

# Archdiocese to settle molestation lawsuits

## Church in Boston agrees to pay up to \$30 million

By JENNIFER PETER  
Associated Press

BOSTON — In one of the biggest such settlements on record, the Archdiocese of Boston has agreed to pay up to \$30 million to 86 people who accused now-defrocked priest John J. Geoghan of child molestation.

"Accepting this money is not going to end the turmoil in their lives," said plaintiffs' attorney Mitchell Garabedian, who announced the settlement at a press conference yesterday. "They are not going to be buying yachts and floating around the Bahamas. There's tremendous pain here."

Under the settlement, which was reached Monday night after months of negotiations, the victims and families will receive a total of \$15 million to \$30 million, according to Garabedian.



Defrocked priest John Geoghan is in prison for molestation.

"This settlement is an important step in reaching closure for these victims who have long endured the damage done to them by John Geoghan," Cardinal Bernard Law said in a statement. "They are courageous individ-

uals who deserve and need our full support and prayers."

The archdiocese already has paid an estimated \$15 million to 40 of Geoghan's victims since the mid-1990s, making this one of the costliest sex scandals the nation's Roman Catholic Church has ever seen.

It was already the biggest scandal to rock the church in terms of the wave of allegations it has set off against priests across the country.

The plaintiffs include 70 victims and 16 parents. The exact amounts that most of the 86 will receive will be determined over the next several months by arbitrators, based on the harm each person suffered.

"I can't feel proud about sitting here," said John Greene, a 42-year-old victim who appeared at a press conference with Garabedian. "I'm embarrassed. This is something I've been living with all my life and I'm embarrassed."

The settlement brings an end to only one batch of cases in an increasing barrage of lawsuits against the church.

At least 58 additional lawsuits have been filed against church workers or clergy, and more than a hundred people have contacted lawyers with claims of abuse by priests, according to several attorneys. The settlement, however, may set a framework for handling those claims.

Unlike many other settlements reached by the church in child-molestation cases, this one is not covered by a confidentiality clause.

The archdiocese reiterated that it would not use church collection money to cover the settlement. Chief financial officer Chancellor David Smith said the money will come from insurance, the sale of assets and private donations.

Geoghan has been accused by more than 130 people of molesting them during his decades as a priest. He is serving a 9- to 10-year prison sentence for groping a 10-year-old boy and faces another criminal trial in a case involving a youngster.

The archdiocese came under increased pressure in January after it was reported that it had ignored warnings about Geoghan's pedophilia and had moved him from parish to parish over three decades. Law has since established a "zero tolerance" policy and given prosecutors the names of 80 priests accused of abuse over five decades, and suspended 11 active priests.

David Clohessy, director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, said a debt is owed to the plaintiffs in the latest settlement.

"Because of their courage, many children are now safe from a dangerous pedophile," he said. "More significantly, because of their courage, the consistent pattern of lies and cover-ups by several bishops has been exposed."

In other similar settlements reached by the church, nine other boys in Dallas who said they were molested by former priest Rudolf Kos received \$23.4 million in 1998. In New Mexico, the archdiocese paid an estimated \$50 million to settle about 45 lawsuits alleging sexual abuse by former priest Jason Sigler.