

# Montreal dioceses hire ex-judge to investigate alleged cases of sexual abuse

Five Montreal-area dioceses have hired a retired judge to examine seven decades of archival files to shed light on credible reports of sexual abuse by clergy that have been kept silent.

"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 dioceses which form the ecclesiastical province of Montreal have commissioned retired Quebec superior court judge Anne-Marie Trahan to conduct the audit.

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

