News



Vestments are seen in this undated photo. The Diocese of Camden, N.J., and related Catholic entities will fund a trust of $87.5 million for more than 300 sexual abuse survivors in a settlement confirmed March 14 to resolve the diocese's Chapter 11 bankruptcy. (OSV News/CNS/Tyler Orsburn)

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The Diocese of Camden, N.J., and related Catholic entities will fund a trust of $87.5 million for more than 300 survivors of sexual abuse in the diocese, in a plan confirmed March 14 to resolve the diocese's Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

The trust, which is to be paid over five years, is part of the diocese's plan for reorganization approved by U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Jerrold N. Poslusny Jr.

"Once again, I express my sincere apologies and prayers to all those who have been affected by sexual abuse in our Diocese," said Bishop Dennis J. Sullivan of Camden in a March 14 letter posted by the Catholic Star Herald, the diocesan newspaper.

"I pledge my continuing commitment to ensure that this terrible chapter in the history of the Diocese of Camden, New Jersey never happens again," he continued. "This settlement will enable the diocese to meet its obligations to the survivors of clerical abuse while we continue to serve the parishes, schools and those in need who utilize our social services throughout South Jersey."

The plan "embodies" a settlement reached with a committee of survivors that was first announced in April 2022, according to a March 14 statement from the diocese. The settlement "includes maintaining and enhancing the protocols for the protection of children," first implemented by the diocese in 2002, the statement continued.

The diocese began Chapter 11 proceedings Oct. 1, 2020. In a letter to the diocese announcing the Chapter 11 reorganization, Sullivan attributed the decision to the negative financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, payments totaling $8 million it paid in 2020 through the New Jersey Independent Victims Compensation Program to clergy abuse victims, and New Jersey's 2019 reform of its statute of limitations for sexual abuse claims, which expanded the time frame in which victims could file lawsuits.

At the time the diocese filed for reorganization, there were more than 50 lawsuits filed against it. During the process, those claims grew to represent more than 300 survivors of clergy sexual abuse.

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"While these three years of reorganization proceedings proved challenging, I appreciate the shared commitment to survivors among those who worked to bring this process to conclusion," said Sullivan, who has led the diocese since 2013, in his March 14 letter.

"This decision opens a new chapter in the Diocese of Camden, allowing us to finally offer substantial reparations to survivors harmed by sinful priests dating back more than six decades," he said.

According to the diocese, its insurers have agreed to contribute $30 million to the survivors' trust.

In his March 14 letter, the bishop extended gratitude "to the survivors, our creditors, and all those involved in the reorganization proceedings." In a media statement from the diocese, he particularly thanked Poslusny "for his dedication to providing a fair venue for this case and for ensuring the interests of the survivors and the Diocese of Camden were considered justly."

"I again express my sincere apology to all those who have been affected by sexual abuse in our Diocese," Sullivan said in the media statement. "My prayers go out to all survivors of abuse and I pledge my continuing commitment to ensure that this terrible chapter in the history of the Diocese of Camden, New Jersey never happens again."

According to research from Penn State Law Professor Marie T. Reilly made available through The Catholic Project at The Catholic University of America in Washington, Camden joins 19 other U.S. dioceses that have emerged from Chapter 11 bankruptcy due to clergy abuse claims; 13 others are currently in bankruptcy proceedings.