in exemplary damages.