

Quarterly report of the Ombudsman of the Montreal Archdiocese

Me Marie Christine Kirouack, Ad.E.

August 17th, 2021

Ombudsman Report No. 1 - 2021-08-17

Summary:

The report of the Ombudsman of the Archdiocese of Montreal was filed on August 17, 2021. It includes the analysis of 45 formal complaints, including 26 related to abuse. Of these, 22 relate to sexual abuse that took place from the 1950s to the present day. Thirteen complaints, mostly concerning issues between employees and members of the clergy, were sent to the Pastoral Staff Office. Finally, six complaints of various kinds were sent to the Vicar General. These do not target members of the clergy, but are rather related to the upkeep of cemeteries, funerals or genealogical research.

In addition, the Ombusman has received a significant number of calls that do not or do not yet constitute a formal complaint.

Montreal Archdiocese Ombudsman's report

August 17th, 2021

This report is the first one since I was appointed on May the 5th 2021. This report is public and will be available on the Archdiocese Website.

During these three months, I have received numerous calls from men and women who have suffered tremendously as a result of the abuses to which they were subjected by members of the clergy, members of religious communities or their employees. Listening to their suffering is an important part of the Ombudsman's job.

The consequences of abuse

Before sharing the statistical part of my report, allow me to give you a brief overview of what the people who contacted me went through and the consequences they suffered either from the abuse itself or from revealing it to their parents or relatives.

The abuses of the 1950s - 1970s:

It emerges from the complaints received that the clergy run schools of that period (1950 – 1970), a closed environment, favoured quasi-institutional abuse on a captive clientele. It was very difficult for these young boys to avoid their attacker and any attempt on their part to defend themselves cost them dearly in further abuse: abuse of authority, abuse at the school level, physical and sexual¹ abuse.

The abuses of that era were marked by the impunity of members of the clergy who then both enjoyed the benefits of the Catholic Church and basked in its aura, which no one would dare criticize. Victims can rarely count on the support of their family when they “tell”. I was both bewildered and appalled at the number of men who not only were not believed when they told relatives about the abuse, but were also sometimes beaten up by their fathers for saying such things.

¹ Fifteen of the twenty-two sexual abuse cases reported to date (or 63,69% of those complaints) took place in that period, namely from the 1950s until the beginning of the 70s.

The abuses of this time also often comprised family circumstances where the father or mother worked for religious communities, ensuring that the victims didn't "tell". The economic survival of the family depended on the silence of these children.

Secrecy :

In matters of sexual abuse, victims of all eras also bear the burden of the secrecy of the abuses of which they were victims.

I salute the courage of this man who in his seventies had the courage to tell me about the abuse he had suffered. He had never told anyone about it before. Others have called me "in secret" from their family underlying the heavy legacy they still carry, forty, fifty or even sixty years after the abuse took place.

« I am sorry for what you went through. »

If there is a constant, it is the spontaneous reaction that was repeated over and over again from complainants when I said to them that "*I was sorry for what had happened to you*". "*You are the first to tell me that.*" These people need to be comforted and acknowledged about their feelings. In that sense, it will be necessary for a church official to also tell them, "*I'm sorry*".

Consequences :

None of the victims, men or women, whom I have had the privilege of speaking to, have come out unscathed from their experiences. In some cases, they have taken refuge in addiction, in others low self-esteem has led to their having abusive partners. Others have experienced great times of depression or anxiety. One of them, a woman, told me, "I was like dead." All of them were left with images in their minds that they would like to get rid of whether they had been denigrated, beaten or sexually abused.

As for the Orphans of Duplessis, the fact of is added the fact of having little or no schooling is added to the abuses to which they were subjected, Some of them had been tagged with false medical diagnoses that they had to get rid of as adults, and in some cases were even submitted to electroshocks for rebelling. Some have told me that they

were lucky to find a good partner who supported them and allowed them to have a "good life" despite their terrible past.

Complaints by category:

Complaints of abuse:

The complaints received were related to the following form of abuse:

- psychological abuse including abuse of power and misogyny;
- financial abuse;
- physical abuse;
- sexual abuse.

In the latter case, we find complaints that cover exhibitionism, pornography, unwanted sexual advances or proposals, group masturbation, being forced into performing fellatio or masturbation, the male version of tribadism, vaginal penetration and sodomy.

In one case, the aggression was so violent that surgery was necessary.

The number of complaints of abuse:

As of today, I have received 29 denunciations pertaining to abuse. Of this number, the Advisory Committee was seized of 26 formal complaints². Of those that were assessed³, 16 were retained, 3 rejected and 3 files were closed as lacking the necessary information to proceed.

² The number of complaints is not necessarily representative of the number of calls received from victims. Some have chosen not to file a formal complaint; others are taking some time to decide if they wish to go ahead with filing one. Furthermore, some victims without wishing to file a formal complaint wanted to be included in my statistics and they have been.

³ Due to the summer vacations, the Committee took a hiatus of three weeks. They are about to start meeting again.

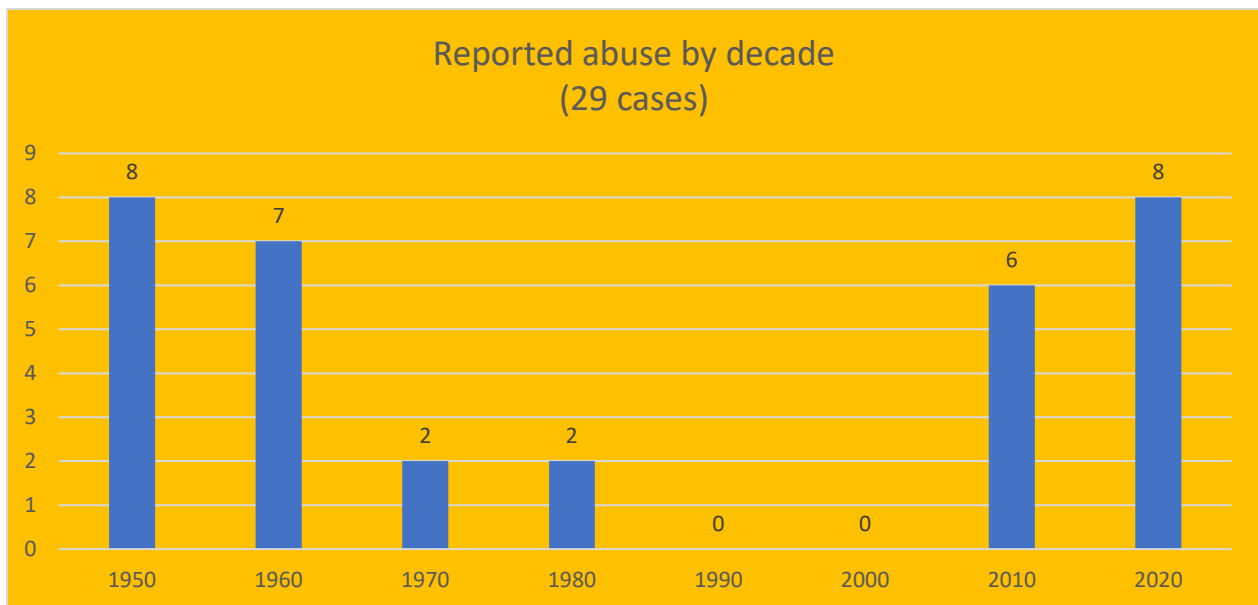
In seven of the retained complaints, the Advisory Committee recommended formal investigations which are presently underway or about to begin. All investigations are made by the external firm Quintet.

In eight files, a letter was sent to the religious order requesting more information and as the case may be, to do an investigation. Some of these religious orders were more willing to cooperate than others.

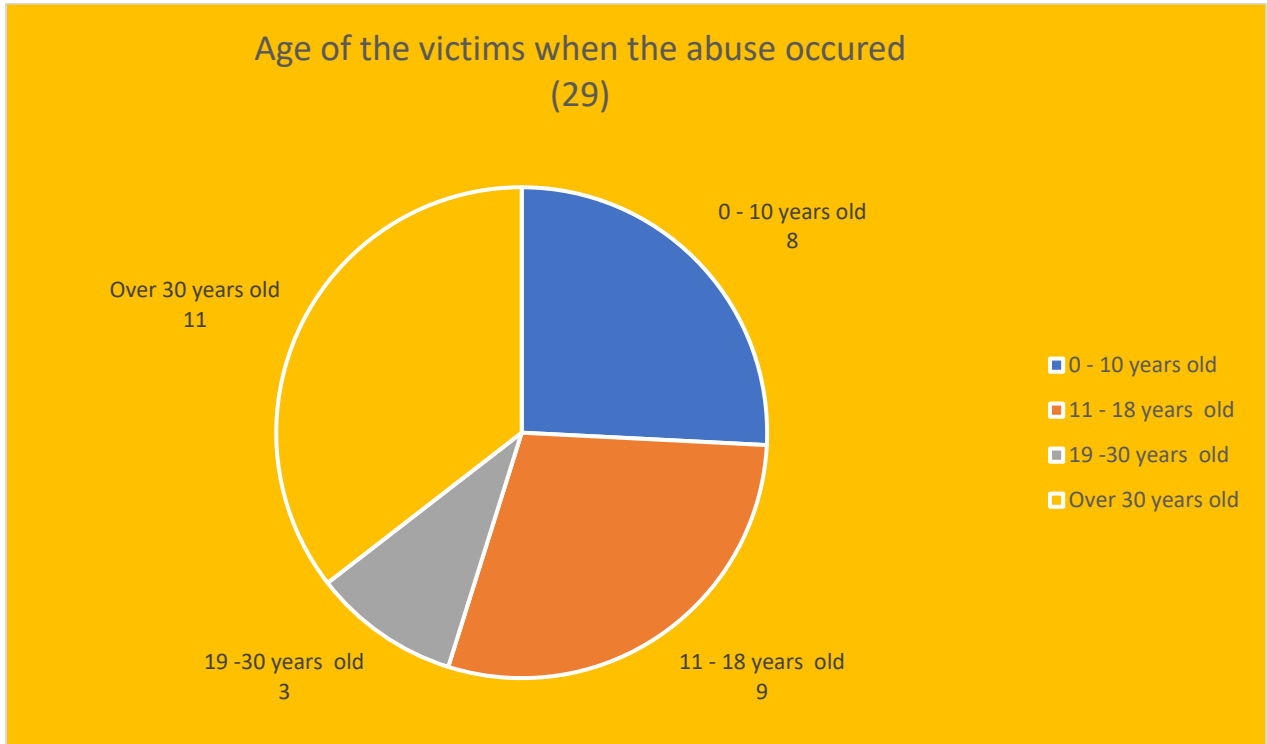
The persons targeted by complaints of abuse :

Of the 29 persons targeted by complaints of abuse, 16 were members of a religious order, 10 members of the clergy, and 3 lay people, employees of religious orders.

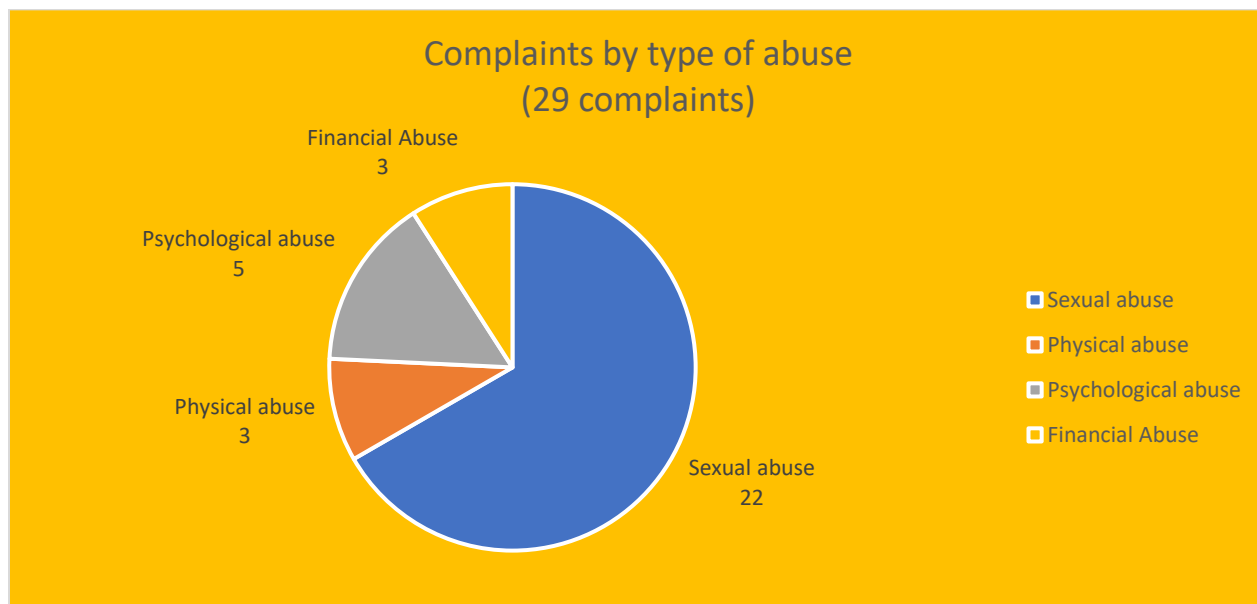
The complaints relate to events that took place from the 1950s to the present day and some abuses spanned more than one decade.



The ages of the victims at the time of the abuse range from elementary school children to adults over 80 years old. It should be noted that in cases of repeated abuse, victims may fall into more than one age category.



The type of abuse denounced in the complaints⁴ :

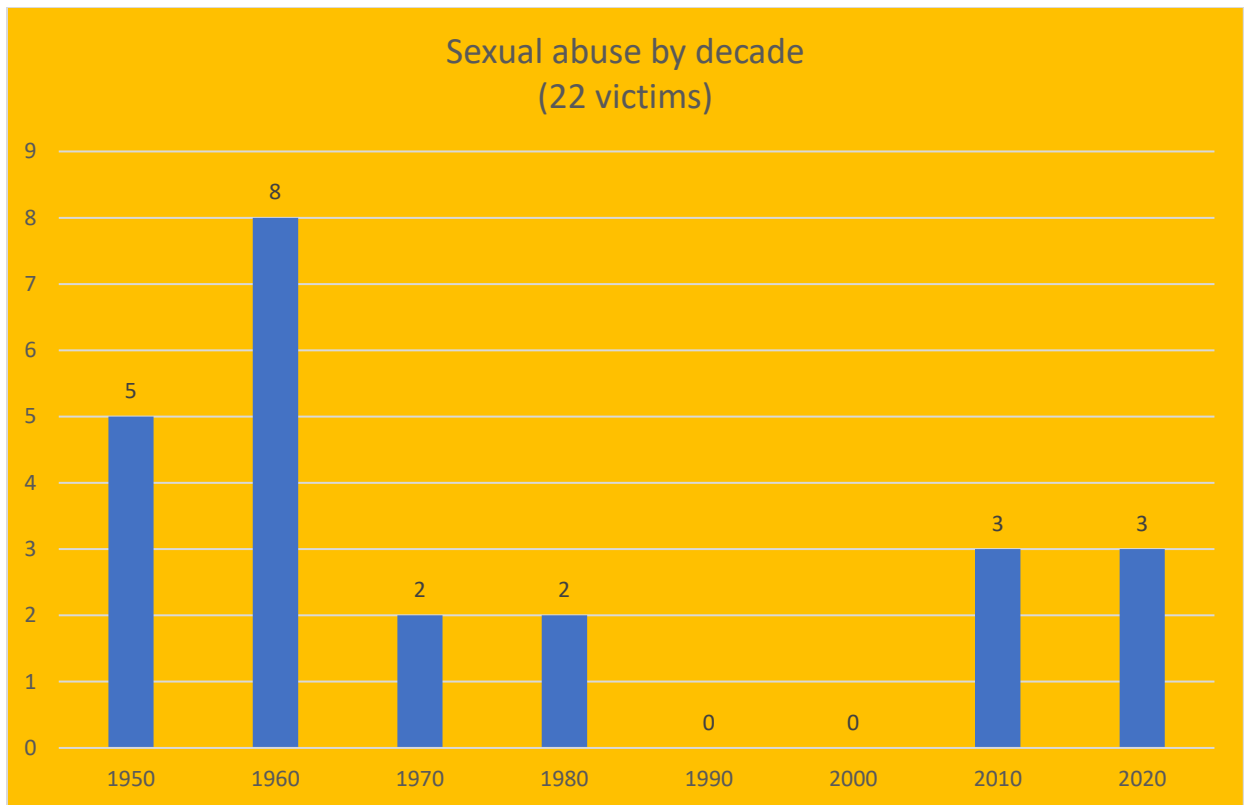


In the case of sexual and physical abuse, **31,3%** of victims were repeatedly abused.

The complaints of sexual abuse taken by decade seem to illustrate a decrease in comparison with the years 1950-70. However, the creation of an Ombudsman's complaint process at the Archdiocese is too recent to be able to draw any inferences from this fact.

In another paradigm shift, unlike the victims of the 1950s and 1970s who were all minors, the complainants in the sexual abuse cases of the 2010s and 2020s were all adults when the abuse occurred. But again, we must avoid drawing hasty conclusions.

⁴ Please note that some complaints contain more than one form of abuse.



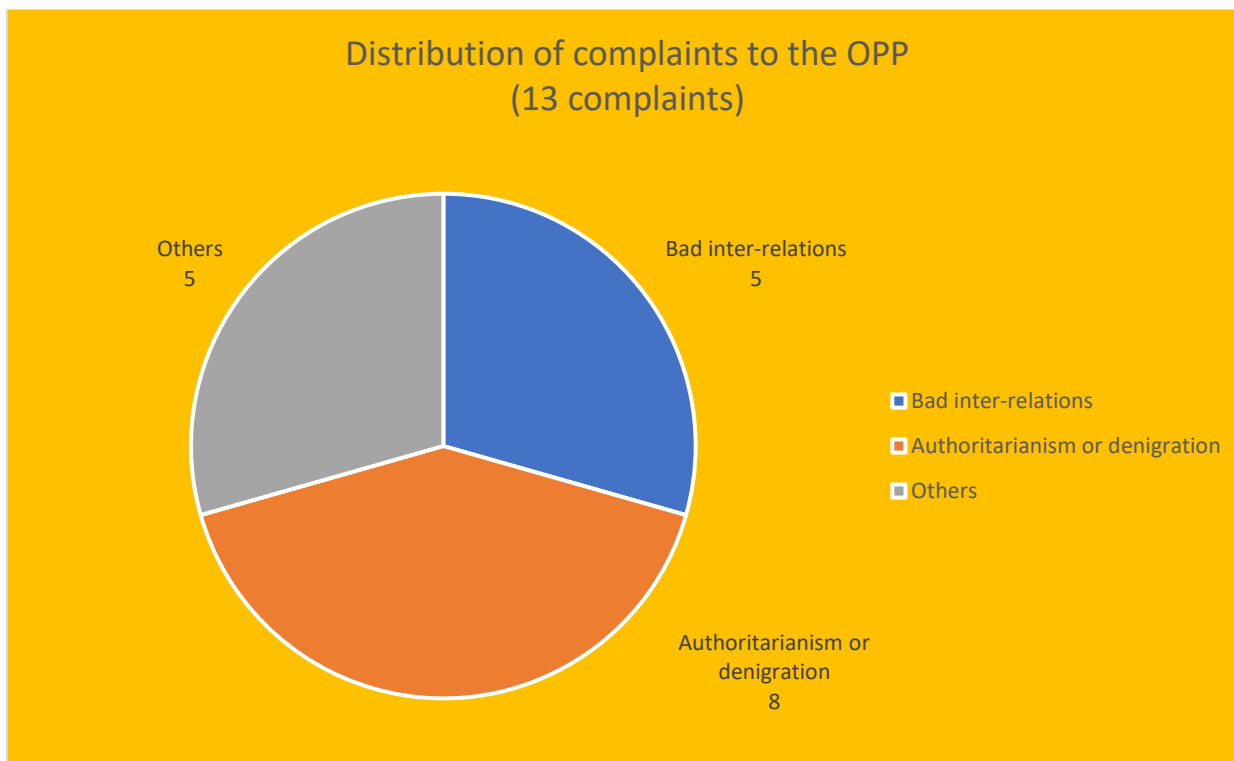
The abuses, whether sexual, physical or psychological perpetrated during the 1950s and 1960s were mainly committed by members of religious communities⁵.

Complaints referred to the Office du personnel pastoral (OPP):

The OPP is seized with 13 complaints (out of the 45 complaints I have received comprising all categories). They mainly comprise difficulties between employees and members of the clergy. As for the others, they pertain to the application of the *Act respecting fabriques*.

The summer vacation delayed processing a good number of them and they should be dealt with in the next few weeks.

⁵ All the complaints that refer to events that took place during the 1950s were committed by members of religious communities (sexual, physical or psychological abuse). Seventy percent of the abuses committed during the 1960s were also by members of religious communities.



Complaints referred to the Vicar General :

The Vicar General was seized with 6 complaints (out of 45 complaints I have received in total) :

- problems related to funerals which do not involve members of the clergy;
- problems related to cemeteries;
- genealogical research;
- ... etc.

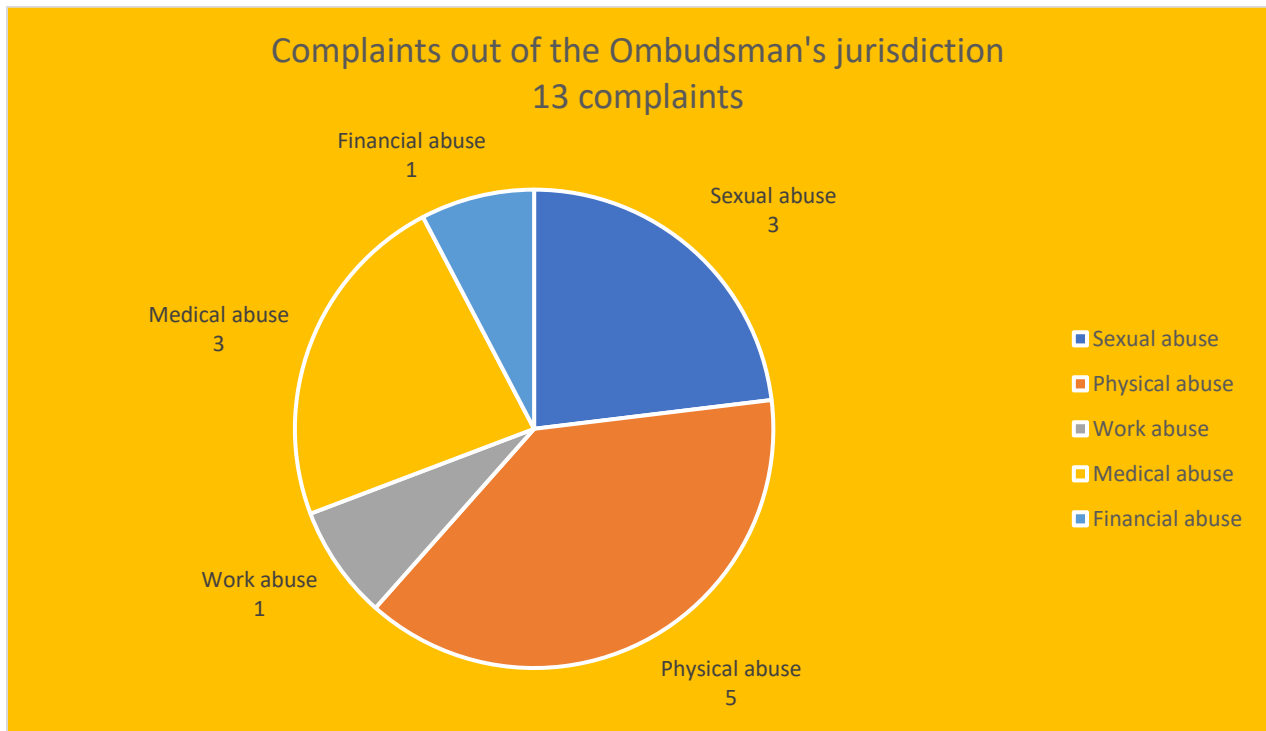
Two have already been treated to the satisfaction of the complainants, the others delayed by the summer vacation will be dealt with shortly.

Other requests made to the Ombudsman:

Complaints that do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman:

Here we find complaints against members of religious communities over which I have no jurisdiction since the persons targeted by the complaints did not (in the case of

deceased persons) or do not come under the Archdiocese of Montreal. In these cases, I regretfully had to decline jurisdiction, but referred them to the relevant diocese.



Other complaints or requests :

In my capacity as Ombudsman, I also receive requests that do not fall within the complaint's process in the strict sense of the term. I have grouped these requests into the following categories.

Covid health measures :

Three requests concerned health measures related to Covid whether for or against these measures.

Orphanages:

Two persons who are not Duplessis orphans, wanted to complain about the treatment they received at other orphanages.

Residential schools :

Following the gruesome discoveries during this summer of many unmarked indigenous graves, it would be impossible for me to table my Ombudsman report without addressing the issue of residential schools.

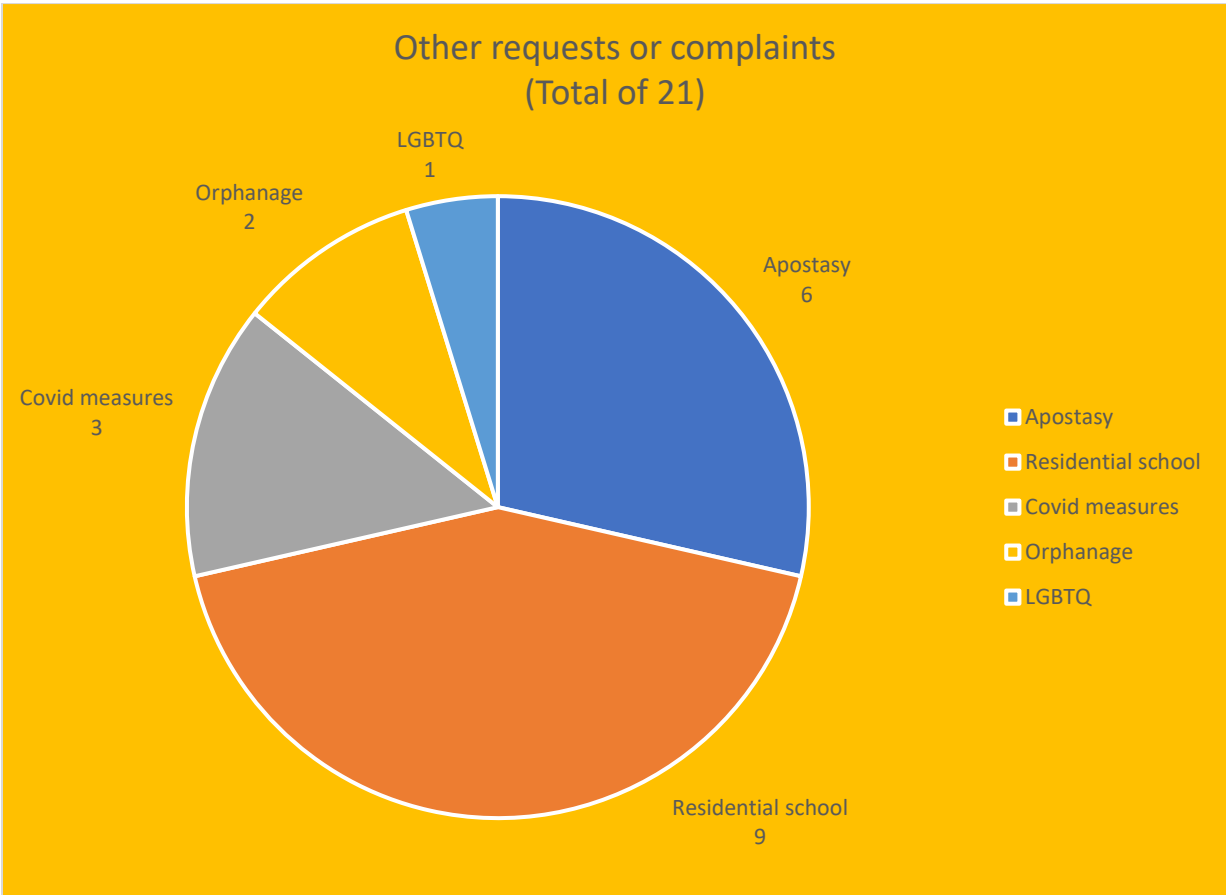
I have received emails and calls (nine in total) denouncing the atrocities suffered by indigenous peoples. To all of them, I said that I not only understood their feeling but that I shared it. I therefore add my voice to theirs in indicating to all members of indigenous communities that I support them in their quest for truth.

Most of these emails requested a public apology from the Catholic Church, notably from each of the Bishops in Quebec personally, but especially from the Pope.

Apostasy requests:

These letters or calls sometimes also included requests for information on the process to apostatize. Others contacted me to do so without reference to residential schools. All of these people (a total of six) have received the requested information to help them in their endeavour.

In summary, the other requests or complaints are subdivided as follows:



Conclusion :

Three months is a short time to set up the new complaints process and implement the protocols. The various intervenors are still in the initial phase of learning and finding ways that information can flow easily and quickly. I think and hope that by the end of September the process should work without technological or timing hiccups.

I hope this report will encourage other victims to come forward so we may stop all forms of abuse once and for all.

Me Marie Christine Kirouack, *Ad.E.*

Ombudsman for the Archdiocese of Montreal