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369 people come forward with abuse claims against Archdiocese of St. John's in bankruptcy case

Decisions by independent claims officer expected by April

[Ryan Cooke](#), [Alex Kennedy](#) · CBC News · Posted: Dec 04, 2023 7:59 AM NST | Last Updated: December 4



Archbishop Peter Hundt says more than 350 people have come forward with claims against the Archdiocese of St. John's and its corporate entity, the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of St. John's. (Ted Dillon/CBC)

The final tally is in — 369 people have come forward claiming they were abused physically or sexually by people under the watch of the Archdiocese of St. John's, including the Christian Brothers at Mount Cashel.

Archbishop Peter Hundt delivered the message to parishioners during Roman Catholic masses on Sunday, saying each of those claims are now being evaluated by an independent claims officer to "provide both a determination of liability and a value for each claim."

It's the latest update in the archdiocese's insolvency proceedings, which began when the organization filed for creditor protection on Dec. 22, 2021.

"It's a high number, but there was a horrific amount of abuse in the Archdiocese of St. John's," said Geoff Budden, lead lawyer for a group of plaintiffs who were abused by Christian Brothers and other clerics with the church, told CBC News on Monday. "It was a high number but I can't say for me personally it was a shocking, or even unanticipated number."

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Budden said people were calling in their proof of claims right up until the deadline on Sept. 30. He said many had similar stories, even though their experiences took place decades apart. He said they had concerns about what happened, how it happened, and that it could happen again if steps weren't taken to hold the church accountable.



St. John's lawyer Geoff Budden represents abuse survivors in the ongoing compensation battle against the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of St. John's. (Terry Roberts/CBC)

Hundt said the claims officer's decision should come by April.

"I know that the ongoing legal proceedings and the sale of church properties have been a great source of hurt and pain for the communities, parishes, and individuals of this archdiocese," he said.

"I am very grateful to all the clergy and parishioners who have provided support and assistance to each other and to the broader Catholic community during this difficult time of change and restructuring."

Many of the claimants are expected to be survivors of the Mount Cashel Orphanage, a St. John's institution that, for decades, served as a safe haven for child abusers and

a house of horrors for the kids that lived there.

The archdiocese's decision to file for creditor protection came on the heels of an appeal court decision that held the church responsible for actions of the Christian Brothers that ran the orphanage. Allegations of abuse at Mount Cashel span from the late 1940s to the 1980s.

The group also includes people who have been abused by priests and have not previously sought damages in civil court.



Gemma Hickey of St. John's is the president of Ending Clergy Abuse, a worldwide organization of human rights' activists and survivors from more than 21 countries. (Kyle Mooney/Radio-Canada)

The claims officer, consulting firm EY, will determine how much compensation is paid to each claimant, and claimants will have the option of appealing to the province's highest court if they aren't satisfied.

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St. John's advocate Gemma Hickey, president of Ending Clergy Abuse and a survivor of clergy abuse, said it's always difficult to see more people step forward with claims of abuse. They noted there are many more that will go unheard.

"We know that there are countless others who have been abused by clergy that, unfortunately, can't come forward because they've signed non-disclosure agreements. Some of them have passed on," Hickey said.

"The headlines are triggering, and we know that we have only scratched the surface when it comes to this issue."

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