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St. Louis Cathedral, seat of the New Orleans Archdiocese. In 2020, the archdiocese claimed Chapter 11 protection under federal bankruptcy law. (Unsplash/Mick Haupt)

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Archbishop Gregory Aymond of New Orleans has issued a formal apology to abuse survivors in that archdiocese, following last month's court approval of a $230 million settlement in the five-year-long bankruptcy case.

"With this letter, I express on behalf of the clergy, religious, and laity of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, my predecessors, and myself, profound regret over the tragic and inexcusable harm you have suffered at the hands of your abusers," said Aymond in a widely distributed Dec. 26 letter addressed "to all child abuse claimants" in the archdiocese.

The seventh amended plan for the archdiocese's Chapter 11 filing — dating to 2020, and prompted by some 500 abuse claims — was approved by Judge Meredith Grabill on Dec. 8.

The archdiocese advised the court on Dec. 29 that "all conditions" required for the plan's taking effect had been satisfied as of Dec. 26.

Aymond's apology letter was posted to the archdiocesan website and that of the Clarion Herald, the archdiocesan newspaper, the print edition of which will also include the message. Bayou Catholic, the official paper of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, will include the text in its upcoming February edition.

In a Jan. 3 press release, the Archdiocese of New Orleans announced that Aymond's letter, posted to the archdiocesan website, would also be printed in full "throughout the upcoming days and weeks in the various media markets."

The "extensive media outreach" — which includes some two dozen secular outlets in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas — is part of the archdiocese's "commitment to the nonmonetary provisions laid out in its Chapter 11 settlement plan," said the press release.

In his letter, the archbishop apologized to the victims "for the trauma caused to you and to those close to you as a survivor of sexual abuse perpetrated by a member of the clergy, a religious sister or brother, or a lay employee or volunteer working within the Catholic Church.

"Sexual abuse is an inexcusable evil, and I am ashamed that you or anyone should have been sexually abused by someone working within the Catholic Church," he said. "Please know that you are not to blame for the abuse perpetrated on you. You were and are completely innocent and did nothing to deserve the pain you have suffered because of the hideous crime of sexual abuse of a minor."

He said the archdiocese "takes responsibility for the abuse you have suffered and pledges to keep children and all vulnerable people safe in our ministry." He added, "It is my fervent hope that as we bring these Chapter 11 proceedings to a close, you will achieve some sense of peace, justice, and healing."

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The closing hearings of the case in early December included testimony from 23 survivors, with Grabill addressing them through tears ahead of her final ruling.

One survivor filed a handwritten letter to Grabill, thanking her for her empathy and saying the court decision "will give children a voice ... who have been silenced for so long."

The survivor — noting a lifelong inability to "shake the stigma of the abuse" — said the decision to come forward "was very powerful for my own healing and to help move the Catholic Church to a safer environment."

With the proceedings also involving 157 affiliated Catholic organizations — including parishes, schools, Catholic Charities organizations, and other ministries — the $230 million settlement will require parishes to contribute a total of some $60 million. A possible $75 million may be supplied by insurance funds.

According to Fox 8 New Orleans, Aymond declined to specify how much each parish would be expected to pay toward the settlement.

OSV News previously confirmed with the archdiocese that its legal fees in the case totaled approximately $50 million as of November.

The arduous bankruptcy proceedings appeared to stall even in their final months, with one group of bond investors calling for further discussion of the archdiocese's Chapter 11 reorganization plan, then in its fifth version, despite an overwhelming

vote of approval of the plan by a committee of survivors and additional creditors.

Grabill appeared to lose patience with the case in April 2025, issuing an order on a potential dismissal of the "particularly contentious" suit, which had failed to reach a reorganization plan after five years of litigation.

Along with the wranglings over bankruptcy and survivor compensation, the archdiocese's battle to resolve sex abuse claims has also included:

— The recusal of a previous judge in the Chapter 11 case.

— The guilty plea and life sentence of Msgr. Lawrence Hecker for rape and other crimes committed in 1975-1976.

— An investigation by the Louisiana State Police and the FBI — with a search warrant issued in May 2024 — to determine if archdiocesan officials covered up child sex trafficking by clergy over several decades, with some alleged victims reportedly taken out of state to be abused and marked for further exploitation among clergy.

OSV News has found that from 2004 to 2024, U.S. Catholic dioceses collectively paid a total of more than $5 billion to settle abuse claims.

In September, Pope Leo XIV appointed Bishop James Checchio of Metuchen, N.J., as coadjutor archbishop of New Orleans. Archbishop Checcio will assist Aymond until the latter's canonically required resignation, submitted upon reaching the age of 75, is accepted by the pope.