

# Investigation into doctor's activities concluded too soon: lawyer

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The RCMP and social services agencies of the day did not do enough to pursue the investigation of Dr. Stephen James Collins, who was convicted in the 1980s of sexually abusing children, says a lawyer who's been on the case for several years on behalf of people who say they were Collins' victims.



St. John's lawyer Bob Buckingham launched two civil cases. One was settled and the other is still before the courts. He also has several other clients and thinks Collins should face the criminal justice system again.

“(The RCMP) should have gone after him. They should have continued the investigation,” Buckingham said. “And then he does minimal amount of time in jail.”

He said Collins was able to manipulate adults and children into a level of trust in rural Newfoundland because he was a “double god” — both a doctor and an ordained minister.

But once he was caught out, police should have broadened the investigation, and social services and other agencies should have made sure adequate counselling was put in place for his victims and their families, Buckingham said.

“What I am saying, the police, once they understood he was a pedophile, should have gone back in along with social services and continued on with their investigation, but they did not do it,” he said, adding victims suffer from ongoing trauma as a result of the abuse, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

The offences for which Collins was criminally convicted involved young children ranging in age from seven to 11 over the period 1975-86. All but two of the children were female.

The incidents consisted of the display and encouragement of nudity, photographing and displaying photographs of nude children, fondling, kissing, masturbation, oral sex and attempts at sexual intercourse with a female child.

In 1986, Collins pleaded guilty to seven counts of sexual assault and four counts of indecent assault on the 11 children.

On appeal in 1987, Collins was sentenced to two years in prison and three years' probation, during which time he was to receive treatment.

Buckingham said one of his clients — not among those 11 from the 1980s case — went to the RCMP about a year ago to make a criminal complaint.

The RCMP did not comment on whether there is a new investigation.

The United Church of Canada, named as a second defendant in three civil cases against Collins, has denied liability or responsibility for Collins' actions in a statement of defence in Buckingham's civil case that is still before the courts.

The Telegram has chosen not to name the woman who launched the lawsuit in 2013, because of the nature of the sexual abuse claims from her childhood, when she said she attended the youth choir led by Collins.

The church said at the time, Collins was practising medicine and was a volunteer with the church, and any abuse that may have been carried out by him was unconnected to his activities with the church.

Collins, who grew up in Africa after being born there to missionary parents, served as a minister in Labrador. After attending medical school in Ontario, he returned to the province to practise medicine in Baie Verte and La Scie. He then acted in a lay capacity with the church, including roles in adult and youth choirs.

He is believed to be living somewhere in Angola, but lawyers say they haven't been able to track down his address. The lawyer who represented him in the settled lawsuit is no longer his lawyer.

Buckingham's two cases aren't the only civil ones facing the United Church and Collins.

On Friday, William Hiscock of Budden and Associates appeared at Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador before Justice Deborah Paquette to seek permission for his client to proceed as a Jane Doe case against Collins, with the church as a second defendant.

The woman in Hiscock's civil case was not among the 11 children Collins was convicted of abusing in the 1980s.

No statement of claim has yet been filed in her case. Friday's application sought approval to proceed as "Jane Doe" and without naming her home community.

But Paquette sought some clarification on an affidavit from a social worker that accompanied the application, and the matter was set over until early December.

In response to The Telegram, the United Church of Canada said it cannot comment on a case that is before the courts, but the church is well aware of Collins' 1980s conviction. He was placed on the discontinued service list in 1986, and is therefore no longer a United Church minister.

The church first drafted a sexual abuse policy in 1993 and it was last updated in 2011.

The church maintains it does not tolerate and will seek to eradicate any behaviour by volunteers, clergy, lay ministers, employees and others that constitutes sexual abuse or child abuse.

In the Jane Doe case launched in 2005, Collins' statement of defence stated that when he sexually assaulted that particular Jane Doe as a child, he "at the time ... suffered from a mental disease known as heterosexual pedophilia ... a compulsive proclivity to engage in sexual contact and behaviour with pre-pubescent females."

The Jane Doe in the 2005 case was among the children involved in the 1980s criminal case.

Collins' first pastoral position in the province was in 1963 in Labrador. Around 1974, he began practising medicine in Baie Verte. After tropical medicine training and a two-year posting to Zaire, Africa, he went to La Scie in 1983.