

Canadian churches accept ruling on Indian sex-abuse claims: Churches will pay 25 percent of compensation to victims

by [Religion News Service staff](#) in the [November 15, 2005](#) issue

Canada's two largest Protestant denominations say they are satisfied with a decision by the country's Supreme Court that stipulates how religious groups and the federal government should divide the cost of compensating tens of thousands of native Canadian sex-abuse victims.

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled October 21 that the federal portion of responsibility for abuse that took place at schools for Indians should be 75 percent, while the church should pay 25 percent. The schools were jointly run by churches and the government.

The high court disagreed with the British Columbia Court of Appeal, which ruled more than a year ago that the federal government alone was liable for compensating abused students embroiled in a nationally watched test case centered on a Vancouver Island native residential school, which was run by the United Church of Canada.

"People think we should be upset. But we're satisfied," said Brian Thorpe, the United Church of Canada's spokesman on residential schools. He said the ruling "clarifies the issue of liability" for the church.

Canada's United and Anglican denominations, which together have about 1.3 million members, have already worked out arrangements with the federal government to pursue more than 600 out-of-court settlements of lawsuits brought by natives. The denominations expect to complete more settlements in the next few months.

Both denominations have been following a formula in which the church pays 30 percent and the federal government 70 percent for damages inflicted at the now-defunct residential schools, which were attended by more than 125,000 Indians.

“This decision confirms the government had the greatest responsibility for the schools, and the churches also face some responsibilities. This ruling will help move settlements along even more swiftly, and that’s good for the complainants,” Eleanor Johnson, acting general secretary of the Anglican Church of Canada, said in an interview from Ontario.

More than 15,000 people have launched lawsuits over their treatment at about 85 of Canada’s federally regulated residential schools. Most of the lawsuits focus on sex-abuse complaints. *-Religion News Service*