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Vatican investigating bishop guilty of having child porn

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VATICAN CITY -- The Vatican will continue its process against a Canadian bishop who pleaded guilty in a civil court to possession of child pornography, the Vatican spokesman said.

Bishop Raymond Lahey of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, pleaded May 4 to the charge of possession "for the purposes of importation child pornography in the form of graphic computer images." However, he told the judge he was not guilty of possession with the intent to distribute.

His plea was in response to his arrest at the Ottawa, Ontario, airport Sept. 15, 2009. Court documents had stated that the bishop's evasive behavior, coupled with a passport stamped with exotic locations known for child pornography, prompted a Canadian Border Services agent to examine the contents of his laptop.

Jesuit Father Frederico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, issued a statement May 4 saying, "The Catholic Church condemns sexual exploitation in all its forms, especially when perpetrated against minors."

"Although the civil process has run its course, the Holy See will continue to follow the canonical procedures in effect for such cases, which will result in the imposition of the appropriate disciplinary or penal measures," Father Lombardi said.

In May 2010, the Vatican revised its procedures for handling priestly sex abuse cases, streamlining disciplinary measures, extending the statute of limitations and defining child pornography as an act of sexual abuse of a minor.

Under the Vatican norms, offenders can be dismissed from the priesthood if found guilty of "the acquisition, possession, or distribution ... of pornographic images of minors under the age of 14, for purposes of sexual gratification, by whatever means or using whatever technology."

Bishop Lahey resigned his post after his arrest and has been living at a priests' residence in Ottawa.

At his court hearing, Bishop Lahey waived bail and was taken into custody. Media reported his lawyer said the bishop wanted to begin serving his time, even though his sentencing hearing had not been set.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement after the hearing condemning "all forms of sexual exploitation, especially involving minors." It said the conference would "continue to work to prevent such behavior and to bring healing to the victims and their families."

"Recognizing the confusion and anger that this case has engendered among many of the faithful, we underscore our pastoral concern for those who have experienced great pain as a result of these events," the bishops said. "In a special way, our thoughts and prayers are with the people of the Diocese of Antigonish and all the Atlantic region."

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