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Deadline looming for abuse survivors to apply for compensation from N.L. archdiocese

Number of claimants now north of 200 as Sept. 30 deadline approaches

[Terry Roberts](#) · CBC News · Posted: Sep 19, 2023 5:29 PM NDT | Last Updated: September 19



St. John's lawyer Geoff Budden represents well over 100 abuse survivors in the ongoing compensation battle against the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of St. John's, which is the business arm of the St. John's archdiocese. The deadline for survivors to file a so-called proof of claim is Sept. 30. (Terry Roberts/CBC)

Survivors of abuse at the hands of Mount Cashel's Christian Brothers and Roman Catholic clergy in the St. John's Archdiocese have until the end of the month to apply for compensation.

And that court-imposed deadline has prompted an influx of new claimants to reach out to lawyers like Geoff Budden, who has spent the last three decades pursuing justice for abuse victims.

Budden said at least two dozen people have come forward in recent months; people who say they've lived with trauma for decades, and never told their story — until now.

"People often only come forward when they know they have to come forward by a certain date or else they will never be able to seek compensation," said Budden.

The deadline to file a so-called proof of claim with lawyers like Budden is 5 p.m. NT on Saturday, Sept. 30.

"I think if somebody comes forward Oct. 2, they're probably going to be out of luck in getting compensation from the archdiocese," he said.

Budden's firm represents well over half of the more than 200 claimants who are seeking compensation from the episcopal corporation, which is the business arm of the archdiocese.

Budden said his clients are located across Canada and the United States, and some live in Europe. What do they all have in common? They were victims of sexual abuse during their time as orphans at the notorious Mount Cashel orphanage in St. John's, or at the hands of parish priests or others in the employ of the archdiocese.



The Mount Cashel orphanage is shown in a 1989 photo. The orphanage was operated by the Christian Brothers until its closure in late 1990, and is now synonymous with a sexual abuse scandal that rocked the Catholic church. (Andrew Vaughan/The Canadian Press)

The Mount Cashel scandal erupted in 1989, leading to the Hughes inquiry on how the justice system handled a botched investigation in the 1970s, as well as criminal convictions related to that and earlier periods. The orphanage, once a pillar in the east end of St. John's, closed in 1990 and was subsequently torn down. The land became a Sobeys supermarket and a small subdivision.

WATCH | Lawyer Geoff Budden says the abuse men — and women — suffered was 'much broader' than just at Mount Cashel:



Deadline set for abuse survivors to apply for compensation from N.L. archdiocese

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Lawyer Geoff Budden, who has spent the last three decades helping victims, says at least two dozen people have come forward in the last couple of months. The deadline to file a "proof of claim" is Saturday, Sept. 30.

Budden said 90 per cent of the claimants are male, and their ages range from 40 to more than 90.

The courts have ruled the corporation is liable for the sexual abuse, which in many cases dates back decades, and was carried out by church or orphanage leaders in a position of trust.

Budden called that betrayal "really quite gross and frightening" and said many of the victims carry a lifetime of scars.

"Their whole world view in many cases was quite shattered," he said.

The court has imposed a publication ban on the identities of the victims.

Selling off assets

The corporation has been in bankruptcy protection for nearly two years as it sells off churches, parish halls, schools and other assets in order to raise money for victims. It's resulted in a dramatic shakeup in the archdiocese, with fewer churches, many frustrated Catholics, and a new reality for a once powerful religious institution.

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So far, the sell-off has raised about \$45 million, with many assets still up for sale, and an ongoing legal dispute over an insurance claim.

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Anywhere from 25 to 40 per cent of the money available for settlements will go to lawyers like Budden.

Court-appointed claims officers are now evaluating individual claims to determine the level of compensation, with money expected to flow early next year.

Average payouts are not yet known, but Budden said it will be north of \$100,000.

"I feel that we will see adequate financial compensation as law (the) defines that," he said.

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