

Former orphanage resident testifies of terrifying shower beating

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In excruciating testimony this morning at the Mount Cashel civil trial, a man in his late 70s told how he tried as a boy in the 1950s to get a Roman Catholic official to help orphanage residents who were being beaten constantly by Christian Brothers.



"We need help here," he said he pleaded to the officials.

But while promises were made, nothing was done, the witness said in Newfoundland Supreme Court.

The Roman Catholic Church is now fighting four test cases, representing 60 claimants, because it says it did not operate the orphanage.

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The man, the second former orphanage resident to testify in the trial in which abuse claimants assert that the RC Episcopal Corp. of St. John's should be liable for physical and sexual abuse of orphanage boys from the 1940s to 1960s by certain members of the Christian lay order, said he pleaded the boys' case.

Then he showed welts on his body to a Christian Brothers official.

This was after the man said he was belted by Christian Brother Ronald J. Lasik while he was nude and wet. He said Lasik, known by the boys to have a collection of straps, was frustrated because the boy had missed shower time for his class.

The man said there was something wrong with a grown man watching naked boys shower, referring to the Brothers who supervised the classes of boys during their turns in the shower room.

The man said he was late due to being at confession and told Lasik that, but never admitted that he had walked a female friend down the road afterwards because lies brought even more severe beatings.

All the hot water was gone, but Lasik insisted that he shower anyway and the boy was dipping in and out of the cold water.

"I was screaming like hell," he said of the atrocious pain of the five to eight hits Lasik belted the boy's naked body.

The man said beatings of boys at the facility were constant and the boys needed help. That's why he reached out to RC officials.

He also testified of a mentally challenged boy who he saw whacked on the side of the head.

"I really got a sick feeling in my stomach," he said. "We all liked this kid."

Later the man was among a group of five orphanage residents who went to a New Jersey college to train as Christian Brothers because they wanted to change things due to their experiences at the violent orphanage, he testified.

"Twice a day, just about everyday, somewhere, somehow," he told claimants lawyer Paul Kennedy when asked the frequency of beatings that could be witnessed at the orphanage.

But he said he did not have a calling and left the training after two years.

The Labrador man, who like other former residents testifying cannot be named due to a publication ban, said he was moody and angry in his marriage, but did not take it out on his "lovely" family.

He said terrifying dreams of the orphanage still haunt him and Lasik is No. 1 in those nightmares.

"The possibility of us boys confiding in someone at the orphanage was nil," he said of the residents having no one to turn to. Visits with relatives were supervised and if the boys went to a doctor or dentist with an injury, they were warned to make up an excuse and not report that the Brothers beat them, he said.

The trial continues. Look for expanded coverage of the day's events, online and in print Thursday.