

Wednesday December 12, 2018

To: Bishop Fabbro

On behalf of concerned individuals and organizations in the London area we are writing this open letter to express outrage and indignation that the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of the Diocese of London has decided to appeal the recent court decision of Judge David Aston. As you know, his decision on November 27th allowed Irene Deschenes to reopen her (civil suit) case. Judge Aston made the ruling because there is evidence that the Church misrepresented itself in 2000 when it stated that it had no prior knowledge of Fr. Sylvester's sexually abusive proclivities in 1994. Irene signed a settlement at that time based on this claim. The settlement was reached under false pretenses and did not give Irene the opportunity to make a fully informed decision. Judge Aston agreed the case could be reopened due to evidence showing the Church knew about the abuse as early as 1962.

We ask that you abandon the appeal and settle with Irene for a number of reasons:

- **The appeal is re-victimizing.** It is not possible for the Goliath of the Church to fight back against highly traumatized individuals without doing even more damage. What Irene has wanted since 1992 (and still wants today) is for the Church to say, "We are sorry. That should never have happened to you. What can we do to support you?" Anything less than this is hypocrisy.
- **The appeal is another cruel betrayal.** It communicates clearly that the Church does not care about Irene's wellbeing. Instead, the Church protects itself and does not take responsibility for its crimes against humanity. They are crimes against humanity because the scourge of clergy abuse is global. Church leaders have willfully and knowingly hidden their crimes over centuries by moving predatory priests from parish to parish. Father Sylvester abused Irene and at least 46 other young girls in multiple parishes between 1954 and 1986.
- **Survivors do not want to litigate.** It is only because the Church has yet to take responsibility for the lifelong impact of sexual abuse on Irene that she has had to fight to get the support she needs and deserves. So many survivors struggle and live on the margins of society because they have been profoundly traumatized by those who claim to hold the highest moral authority. The Church owes survivors, their families and the community whatever it takes for healing to happen. It is not for the Church to decide what little girls and boys will need over the course of their lives to heal from such early sexual, physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual violation.
- **Support is the only possibility for healing.** The appeal process will drag out the litigation for another two to four years. The toll on Irene will be great. Instead of wearing her down, consider what it would mean if the Church used the resources to support Irene and to acknowledge the importance of making honest amends in the name of healing. Unequivocal support for Irene is the only possible path to healing for Irene, the community and the Church. Go to Irene and ask her what she needs for healing and closure.

We owe a great debt to Irene and other survivors who have found the courage to come forward and call the Church to account. Without them there would be even more victims. In spite of repeated calls for reform and accountability for decades now, the Church continues to persecute victims by forcing them to litigate and by begrudging every dollar paid in compensation. The Church owes a lifetime of support to the people and communities it has hurt.

It is time for us to demand change. We are asking the Catholic community to stop all financial support for the Catholic Church as long as it continues to punish and re-victimize survivors. The appeal being launched against Irene is only the latest example. We call on all those who believe in social justice to stand with Irene in demanding action and reparation. Until the Church makes amends to survivors, we do not believe that change has taken place.

Bishop Fabbro, it is time to stop and reflect on the adversarial path that is advised by lawyers and insurance companies. When does human decency become the voice that is acted on by the Church? We ask that you withdraw the appeal and settle the case with Irene so that she can finally stop fighting. We are looking to your leadership to make this change with Irene that will allow for a powerful healing to begin.

With hope,



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