

# Archdiocese of Edmonton plans for audit of clergy sex abuse files

The Archdiocese of Edmonton plans to have its accrediting agency, Praesidium Inc., complete an audit of all records regarding sexual abuse by clergy as part of its ongoing commitment to transparency and accountability, although the terms and timeline are yet to be determined.

“We can never be complacent in the work we have done because there is still far more to do,” said Teresa Kellendonk, the Archbishop’s Delegate for Safe Environments and Abuse Prevention.

“Victims are still in the communities that we serve. Some we don’t know. Some we do. And their stories are always to be told and shared and respected.”

Meanwhile, five Montreal-area dioceses announced March 26 that they have hired a retired judge to examine seven decades of their archival files to shed light on credible reports of sexual abuse by clergy that have been kept silent.

The Edmonton Archdiocese first contracted with Praesidium, an international leader in abuse risk management, in 2011 to update formal abuse policies and to train every priest, deacon, seminarian, staff and volunteer in abuse prevention. To date, more than 10,000 people have received this training, and training sessions are offered throughout the Archdiocese every year.

The Archdiocese became the first in Canada to receive Praesidium accreditation in 2017 for its abuse prevention program.



**Teresa Kellendonk**

No timeline or terms have been set for the audit of clergy abuse files, but Kellendonk said Praesidium will advise on how to prepare for the audit without compromising those files in any way. It’s not known exactly how many there are.

“They are coming in to review every file that has anything to do with clergy sex abuse,” Kellendonk said.

Kellendonk noted that there has been increased need for transparency and accountability among all of Canada’s Catholic bishops since 1992, when they published *From Pain to Hope*, a document that outlined recommendations on abuse prevention. The document was updated in 2007 and comprehensively rewritten in 2018.

Archbishop Richard Smith announced last fall that following a review of files, the names of any priests who have served in the Archdiocese and those who have been convicted of child sex abuse would be made public on the Archdiocese website. That review is under way now.

At that time, he said at least six priests who had served in the Archdiocese had been charged and convicted of sexual misconduct or abuse in the past, with crimes dating back to the 1960s. The most recent was in the 1980s.

“I see a commitment and an accountability by the bishops to walk with the victims, to prevent and mitigate abuse in everyone’s respective dioceses. Abuse is preventable and we can’t make excuses,” Kellendonk noted.

“No diocese wants to be sued over and over again ... because that means we haven’t responded to a victim or a victim has felt that our response hasn’t been adequate. The challenge is for some victims to trust to come to us and to meet with their bishop.”



Anne-Marie Trahan

Back in Quebec, the dioceses that form the ecclesiastical province of Montreal have commissioned Anne-Marie Trahan, a retired Quebec superior court judge, to conduct their audit.

“We all wish to prioritize transparency and to get to the bottom of things in the search for truth,” Montreal Archbishop Christian Lépine said in a statement.

The audit is to begin in September and take 18 to 20 months to complete, according the statement.

Trahan is to be given “full access to all pertinent files” dating back to 1950. Her complete report will go to the bishops of the five affected dioceses.

A statistical summary of her findings that respects “the requirements under Quebec’s privacy laws” will be made public, the statement said.

The external audit was motivated by similar initiatives undertaken in other jurisdictions. Several American dioceses have launched audits in the wake of last summer’s Pennsylvania Grand Jury report that exposed thousands of a cases of sexual assault that were covered up.

Speaking to the Montreal Gazette, Lépine said the investigation is an attempt to rebuild trust between the Church and the public. He acknowledged, however, the opposite could occur if her report uncovers a long history of coverup.

“What I’ve asked Judge Trahan to do is to help us find the truth, whatever it is, wherever it will lead us,” Lépin told the Gazette. “We need to get to the bottom of it. It might be worse before it gets better. But we need to go there.”

As part of the review, abuse victims will be invited to come forward and tell their stories.

The other dioceses participating in the review are Joliette, Saint-John-Longueuil, St. Jerome and Valleyfield.

(With files from Canadian Catholic News)

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