

Anglican Church will issue apology to victims of former minister

Pedophile Ralph Rowe is estimated to have sexually abused hundreds of indigenous boys.



Former Anglican minister Ralph Rowe was convicted of sexually abusing boys in northern Ontario during the 1970s and 80s. The Anglican Church has, until now, never issued a formal apology. (THE SURREY-NORTH DELTA LEADER)

By [TANYA TALAGA](#) Staff Reporter

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The Anglican Church of Canada [announced Friday](#) that it will make a formal, national apology to all the victims of notorious pedophile Ralph Rowe.

It is estimated the former Anglican minister Ralph Rowe abused hundreds of victims. The Anglican Church has never issued a formal apology. One of the communities Rowe targeted was Wapekeka First Nation.

Wapekeka is struggling after two [12-year-old girls died by suicide](#) earlier this month. The community has tried to manage youth mental health issues and suicide epidemics for decades.

“Yesterday, Jan. 19, the Grand Chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), Alvin Fiddler, noted that the Anglican Church of Canada shares responsibility for the crisis in the communities he serves and especially for the tragic number

of young people who have died by suicide,” said Michael Thompson, the church’s general secretary, in a statement.

Rowe, a clergyman who used to pilot a small plane into remote northern First Nations communities in the 1970s and ’80s, targeted young boys aged 8 to 14. Many indigenous parents trusted Rowe because of his position in the church and let their children travel on camping excursions with him. Rowe was also a Boy Scout leader.

It is nearly impossible to quantify the scope and scale of the damage Rowe caused during the time he travelled through NAN communities, Fiddler said.

“What people need to know is the church enabled him to do this. They gave him a role as a priest and they gave him a plane for him to be able to fly around to our communities. We now know through our counselling agencies in the north and through the court systems — the estimates are during the 22-year period he was up here that he sexually assaulted and abused over 500 young boys during that time,” said Fiddler.

“Similar to the residential school experience, now we are seeing the intergenerational impact of these victims,” he said.

In the statement, the church acknowledged their past actions helped create a “legacy of brokenness” in some First Nations communities, but they are willing and want to renew a dialogue with indigenous people that will help them “understand more deeply and act more effectively on our responsibilities,” the statement read.

Thompson was travelling on Friday and could not be reached for comment.

“We know that Grand Chief Fiddler’s call to our church and to our government to live more fully into our obligations comes from a heart that is broken by the tragic deaths of children. Whatever our words, we will only have honoured that grief when we act and we look to him and to others to help us direct our actions in ways that will help end the crisis in the communities he serves,” the statement said.

“Ralph Rowe’s abuse was massive in its scope and horrendous in its impact, and we owe a debt of gratitude to those who with great courage have borne witness to that abuse, and continue to help us understand our moral obligation as the Anglican Church of Canada to support initiatives that address its continuing consequences,” the statement said.

Most of the communities Rowe frequented are in NAN, a political organization of 49 First Nations in northern Ontario that occupy a territory roughly the size of France. Many men have struggled to get on with their lives in the wake of the abuse and Fiddler notes many others have not been able to cope and have taken their own lives.

Wapekeka First Nation, 600 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, was one of Rowe's communities. It has also struggled with sexual abuse issues for decades, said Fiddler.

Earlier this month, two 12-year-old girls, Jolynn Winter and Chantell Fox, took their lives while four other girls had to be flown out of the remote community for fear they would also take their lives. Another 26 students are being monitored and are considered at "high risk" for suicide.

The girls' deaths have revived the urgency of the need for a national suicide strategy to be put in place to help indigenous youth. On Thursday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau held a closed-door meeting with Fiddler, Wapekeka member Joshua Frogg and Mushkegowuk Council Grand Chief Jonathan Solomon. The Mushkegowuk territory of the James Bay coast has acutely felt the suicide epidemic in its communities.

The church did engage in mediation with one of Rowe's communities, Wunnumin Lake First Nation, in 1996. And the Anglican Church of Canada's Healing Fund has supported healing initiatives in other First Nations in the Sioux Lookout area, such as Kingfisher Lake and Sachigo Lake.

Fiddler has sought an apology from the church for years.

"After reaching them a number of times, I appreciate their effort reaching out to us to work with our communities and to do a formal apology for all the victims; and for them to acknowledge their role in all of this is encouraging," he said.

In 1994, Rowe was convicted of 39 counts of indecent assault on 15 boys aged 8 to 14. He was sentenced to six years in prison, but only served only four and a half years. Part of his plea deal meant he was protected from facing more charges of a similar nature.

Many other men have come forward, but have not been able to press charges.