

# Bishops call for break in silence over abuse

OTTAWA (CNS) — The Canadian bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Child Sexual Abuse has called for a break in the "wall of silence" that has allowed sexual abuse to persist within the church for years.

The seven-member committee released the 92-page final report "From Pain to Hope" on June 11. The report contained 50 recommendations, ranging from forming advocacy committees for victims of abuse, to deciding whether priests convicted of child abuse should return to the active ministry.

The report said a contributing factor to child sexual abuse among religious was the fact that the church "too readily shelters its ministers from having to account for their conduct." The church "is often tempted to settle moral problems behind a veil of secrecy which only encourages their growth."

"We would like to see our church take firm steps which would leave no

doubt as to its genuine desire to eradicate the phenomenon of child sexual abuse," the report added.

The committee conducted its two-year study at the request of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, whose members were concerned about sexual abuse by church personnel.

The church in Canada — from British Columbia to Newfoundland — has been rocked by revelations of sexual abuse of children and women. The cases have involved priests, brothers, a bishop and lay church personnel.

Although most of the committee's recommendations concerned children abused by priests, the suggestions could be easily adapted for other types of sexual abuse, the report said.

Children sexually abused by a priest or religious "feel that the basis on which they have built relationships with a small group of special people has collapsed beneath them," the report said.

"The damage done extends well

beyond a deep psychological wound; it causes radical soul-searching about the meaning of life and the pertinence of all that has been taught about God and religion. This sort of spiritual crisis goes so far as to render impossible, at least temporarily, the capacity to forgive."

The report spoke of the wounds inflicted by abuse, especially when the abuse is repeated over a period of time, and said "a wound inflicted in childhood may continue to trouble the person even into adulthood."

"The diocesan church should, if necessary, contribute to the cost of the sometimes prolonged therapy required to heal the wound suffered by a child or by an adult when a child," the report said. "The church should also ensure that the offender contribute to the payment of the expenses incurred, even if only symbolically."

The report said sexual abuse often was an abuse of power, and pointed to "a direct connection between a certain model of church life and the deviations we deplore in the behavior of some of the church's ministers."

"Relatively recently in our history, Catholic priests in Canada could, on account of their ministry and their status as priests, exercise considerable authority over the day-to-day lives of their communities," the report said. "This excessive power, unchecked by any kind of social control, placed cer-

tain individuals beyond the reach of legitimate questioning and made it possible to prevent detection.

"The fact that priests were placed on a pedestal was actually a kind of trap," the report continued. "This contributed to their becoming more and more isolated from the people they served and not developing healthy relationships built on simple friendship — something essential to a balanced humanity."

The report said professional clinical experience with priests accused of sexual abuse "reveals clear shortcomings in their formation in how to relate interpersonally, control their sexual urges, integrate their personalities and live as celibates."

"We do not wish to suggest that the formation of future priests has until now been inadequate," the report said. "Nonetheless, we think that improvements are possible and desirable."

Ten of the committee's 50 recommendations were directed to "those responsible for priestly formation."

Another 10 recommendations were directed to "those responsible for priests in a diocese." Among those recommendations was placing a priest accused of sexual abuse "on administrative leave with pay, from the time there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe that child sexual abuse occurred until completion of the investigative or judicial process."



**SERBIAN REFUGEES** — An ethnic Serbian refugee boy from Bosnia peers out while lying on a cot in a makeshift refugee camp in the village of Veliko, Orasje June 11. The village is located some 112 miles southeast of Belgrade in Serbia. Serbs announced a cease-fire June 12 in the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and offered to let U.N. monitors oversee the truce.

## Sisters of Mercy open new housing project for women

ROCHESTER — The Sisters of Mercy have opened a home to provide transitional housing for single women and their families.

Named after the congregation's founder, The Catherine McCauley Housing Project is located at 1694 St. Paul St. The building, which was purchased May 15, offers apartments for up to five women.

The first residents — a woman and her child — moved in June 17, according to Sister Janet Korn, RSM, the project's director.

In addition to using their own money to purchase the building, the sisters received supplementary funding through grants, parish donations, the Knights of Columbus and two benefit concerts.

Liz Bearisto, a social worker, was hired June 1 with funding from the Mercy Sisters of America. She will provide individual and group counseling for women. The project will also offer programs focusing on skills women will need as they prepare to live on their own, Sister Korn said.

"The project has three goals," she said. "We want to provide safe, affordable housing of women and we want to provide support services in a caring environment so people can move from dependence to self-sufficiency. And

we will advocate for justice regarding housing."

Residents will be able to stay at the home for a maximum of two years, Sister Korn said.

She said a task force on homelessness, created at the congregation's general chapter in 1989, determined that the project should focus on single women with children.

In particular, Sister Korn added, the project would have to provide continuing assistance for the women living at Melita House — the order's project for single, pregnant women.

"We would be like a second phase to that," she noted, "to make sure the women had parenting skills, jobs skills, and other skills they would need to make it on their own."

Sister Korn noted that one of the project's long-term goals is to purchase and renovate more housing units and to make them available at low cost.

The Mercy sister said she will continue to seek donations and grants to finance the current building and any future properties.

**EDITORS' NOTE:** For information about the project, write The Catherine McCauley Housing Project, 1694 St. Paul St., Rochester, N.Y. 14621; or call the Sisters of Mercy, 716/288-2710.

— Lee Strong

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