News



New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, right, greets Bishop Ronald Hicks during a news conference at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City Dec.18, 2025. Hicks will be installed as the new archbishop of the New York Archdiocese in early February. (AP/Ryan Murphy)



by Ryan Di Corpo

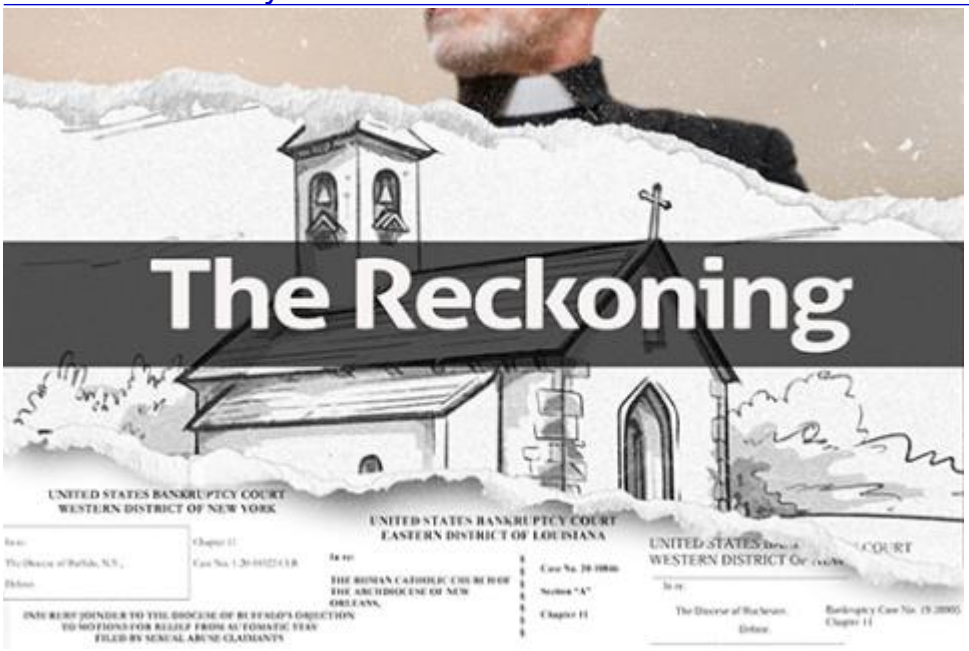
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(NCR logo/Toni-Ann Ortiz)

New York Archbishop-designate Ronald Hicks, who will be installed in early February, will arrive in an archdiocese seeking to raise $300 million to compensate more than 1,000 survivors of clergy sexual abuse while negotiating a universal settlement deal.

A settlement agreement could break years of legal gridlock involving the archdiocese and its longtime insurer Chubb, which has refused to cover abuse claims because, the company argues, the church is responsible for allowing misconduct to occur over several decades.

"Our goal has always been ... to resolve expeditiously all meritorious claims, provide the maximum amount of compensation to the greatest number of victim-survivors and help them heal and move forward," Cardinal Timothy Dolan wrote in a public letter Dec. 8.

The outgoing cardinal, who led New York Catholics for 16 years, noted that the archdiocese has reduced staff, cut its budget and sold its former Manhattan headquarters for a hefty sum to help meet its multimillion dollar goal. NCR previously reported that the archdiocese laid off 18 employees last November due to a "financial crunch."

This month, the archdiocese sold the land under a luxury hotel on Madison Avenue for a reported $490 million. Some $200 million will be used for survivor compensation, while the remaining funds will help cover loans received by the archdiocese for previous settlements.

While acknowledging that the church failed to protect minors from abuse, Dolan also faulted its insurers for "accepting millions in premiums from the archdiocese" and then declining to cover abuse cases. Between 1956 and 2003, Chubb, identified in lawsuits as the Century Indemnity Company, issued more than 30 liability policies to the archdiocese; the church argues that these policies provide coverage for abuse claims.

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Since the passage of New York state laws, in 2019 and 2022, extending the statute of limitations to allow more abuse survivors to file civil suits, the archdiocese has been named in more than 1,500 abuse cases it has struggled to settle. Chubb claims the church hopes to evade financial responsibility for its misdeeds by relying on insurance policies.

Attorney Jeff Anderson, who represents hundreds of clergy abuse survivors, told The New York Times that the church's recent push toward a settlement marks "the first time the archdiocese has shown willingness to engage in any kind of process to bring all of this toward resolution."

Opening the 'lookback' window

In February 2019, then-New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the Child Victims Act, which allowed some survivors of child abuse a one-year "lookback" window to bring claims "in which the statue of limitations has lapsed." Heralded by state legislators as a historic step toward justice for abuse survivors, the bill faced opposition from the archdiocese. Dolan claimed the lookback clause "would be toxic" for the church.

"The lookback we find to be very strangling. When that happens, the only organization targeted is the Catholic Church," the cardinal told reporters in 2018 after a private meeting with Cuomo.



Then-Gov. Andrew Cuomo is seen with Cardinal Timothy Dolan March 17, 2016, during the St. Patrick's Day Parade in New York City. (CNS/The Tablet/Ed Wilkinson)

Tensions between the governor and the cardinal had escalated into a war of words by January 2019, when Cuomo blamed church leaders for protecting themselves instead of children, and Dolan accused New York Democrats of choosing to "alienate faithful Catholic voters."

The act was passed the following month, and two years later, in 2021, Dolan noted that the archdiocese was the defendant in more than 1,500 abuse cases after the one-year lookback period was extended due to the Covid pandemic. After suing 32

of its insurers (including Chubb) for nonpayment in 2019, the church urged its longtime carrier to provide restitution to survivors who filed claims.

"We are committed to calling upon our insurers to respond to covered claims and redeem the insurance coverage we purchased over many decades, so, on our behalf, they can expeditiously resolve meritorious abuse claims with appropriate compensation," the cardinal wrote in an archdiocesan communiqué.

Trouble for the church continued in the spring of 2022, when Gov. Kathy Hochul signed the Adult Survivors Act. Similar to previous legislation focused on minors, the new law also opened a one-year lookback window and allowed abuse survivors sexually assaulted as adults to sue perpetrators "regardless of when the abuse occurred."

Dueling lawsuits

In June 2023, Chubb sued the archdiocese in New York State Supreme Court, arguing that church leaders are responsible for settling claims because they may have been aware of sex abuse committed by priests. By this point, the church expected Chubb to pay $859 million in compensation to satisfy more than 3,000 claims. Chubb's lawsuit against the church was first dismissed before an appellate court handed the insurance giant a legal victory and allowed its case to proceed.

"The complaint sufficiently alleges that recovery would fall outside the scope of plaintiffs' [Chubb] duties to defend and indemnify if the Archdiocese had knowledge of its employees' conduct or propensities," the appellate court ruled in April 2024.

But the next month, in May 2024, a large group of child sex abuse survivors urged state Attorney General Letitia James to investigate Chubb for "violating New York insurance and business laws" by refusing to compensate victims.

On Sept. 30 2024, in a fiery letter that said the "gates of hell" would not destroy the church and that the archdiocese would prevail like New York City after 9/11, Dolan announced the church would countersue Chubb for abandoning abuse survivors. The cardinal noted that the church had already settled hundreds of cases but faced approximately 1,400 more.



The exterior of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City is seen at nighttime. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Chubb, in response, called the church lawsuit "a financial maneuver" and faulted the archdiocese for "shifting responsibility for its actions onto insurers."

Questioned motives

The archdiocese instituted the Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program in October 2016 to offer financial settlements to clergy sex abuse survivors. In an email to NCR this past March, Camille Biros, who provides victim compensation through the archdiocesan program, stated that the church independently resolved more than 400 abuse cases. (These settlements were separate from 123 resolved cases brought through the Child Victims Act.)

"The compensation payments to victims were made directly from the archdiocese to our program," wrote Biros.

Dolan has touted the program as an example of the archdiocese's commitment "to help bring a measure of peace and healing" to abuse survivors.

But controversy erupted in 2021 when leaked remarks made years earlier by attorney Kenneth Feinberg, whom Dolan tapped to run the compensation program, suggested that the archdiocese sought to prevent survivors from filing new abuse claims through state law.

"I think the cardinal feels that [the compensation program] is providing lawyers in Albany with additional persuasive powers not to reopen the statute," said Feinberg during a teleconference with attorneys and church officials from three New York dioceses. "We are already doing this. Why bother? Don't reopen the statue. We are taking care of our own problem."

Hicks, during his time leading the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois, described "profound remorse over any failure of the diocese to respond to an allegation of abuse" after the Illinois attorney general released a nearly 700-page report on clergy abuse claims in 2023. At that time, Hicks noted that no priests facing allegations of misconduct remained in active ministry in the diocese.

"Remembering the harm done forces us to remain vigilant in our efforts to ensure it never happens again," Hicks wrote.

This story appears in the **The Reckoning** feature series. View the full series.
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