

Top Anglican calls for lifting seal of confessional in child abuse cases

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October 23, 2014



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CANTERBURY, England (RNS) Anglican priests should no longer be bound by the centuries-old principle of confidentiality in confessions when they are told of sexual crimes committed against children, the Church of England's No. 2 official said.

Speaking at the end of an internal inquiry on whether senior church officials ignored abuse allegations involving children, Archbishop of York John Sentamu said that "what happened was shameful, terrible."

He said that the Church of England must break the confidentiality of confession in cases where people disclosed the abuse of children.

“If someone tells you a child has been abused, the confession doesn’t seem to me a cloak for hiding that business,” he said. “How can you hear a confession about somebody abusing a child and the matter must be sealed up and you mustn’t talk about it?”

Sentamu commissioned the inquiry after an investigation by *The Times* newspaper exposed an Anglican priest, Robert Waddington, as a serial sexual abuser of children in England and Australia for more than 50 years.

Waddington, who died in 2007, was head of education for the Church of England, a dean of Manchester Cathedral in the English Midlands and governor of a music school where he was alleged to be responsible for mass abuse against children.

In July, Anglicans in Australia backed a historic change that breaks the convention that the confidentiality of what a man or woman tells a priest during confession is inviolable.

While more common among Roman Catholics, some traditionalist Anglicans also practice confession, referred to as the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Existing church law demands that the confession of a crime is to be kept confidential unless the person making the confession consents to the priest disclosing it. The Roman Catholic Church insists that the seal of confession is inviolable—even when it involves a person confessing to sexual crimes committed against children.