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Montreal deacon who was bishops' spokesman faces child porn charges

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William Kokesch, a Montreal permanent deacon who served almost 10 years as a communications director for Canada's Catholic bishops, has been charged with producing and distributing child pornography.

On Thursday, Kokesch, 65, was released on bail after posting a $10,000 cash bond. The judge ordered him not to use computers or be around anyone under 18 without adult supervision.

The married father of five grown children is scheduled to appear in court Feb. 27. Information revealed during a bail hearing was placed under a publication ban at the request of Kokesch's lawyer.

Constable Danny Richer, Montreal Police Service spokesman, said several people have contacted the police with information concerning the case since news broke of Kokesch's arrest Dec. 21. Investigators have met with those people and "are trying to analyze the new information," he said.

On Dec. 21, after police received a complaint from the public, they searched Kokesch's church office at St. Edmund of Canterbury Parish in Beaconsfield and his home in Pointe-Claire, Richer said. They discovered more than 2,000 child porn images on a computer and other information devices they seized in the search, Richer said.

Kokesch, who was ordained to the diaconate in 1981, spent the Christmas holidays behind bars.

The Montreal Archdiocese removed Kokesch from "all ministry and pastoral activity" upon learning of his arrest, according to a Dec. 22 statement.

"We wish to assure all those concerned by this event that we are keeping them in our prayers, and we urge everyone to have confidence in and respect for the judicial process and to await its conclusions," said the archdiocesan statement.

Kokesch had extensive media experience, starting from his work as a reporter for the Montreal Gazette in the 1970s, then as a radio reporter. From 1995 to 2005, he worked as English sector communications director for the CCCB, fielding many of the questions about the sexual abuse crisis in the early 2000s.

Kokesch lost his job at the CCCB in early 2005 during a major restructuring of the Ottawa secretariat.

In recent years, he operated an independent communications company serving primarily charities and churches.

Reporters descended on St. Edmund's Parish the weekend of the arrest, but few parishioners would consent to being interviewed and then only without releasing their names. Most expressed disbelief and shock; others said they were certain he did not abuse children from the church.

Eric Durocher, Montreal archdiocesan spokesman, told the QMI news agency that Kokesch coordinated the church's altar service and worked closely with the parish priest. Durocher said "as far as we know (Kokesch) was never alone with children; there was always another adult present."

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