

Archbishop Alphonsus Penney

1924 - 2017

Archbishop Alphonsus Penney was head of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. John's in Newfoundland for several decades. He was also responsible for launching a national inquiry into sexual abuse within the Church.

He was born in St. John's in 1924. In 1949, he was ordained a Catholic priest in the Archdiocese of Saint John's. Appointed as Bishop of Grand Falls, Newfoundland by Pope Paul VI in 1972, a year later, he received episcopal ordination by the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to Canada. In 1979, Pope John Paul II appointed him Archbishop of Saint John's.

While in the 1970s he protected some priests from accusations of child abuse, in 1989 he established the Archdiocesan Commission of Enquiry into the Sexual Abuse of Children by Members of the Clergy. The Commission submitted a 39-page report, which led to another committee writing a 700-page report. Following these publications, several priests were convicted of sexual abuse. The latter report also contained 55 recommendations submitted to Newfoundland's Roman Catholic Church, many of which were adopted. This marked the end of the Church and the Government denying claims made by the victims.

In 1990, Penney resigned from his post as Archbishop after finding out the magnitude of the abuse within Newfoundland's Roman Catholic Church. In his exit interview, he admitted to the CBC of a failure to the very people he was supposed to nurture and protect. He made a public apology to the victims and their families. He told the press, "I recognize the deficiencies in my handling of this matter. My leadership and administration have not been perfect". Although the press demonized Penney for being the head of Newfoundland's Roman Catholic Church during the sex scandal, it is undeniable that his calling of



the Commission of enquiry had a ripple effect of healing for his entire community.

Penney gave life to a national movement and worked to end a terrible scourge within his Church. He died in December 2017 at the age of 93.