



Archevêque de Montréal

September 19, 2018

In an open letter published in two dailies, La Presse and The Gazette, Archbishop Christian Lépine calls on the Church to stand firm in its struggle against sexual abuse.

No one can remain indifferent to the turmoil experienced by the victims of sexual abuse at the hands of some members of the Catholic clergy during past decades. On this continent and elsewhere, reports related to abuse and cover-ups have multiplied, hurting us all, irrespective of our faith or our belief.

As archbishop, the impact of these scandals weighs heavily upon me all the more because this abuse was committed mainly by men in positions of moral authority who pledged to live according to the high standards set out in the Gospel. Such a situation arising within the Church understandably undermines the faith of sincere believers and erodes public trust in this institution.

In expressing his shame and pain recently, Pope Francis is showing us the way forward. The Holy Father states that “looking back to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient”. He, therefore, is calling upon the bishops, the priests and all Catholics to make every effort to ensure not only that such incidents never happen again but also that they are never concealed, by anyone.

SEEK THE TRUTH

Acknowledging that sexual assault is both a grave moral aberration and a crime, we must take decisive action to ensure that sexual aggressors do not use the Church as a refuge where they can operate secretly, thinking they are sheltered from both civil and Church justice.

We must, therefore, put words into action, beginning by accompanying victims, with the utmost care, assisting them both in their personal journey and in approaching law enforcement authorities. But in addition to the pursuit of justice, we must unequivocally send out a clear message that we will never accept that such crimes could be committed and remain concealed.

It is deeply sad to note that, for far too long, the Church hierarchy had failed to prevent sexual abuse and to address and rectify the known abuses quickly and effectively. That is why, more than two decades ago, the Catholic Church of Canada voted to condemn such reprehensible acts and to take concrete action. National guidelines for the protection of minors were put in place across the country. “This fall, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops will launch updated and expanded guidelines promoting the safeguarding of minors and increasing accountability and transparency within Church leadership”.

PREVENTION FIRST

Throughout Canada, bishops are earnestly dealing with the issue. In Montreal, we had already established a Department for Responsible Pastoral Ministry to ensure a safe, responsible and healthy environment within the Archdiocese. This has led us to adopt a strict policy regarding abusive behaviour, whether physical, psychological or sexual.

Under my leadership, the Archdiocese of Montreal is determined to get to the bottom of things in the search for truth, and we renew our commitment to ensure that each and every person who calls upon us is received with compassion and respect, and guided, accordingly, to the appropriate authorities. We wish to contribute humbly to the process of justice and healing.

In this respect, we will abide by the words of Jesus: “For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Matthew 7:8)

The Archbishop,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

† Christian Lépine