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Canadian Orthodox bishop on leave for 'misconduct'

Ron Csillag Religion News Service | Oct. 6, 2010

TORONTO -- One of Canada's top Eastern Orthodox hierarchs has resigned his duties and been granted a leave of absence following allegations by police of ?misconduct? going back decades.

Archbishop Seraphim of Ottawa, who has jurisdiction over all of Canada for the New York-based Orthodox Church in America, requested and was granted a leave of absence.

Archpriest Eric Tosi, secretary of the OCA, said he ?cannot make any comments? on the matter ?at this time because it's an open investigation. We are cooperating fully with the (Canadian) authorities.?

On its website, the OCA said its bishops, meeting last month in Oyster Bay, N.Y., ?heard an official report that police in Canada have received a complaint alleging misconduct committed by? Seraphim ?some 30 years ago.?

?An investigation is now in progress,? the OCA statement said, and Bishop Irenee of Quebec City will serve as temporary administrator in Canada.

The OCA is the second-largest Orthodox church in the U.S., with nearly 85,000 U.S. members, according to recent data. Data from 2004 reported 10,000 members in Canada.

The head of the OCA, Metropolitan Jonah, has directed the church's Office for Review of Sexual Misconduct Allegations to work with Canadian authorities ?in order to obtain the necessary information needed to bring about a proper resolution,? the statement said.

A statement by Seraphim, published on the websites of both Orthodox Christians for Accountability and Pokrov.org, ?a resource for survivors of abuse in the Orthodox Church,? said Seraphim requested permission from church superiors on Sept. 19 ?to resign from all the duties I held with the Holy Synod.?

Orthodox Christians for Accountability said on its website that police in Winnipeg, Manitoba, ?have contacted potential witnesses in both Canada and the United States.? The allegations stem from the time Seraphim served as a parish priest in Canada.

A police spokeswoman in Winnipeg told Religion News Service that she had ?nothing to say? about the case.

The Orthodox branch of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests blasted the church for ?secrecy? and ?delays? in its handling of the matter.

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