

British sex abuse inquiry to focus on churches, politicians

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CANTERBURY, England (RNS) The British government is launching an independent five-year inquiry under the leadership of a prominent New Zealand-born jurist to examine whether private and public institutions, including churches, failed to protect children from sex abuse.

At a news conference in London on Friday (November 27), Justice Lowell Goddard, who will head the inquiry, said the investigation would focus on high-profile allegations of child abuse involving current or former members of Parliament, senior civil servants, and government advisers.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby asked Goddard to investigate the Church of England first, saying that he would order his own inquiry if there was a lengthy delay, the Anglican Communion News Service reported.

Goddard said the inquiry would consider the case of Peter Ball, the former bishop of Lewes, who was jailed in October for the sexual abuse of young men between 1977 and 1992.

At Ball's trial, the court was told that a member of the royal family backed him while the bishop tried to avoid sex abuse charges in 1993. Goddard said she would look into whether prominent people interfered in the criminal justice process.

Although Prince Charles was not named in court, a spokesperson for the Prince Wales said he made no intervention in the judicial process on behalf of Ball.

The inquiry will consist of 12 different investigations and is expected to cost nearly \$27 million. It will also investigate the Roman Catholic Church in England.

The Children's Commissioner for England suggested as many as 450,000 children were sexually abused between 2012 and 2014 but only one in eight were identified.