

Class action request targets Sisters of Charity of Quebec

The Sisters of Charity of Quebec said they were “surprised” and “troubled” by allegations that children who once stayed at the Mont d’Youville orphanage in Quebec City were sexually abused not only by lay educators but also by nuns.

The allegations came in a revised petition to the Quebec Superior Court from a former orphanage resident seeking designation of a class action lawsuit, the first in Quebec province that named a women’s religious congregation.

The original request for class action by Jean Simard, 56, was limited to lay educators at the orphanage. Since then, other alleged victims came forward and on Sept. 24, Simard’s attorneys modified the petition to include some victims who said they had been abused by nuns.

The nuns “are troubled to hear the allegations of the proceedings involving their congregation,” the religious order said in an Oct. 3 statement from its attorney, Benoit Mailloux.

“Before these legal proceedings, the Sisters of Charity of Quebec had never been informed of such allegations. Their astonishment is complete,” he said.

Simard has alleged that when he was 12, he was “subjected to systematic and repeated sexual and physical aggression” by John-Anthony O’Reilly, an educator who was in position of authority. Simard claimed that during his stay at the orphanage from 1973 to 1975, he was beaten with a belt during a “correction session” each week.

The Sisters of Charity of Quebec operated the orphanage from the 1920s to the 1990s.

The original petition considered that the religious congregation had been “complicit in its gross negligence, willful blindness, or camouflage” of the actions of the lay educator.

Attorneys representing Simard indicated that since the initial request was filed, several other former orphanage residents “have come forward to denounce abuses of which they have been the victims, not only from lay workers but also from the nuns.”

A woman said she was sexually assaulted by the nun in charge of the orphanage’s laundry when she was 7. “These sexual assaults took place over a period of one year, once or twice a week,” the request said.

The updated request also targets the Capitale-Nationale’s Integrated University

Health and Social Services Center, known as CIUSSS. The orphanage merged with other social services and became the Quebec Youth Center in 1996. Since 2015, the Quebec Youth Center has been part of the CIUSSS.

If the class action is authorized, the attorneys are seeking \$2 million in compensation for Simard and an unspecified amount for the other victims, which may number in the hundreds, the court filing said.

“Regarding the judicial proceedings brought to our attention today, we hope that all the light will be shed as soon as possible, both for the alleged victims and for the nuns of the congregation,” said Jasmin Lemieux-Lefebvre, director of communications at the Archdiocese of Quebec.

Founded in 1849 by Sister Marie-Anne-Marcelle Mallet, the Sisters of Charity of Quebec today has 288 members.