
FAQ

What is the Safeguarding Commission?

The Oblate Safeguarding Commission is an independent review of historical allegations of sexual abuse relating to Joannès Rivoire in present-day Nunavut, including the circumstances under which he left Canada. It aimed to better understand how past allegations of abuse were addressed within our congregation and identify any improvements to Oblate policies and governance in order to better safeguard minors and ensure a high-level of accountability.

The commission was led by the Honourable André Denis who issued a final written report in English, French and Inuktitut on March 15, 2024.

Who is Justice Denis?

Justice Denis is a retired judge of the Superior Court of Quebec who has had a distinguished career in the judiciary, including as the first judge in Canada to preside over a trial involving the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act. In December 2020, he was hired by the Archdiocese of Montreal to work on two mandates regarding allegations of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable people.

Denis reviewed almost 10,000 files dating from 1940 to 2021 and compiled a report covering the nine dioceses of the Ecclesiastical Province of Montreal and the Ecclesiastical Province of Gatineau. The report that he oversaw uncovered 87 employees who were the subjects of confirmed or well-founded sex abuse allegations involving minors or vulnerable adults, providing the Archdiocese with information that helped it understand the scope of the problem before taking concrete steps in pursuit of truth, transparency, and transformation.

How have the Oblates responded to the allegations against Joannès Rivoire?

Joannès Rivoire has been accused, and formally charged, for sexually abusing Inuit children in the 1960s and 1970s while working in Nunavut, Canada. These long-standing allegations have caused great suffering, anger and intergenerational wounds in the people the Oblates have served for 150 years.

As Oblates, we are fully committed to contributing to healing these wounds, and to the larger journey of healing and reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous Peoples. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Canada have urged Rivoire to make himself available to the justice system, and to engage in this process for truth, transparency, and eventual reconciliation. We have also proactively supported Canada's extradition request and proactively reached out to the Ministry of Justice, offering to cooperate with any investigation.

The Oblates have been working directly with survivors to provide support to the Inuit community. This commission followed a commitment to independently review the congregation's response to sexual abuse allegations against Joannès Rivoire, including the circumstances under which he left Canada.

What did the Commission's work entail?

Justice Denis was mandated to hear from victims and their families and identify any improvements to Oblate policies and processes that can better safeguard children and ensure a high-level of accountability.

We recognize that this subject matter is inherently difficult for many survivors or intergenerational survivors to engage in. Justice Denis was expected to take reasonable steps to accommodate them at times and formats that meet their respective needs.

All relevant personnel records and other archival material from the Oblate provinces of Lacombe and France were made available to Justice Denis, and a final written report was issued on March 15, 2024.

What did the Commission find?

The report found that the allegations made against Joannès Rivoire were well founded. It also stated that the Oblates in Canada and the ecclesiastical authorities in Nunavut neither concealed nor organized Joannès Rivoire's flight from Canada to France in 1993 and that the Oblates did "everything in their power to ensure that he returned to Canada to stand trial or be extradited." Justice Denis referred to our policy "Exercising Responsibility in Our Ministry: Safeguarding Minors & Vulnerable Persons," that sets processes and best practices to preserve the safety of minors and vulnerable persons, as comprehensive, covering everything from prevention to denunciation to intervention by authorities.

We accept the report's conclusions with a heavy heart. We wish to apologize unequivocally to anyone who was harmed by an Oblate priest and to continue taking concrete steps towards transparency and transformation, informed by guidance from victims, survivors and Inuit representatives.

What do the Oblates intend to do with the Commission's findings?

The Oblates hope this commission contributes to the process of healing for the survivors and intergenerational survivors of clergy abuse. We sincerely thank those who had the courage to come forward, the Inuit community for their guidance, and all who have participated in this process.

Moving forward, we will continue to cooperate fully with legal authorities and the community and are determined to ensure our governance and policies reflect the highest standards of safeguarding and ethical accountability.

Why was the Commission focused on allegations against Joannès Rivoire?

This commission met a previous commitment to independently review the congregation's response to sexual abuse allegations against Joannès Rivoire, including the circumstances under which he left Canada. The Oblates recognize the tragic legacy of clergy abuse and are sincerely committed to support the Inuit Peoples who advocate for truth, justice, healing, and reconciliation.