

Man tells Mount Cashel civil trial he was sexually stalked at orphanage

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Published: Apr 13, 2016 at midnight

Updated: Sep 30, 2017 at 6:04 a.m.

A man told the Mount Cashel civil trial at Newfoundland Supreme Court that he was taken in the 1950s by a Christian Brother to the boiler room at the orphanage and fondled, beginning the two worst years of his life ever in which he said he was sexually “stalked” by that Brother and abused numerous times.



The door to Court Room No. 2 in Newfoundland Supreme Court where the Mount Cashel civil trial is taking place.
— Photo by Barb Sweet/The Telegram

The man also talked about another Brother that beat him, leaving his eye swollen for two weeks.

The man said he told priests about the incidents in and out of confession and his once serious interest in pursuing a career in the priesthood or as a Christian Brother ended with a loss of faith because his situation was not helped.

Outside of those conversations, he said he first personally spoke of the incidents in the 1990s. None of the allegations were ever dealt with in a criminal court, he testified. (There were criminal cases in the era following the 1989 Hughes Inquiry.)

The man is not represented by lawyers Budden and Associates as part of the case before Justice Alphonsus Faour, but said he contacted the firm after he read newspaper coverage of the civil trial. He has been a claimant with another St. John's law firm.

The man cannot be identified because of a publication ban. The names of deceased priests are also banned from publication.

The lawsuit against the RC Episcopal Corp. of St. John's seeks compensation and involves four test cases that claim the church should be held liable for the physical and sexual abuse of boys at the orphanage by certain Christian Brothers during the period, the late 1940s to early 1960s. The test cases represent about 60 claimants represented by Geoff Budden's firm.

The church contends it did not run the orphanage, therefore is not responsible for actions of the lay order Christian Brothers there.

The man said he was brought to the orphanage by a priest, but conceded to Susan Adam Metzler, who represents the church, he was young at the time and may have been unaware of who organized his admission to the orphanage, but that's what he was told years later.

His father died in 1943, months before the witness was born to a family with several children. His mother remarried but later died. His stepfather left with his own kids — the man's half siblings — and for a time he was cared for by a sister. The man, one of three brothers in the orphanage, said the early years at the orphanage were good, as things were bad at home with little food and sickness.

Later years were also OK, once the two Brothers who he said abused him left the orphanage, he said.

The witness conceded to Adam Metzler that he is unaware of what further conversations that priests he spoke to had with others.

He also conceded the Brothers were responsible for the boys' education, and daily routines at the orphanage.

"They were our teachers and parents, basically," he said.

While the former orphanage resident was adamant about the church's role at Mount Cashel, Thursday's other witness stated the opposite.

"I would have to say (the archdiocese) played no longterm role as I saw in the documentation. There was no long-term management, direction, control, operation of the orphanage. This matter of the orphanage was left to the Irish Christian Brothers," said Newfoundland historian John FitzGerald.

His testimony is a temporary shift to the church's case because of scheduling. FitzGerald, an expert witness called by lawyers defending the archdiocese, said the Christian Brothers had their own hierarchy of superiors and did not answer to bishops and the Catholic line of authority.

He began presenting a lengthy history of how the Irish Christian Brothers came to the province in the 1870s to establish schools, as they built an international reputation as educators.

He said while the archdiocese was a liaison, helped to fundraise for the orphanage and had lobbied the government at the request of the Irish Christian Brothers, it did not run the facility.

"The management and control of the orphanage were in the hands of the Christian Brothers, FitzGerald said.

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