News



Members of SNAP (the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests) hold up signs during a demonstration in front of the archdiocese headquarters in San Francisco, March 29, 2010. San Francisco's Roman Catholic archdiocese filed for bankruptcy Monday, Aug. 21, 2023, saying the filing is necessary to manage more than 500 lawsuits alleging child sexual abuse by church officials. (AP Photo/Paul Sakuma, File)

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San Francisco’s Roman Catholic archdiocese filed for bankruptcy August 21, saying the filing is necessary to manage more than 500 lawsuits alleging child sexual abuse by church officials.

The Chapter 11 protection filing will stop all legal actions against the archdiocese and thus allow it to develop a settlement plan with abuse survivors, Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone said in a statement.

"The unfortunate reality is that the Archdiocese has neither the financial means nor the practical ability to litigate all of these abuse claims individually, and therefore, after much consideration, concluded that the bankruptcy process was the best solution for providing fair and equitable compensation to the innocent survivors who have been harmed," Cordileone said.

The San Francisco Archdiocese is the third Bay Area diocese to file for bankruptcy after facing hundreds of lawsuits brought under a California law approved in 2019 that allowed decades-old claims to be filed by Dec. 31, 2022. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Oakland filed for bankruptcy in May. The Diocese of Santa Rosa became the first one in California to file for Chapter 11 protection, in March.

The overwhelming majority of the more than 500 claims stem from allegations of sexual abuse that occurred 30 or more years ago involving priests who are no longer active in ministry or are deceased, said Cordileone.

Survivors of clergy sex abuse victims criticized the bankruptcy filing, calling it a ploy to keep information hidden.

"Cordileone will use every tactic and tool at his disposal to continue to run from the truth. He refuses to identify offenders in his diocese, he attempts legal maneuvers to eliminate the California Child Victims Act, and now he is attempting a last-ditch effort to hide the truth behind bankruptcy," Jeff Anderson, an attorney representing over 125 survivors in the Archdiocese of San Francisco, said in a statement.

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The Archdiocese of San Francisco is the only diocese in California yet to release a list of clergy credibly accused of child sexual abuse, Anderson said.

SNAP, a survivors' network for clergy sex abuse victims, said it doubts the Archdiocese is as financially strapped as it claims.

"We seriously doubt that the Archdiocese of San Francisco does not have the assets to settle these lawsuits," SNAP said in a statement. "We can only hope that the federal judge closely examines the Archdiocese's real estate holdings, which are spread across three of the richest counties in the United States."

Cordileone said in his statement that a list of priests and deacons who are in good standing can be found on the Archdiocese website. He said those under investigation for alleged child sexual abuse are prohibited from exercising public ministry and are removed from the list.

Cordileone has established himself as one of the most prominent and outspoken of the hard-line conservatives within the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

He attracted national attention in May 2022 when he said that then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a San Francisco resident, would be barred from receiving Communion in his archdiocese because of her support for abortion rights.

The San Francisco Archdiocese serves about 440,000 Catholics in the counties of San Francisco, Marin and San Mateo.