

Fall 2020

Bishop Ronald Fabbro
Bishop of London, Ontario
1070 Waterloo St.
London ON N6A 3Y2

Dear Bishop Fabbro,

It has come to my attention that the Diocese of London, is filing for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada in the case of the clergy sexual abuse of Irene Deschenes by Fr. Sylvestre. I am writing to ask you, as the Bishop of London, to drop the appeal and expedite a just mediated settlement with Ms. Deschenes.

Your recent written statement regarding this case claims that “The Diocese believes there are important legal issues that need to be considered by the Supreme Court.” (CBC News, London, August 21, 2020). This indicates that your concern about “legal issues” has become more important than your concern for clergy sexual abuse survivors. Yet, your own diocesan “Safe Environment Policy” states: “Sexual misconduct is always a tragedy and calls for the Diocese to respond with justice and compassion toward all those persons involved. Our primary concern must be for the victim” (1 Preamble, October 2016). It is more than legally sufficient that two lower court judges have ruled that the Diocese of London “misrepresented” itself in the initial settlement with Irene Deschenes, by not revealing that it had knowledge of Fr. Sylvestre’s abuse of girls in 1962 (almost a decade before Irene Deschenes was abused). In the light of this revelation, the Diocese is both legally and morally obligated to mediate a just new settlement with Ms. Deschenes.

To file for leave to appeal this case to the highest court in Canada extends what has already been a decades-long ordeal for Ms. Deschenes. It certainly leaves the impression that the Diocese is willfully prolonging settlement to the furthest extent possible. To do so is an abuse of ecclesial power and a dereliction of moral duty. It also contradicts Roman Catholic Church law which states: “All the Christian faithful, and especially bishops, are to strive diligently to avoid litigation among the people of God as much as possible, without prejudice to justice, and to resolve litigation peacefully as soon as possible” (Canon 1446).

While the Diocese has a legal right to appeal, I call on your moral responsibility as a Catholic bishop to expedite a mediated settlement and allow Irene Deschenes to move toward healing. I respectfully urge you to hear the call of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke “to let the oppressed go free.” (Luke 4:18).

Sincerely,