

## 'Apology without action is empty', Canadian abuse victim tells Pope

Canadian abuse victim John Swales has responded to an open letter from Pope Francis with [his own letter to Rome](#) in which he rejects what he terms the Pope's "empty" apology and calls for "real" change founded on "honesty and accountability."

"I believe the Church has committed crimes against humanity. As head of the organization, I hold you responsible," Swales wrote.

He was reacting to the Pope's [Letter to the People of God](#) published Aug. 20 after the release of a Pennsylvania grand jury report that cited decades of sexual abuse of minors by 301 priests and detailed how the crimes were covered up by bishops and other Church officials. The Pope's open letter admitted that Church leaders "kept quiet" about the crimes and called for repentance, but did not propose specific new norms to deal with bishops who cover up abuse.



**Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi**

Swales sent copies of the letter to the Vatican and to the Vatican's nuncio in Canada, Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi, in the hope that it will reach the Pope.

Swales also launched an online petition urging abuse survivors to demand accountability from bishops and he created a website ([DearPopeFrancis.org](http://DearPopeFrancis.org)) urging victims to write directly to the Pope. He also called for a papal apology for the Church's involvement in residential schools.

"I'm trying to co-ordinate this so it comes out to all people at the same

time," said Swales.

His letter to the Pope describes five years of abuse from 1969 to 1974 at the hands of Father Barry Glendinning, a former priest in London, Ont. Swales was 10 when it began.

Glendinning also taught at Newman Theological College in Edmonton from 1976 to 1982 and assisted at parishes.

Glendinning was later arrested and pled guilty to six charges of gross indecency involving five boys and a girl. He served three years probation, received psychological treatment at the Southdown Institute and was hired to teach liturgy at St. Peter's Seminary in London, Ont., and later at Saint Paul University in Ottawa. He was laicized in 2008 and died in 2011.

Swales' letter says he never recovered from the abuse. From the age of 15 until he began recovery from his addictions at 33 he dived deep into alcohol, drugs and prostitution.

In 1996 the Swales family launched a civil action against Glendinning and the Diocese of London that led to a 1999 apology from then-Bishop John Sherlock – which Swales called "contrived" – and a 2004 award of \$1.4 million.

"In hindsight, I realize that what I wanted more than anything was a sincere apology for what had happened and then to be held and supported by the Church that I had loved, through the aftermath," Swales wrote to the Pope.

His letter claims that under Pope Francis the Church continues "to distance itself from responsibility and liability."

"This is another kind of abuse of power," he wrote. "There is nothing specific written in your letter about the actions that might follow and no acknowledgment of the orchestrated coverup of moving predatory priests and the silencing of victims through threats of ex-communication and non-disclosure agreements. Apology without action is empty."

His letter to Pope Francis was not motivated by anger, he said.

"It's time for the people who have been most directly impacted to have a voice in this story," said Swales. "I hope that a simple person who has gone through hardships can have an audience with the Pope. Whether that will happen or not, I'm not sure."

Swales, 59, has built a life as a single father of a daughter attending university, a son in high school, plus two daughters from a previous relationship. He also has two grandchildren. He has just begun studying social work at King's College in London.

In his letter, Swales makes three recommendations.

“First, go straight to the source of pain. Direct non-offending priests and bishops all over the world to go with true humility to ask each person harmed in their parish for forgiveness.

“Second, stop forcing survivors to litigate for compensation. Be willing to go to the lengths of bankrupting the institution in the name of healing all those the Church has hurt and destroyed.

“Third, publicly acknowledge the abuse of Indigenous peoples by priests and nuns. Repeat the first two actions.”

Swales received help in composing his letter from Western University chaplain Father Michael Bechard.

“For me to be able to walk with somebody on that path is a real gift,” Bechard said.

Bechard says Swales is wiser and gentler than anyone has a right to expect. He’s not surprised that Swales has made a success of his life.

“There’s a real resiliency in the human spirit which always amazes me,” Bechard said.

A spokesperson said the London diocese had no comment.