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Bishops gesture on the forecourt of the Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire basilica in the sanctuary of Lourdes, southwestern France, Saturday, Nov. 6, 2021 during a ceremony, part of The Bishops' Conference. (AP Photo/Bob Edme)

by The Associated Press

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France's Catholic Church agreed on Monday to financially compensate sex abuse victims in what the president of the country's Bishop Conference hailed as a

“decisive step.”

Conference President Eric de Moulins-Beaufort said in a speech that the Church has recognized its “institutional responsibility" and decided to go “on a path of recognition and reparation that paves the way for victims to get the possibility of a mediation and a compensation.”

The Bishops Conference held its annual meeting a month after a report revealed large-scale child sex abuse within the French Catholic Church.

The study released by an independent commission estimated that some 330,000 children were sexually abused over 70 years by priests or other church-related figures.

“We felt disgust and horror inside us when we realized how much suffering so many people had lived and were still living,” Moulins-Beaufort said.

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The bishops acknowledged the church's responsibility that implies financial compensation because the commission “strongly suggested that path” but also because “worshippers full of shame were expecting it from us,” he said.

Moulins-Beaufort did not provide details about the amount of the compensation and how the church intends to pay.

The report published last month described “systemic” coverup of abuses by the Catholic Church, and urged the church to respect the rule of law in France.

It said the tally of 330,000 victims includes an estimated 216,000 people abused by priests and other clerics, and the rest by church figures such as Scout leaders and camp counselors. The estimates were based on a broader research by France’s National Institute of Health and Medical Research into sexual abuse of children in the country.

France is a traditionally Roman Catholic country, but adheres to a strict form of secularism in public life based on a 1905 law separating church and state.