

Charts abuse of clergy

The United Church is ignoring the pain of some of its clergy and driving others right out of the denomination, the Rev. Casey McKibbon of Metcalfe, Ont., has charged.

He is co-ordinator of Clergy Abuse, a loose network of ordained and lay people which, he said, is attempting both to document the mistreatment of clergy by church courts and to support those who have been hurt. "We have people all across the church who are afraid to talk about what has happened to them," he said.

McKibbon is working on the study alone, but said there are already support groups in four Conferences — Manitou, Alberta, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, and Montreal-Ottawa.

A high percentage of clergy in conflict with their congregations are from the conservative, evangelical wing of the church, McKibbon said. "There's a real trend for these United Church pastors, when they're bounced or put on the discontinued service list, to go out and set up their own shop down the street. And well-meaning church officials are encour-

aging them to get out."

The Rev. Robert Shorten, associate secretary for personnel services at the national level, disagreed: "I don't think there are many who have gone on to establish independent churches, and I don't think conflict centres on people of a conservative orientation."

He said McKibbon's study will be useful to the church if it stimulates interest in the issue. "There are powerful people and groups in some congregations who make life miserable for clergy," he pointed out.

But he cautioned that Clergy Abuse has the potential to cause polarization. "If it gets ministers to band together and 'fight for their rights,' then we're likely to see a Congregation Abuse group start up too," he said.

"There are some ministers who leave a string of pastorates in turmoil behind them," he noted. "If we have erred at all in the past, we've erred on the side of being too tolerant of them. I'd like to see the church get into a dialogue as to what the expected standards of ministry should be." 