News



The Diocese of Crookston, Minn., has reached a $5 million settlement with victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse, it announced in a statement July 17, 2019. (CNS photo/Diocese of Crookston)

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The Diocese of Crookston announced July 17 it has reached a $5 million settlement with victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse.

The settlement resolves 15 lawsuits for sexual abuse claims filed between April 2016 and May 2017 because of the Minnesota Child Victims Act. The legislation lifted the statute of limitations on abuse cases in Minnesota, opening a three-year window that allowed victims an opportunity to file civil claims even on cases alleged to have happened decades ago.

"To all victims and survivors of sexual abuse by clergy, as the bishop of Crookston I apologize for the harm done to you by those entrusted with your spiritual care. Although you can never be fully compensated for your suffering, we are thankful this litigation has now come to a good end and are hopeful this settlement offers you justice and will be helpful for healing," Bishop Michael J. Hoeppner said in a letter to Catholics of the diocese.

"To you, the faithful of this local church, I say thank you for your continued prayer: for victims of sexual abuse; for a fair resolve to these cases," he wrote. "Let us all now, humbly, offer prayers of thanksgiving."

According to the diocese, most of the costs associated with the settlement came through insurance proceeds. $1.55 million came from the property sales of Camp Corbett in Big Elbow Lake in 2018 and Holy Spirit Newman Center in Bemidji in 2016, as well as two nonrestricted estate gifts in 2017.

Also, in preparation for the settlement, the diocese said two open staff positions were left unfilled. The diocese did not have to finance any portion of the settlement through loans. According to Hoeppner, no Diocesan Annual Appeal funds were used for the settlement.

Because of the settlement, the Diocese of Crookston has been able to avoid bankruptcy protection, it noted. "All other dioceses in Minnesota have filed or

announced their intent to file for financial reorganization in recent years."

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Last September, a U.S. Bankruptcy Court judge approved the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis' plan for reorganization, including a $210 million settlement for victim/survivor remuneration. The reorganization process is at various stages for the dioceses of Duluth, New Ulm, St. Cloud and Winona-Rochester.

The Crookston Diocese also said it will not experience layoffs and "can steadfastly continue its mission of serving God's people in the 14 northwest counties of Minnesota."

The diocese "is committed to transparency and accountability in response to the clerical sexual abuse crisis and takes seriously accusations of sexual misconduct by clergy," its statement said.

It also urged anyone who has been a victim -- or knows of someone who has been a victim -- of sexual misconduct "on the part of a priest, deacon, or individual representing the Diocese of Crookston, its parishes or its schools" to contact the diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator at (218) 281-7895.