

Inquiry into alleged historical child sex abuse in Cornwall, Ont., begins

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TORONTO (CP) - A long-awaited public inquiry that will examine how the justice system responded to allegations that doctors, lawyers and priests sexually abused children in an eastern Ontario city over the course of a half-century begins Monday.

The independent commission will probe the actions of Cornwall police, the Ontario Provincial Police, the Ontario government and the Children's Aid Society among others during and after the alleged abuse, but won't draw any conclusions about criminal liability.

The scope of the inquiry is vast. A team of lawyers has already begun the process of sifting through more than 150,000 pages of documents. Experts on sexual abuse, child welfare response and police protocol will testify over the first few weeks of the inquiry, tentatively scheduled to span a year, to set a framework for the issues at stake.

It's hoped the inquiry will eventually lift the cloud of scandal that has for years plagued Cornwall, a blue-collar city, about a 90-minute drive southeast of Ottawa.

Lead commission counsel Peter Engelmann hopes it will also allow for the "healing and closure" of the alleged victims, the alleged perpetrators and the community at large.

"There has been at least a feeling in this community, and I'm sure in other communities, that the issue hasn't been fully and promptly addressed," Engelmann said.

Sordid tales have spread of a purported underground clan of pedophiles that existed since the late 1950s and allegedly involved prominent members of the region's Roman Catholic clergy.

Police laid 114 charges against 15 high-profile men in the 1990s under an investigation dubbed Project Truth, including a doctor, a

lawyer, a bus driver, an organist and three Roman Catholic priests. But only one person, unconnected to the alleged sex ring, was ultimately convicted of sex offences.

Two other accused committed suicide and the last case was thrown out after a judge ruled it took too long to go to trial.

In concluding their investigation, officers said they found no evidence that a pedophile ring operated in the city of 50,000.

The shocking accusations of abuse and a subsequent police coverup began in 1992, after a 35-year-old former altar boy came forward saying he had been sexually abused by two priests in the late 1960s.

The Alexandria-Cornwall Roman Catholic Diocese agreed to pay him \$32,000 in exchange for a vow of silence. The man then refused to co-operate with police and the investigation was dropped.

But Cornwall police Const. Perry Dunlop later leaked the information to the Children Aid's Society, which made it public and led more victims to come forward.

Dunlop, who resigned from the force in June 2000, was charged with illegally leaking a police document but later exonerated.

In the months following his resignation, Dunlop said he felt "abandoned" by his colleagues.

Some in the community have already lost their confidence in the inquiry.

In June, a lawyer for alleged abuse victims Ron and George Glaude said they were distant cousins of Justice Normand Glaude, who has been appointed to lead the inquiry.

Ontario Attorney General Michael Bryant said Glaude, a Sudbury, Ont., resident, is not in a conflict of interest since he has no direct ties to Cornwall or to Project Truth.