

Chronology of Events

Leading to Court Action to Re-open the Settlement Between Irene Deschenes and the Diocese of London,

*Prepared and updated by Chatham-Kent Sexual Assault Crisis Centre – first released by ACTS-Canada in August, 2020
In Hope of Justice for Irene and All Victims of Child Sexual Abuse by Clergy*

- 1971 - 1973:** Irene Deschenes experienced Child Sexual Abuse by Roman Catholic Diocesan Priest, 'Father' Charles Sylvestre, from the age of 10 to 12 at St. Ursula School in Chatham Ontario.
- September 1992:** Irene reported her experience of Child Sexual Abuse by her Parish Priest, Charles Sylvestre, to the Diocese of London.
- 1996 - 2000:** Irene filed a lawsuit on the basis that the Diocese of London failed to protect her from sexual abuse by 'Father' Sylvestre. The Diocese of London advised Irene that it had no knowledge or information that 'Father' Charles Sylvestre had molested/committed Child Sexual Abuse prior to the time she experienced such abuse by Sylvestre. Based on that assurance, Irene accepted an out-of-court financial settlement with the Diocese of London. As part of the settlement Irene was bound by an order of non-disclosure.
- April 27, 2002:** Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B. was named as the 10th Bishop of London and continues to serve the Diocese in that capacity. Bishop John Sherlock filled that position from 1978 to 2002, following Bishop Gerald Emmett Carter from 1964 to 1978 and Bishop John Cody from 1950 to 1963.
- 2004:** Suffering under the silence that Irene was legally obliged to maintain as a condition of the settlement, she applied to the Diocese of London to have the non-disclosure order lifted. Bishop Ronald Fabbro released Irene from the non-disclosure order that had forced her silence.
- 2004:** Irene reported her experience of historical Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic priest, Charles Sylvestre, to Chatham-Kent Police Service. Similar reports by dozens of other women followed.
- October 6, 2006:** Catholic Priest, Charles Sylvestre, was convicted of the historical Child Sexual Abuse of dozens of girls, now women, over a period of 36 years.
- December 21, 2006:** A news report by Jane Sims - London Free Press, revealed that the Diocese of London was "in possession of three police reports from 1962 detailing the sexual abuse of three victims by disgraced priest Charles Sylvestre." Apparently the reports had been provided to the Church by Sarnia Police and were "found tucked away in the back of a filing cabinet..." by Bishop Fabbro's Executive Assistant. According to the news report, the statements of the three victims had been forwarded to the Bishop of the Diocese in 1962.
- 2008:** Knowledge that the Diocese of London did in fact have information regarding sexual abuse against girls by 'Father' Charles Sylvestre in 1962, contradicted the information that Irene relied upon during previous settlement negotiations. Irene filed an application with the court to re-open the settlement of the civil claim she and the Diocese of London had previously reached.
- November 27, 2018:** In a decision by Superior Court Justice David Aston, Irene won her application to re-open the 2000 out-of-court settlement with the Diocese of London. Justice Aston acknowledged that Irene "would not have settled as she did in the fall of 2000 if they had known about the 1962 police reports".

- December 6, 2018:** Irene, with her lawyer, Loretta Merritt, held a news conference where they announced the court's decision.
- December 7, 2018:** The Diocese of London announced, through the media, their intention to file an appeal of Justice Aston's decision to set aside the settlement reached in 2000.
- December 12, 2018:** Community organizations and individuals advocating *Justice for Irene*, met at the Chancery Office in London Ontario where they delivered a letter for Bishop Ronald Fabbro urging the Diocese of London NOT to appeal Justice Aston's decision of November 27th. Father John Comiskey accepted the letter on the Bishop's behalf. Father Comiskey reminded those in attendance that, as part of the legal process, the Diocese of London had every right to appeal Justice Aston's decision. The group acknowledged their legal right to appeal the ruling and pressed for decision-makers within the Diocese to check their moral compass and do the right thing in delivering *Justice for Irene*.
- November 19, 2019:** The Ontario Court of Appeal heard arguments made on behalf of the Diocese as well as Irene.
- May 2020:** The Ontario Court of Appeal delivered its ruling. The Diocese of London lost its' appeal and Justice David Aston's decision to set aside the 2000 settlement was upheld.
- August 2020** The Diocese of London filed an appeal with the Supreme Court of Canada to overturn the May 2020 ruling by the Ontario Court of Appeal allowing the settlement reached between Irene Deschenes and the Diocese of London in 2000 to be set aside.
- August 20, 2020:** Irene Deschenes, supported by ACTS-Canada and others, held a media conference urging the Diocese of London to withdraw their appeal.
- August 21, 2020:** The Diocese of London released the following statement:
"The Diocese of London continues to offer our prayers and support to victims of clerical abuse. In all cases we believe we have treated victims with the empathy and respect needed to help them receive justice and begin the healing process. Being fair and just means that settlements are reached based on the specific circumstances of each individual case, including that of Irene Deschenes. The Diocese believes there are important legal issues that need to be considered by the Supreme Court. The Diocese is very much aware of its responsibility to be a good steward of the resources entrusted to it. Because this matter is before the courts, no further comment is possible at this time."
- September 15, 2020** In the Catholic Church September 15th is recognized as the *Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows*. The Diocese of London previously held Mass on this day with prayer dedicated to Victims of sexual abuse. In a show of solidarity and quest to find *Justice for Irene*, she and supporters held a day-long "lone" vigil in front of St. Peter's Basilica in London, Ontario. From early morning into the evening supporters took shifts to stand, symbolically a solitary figure at a time, for change, truth and justice.