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A cross is silhouetted against a stained glass window inside a Catholic Church in New Orleans on Dec. 1, 2012. (AP/Gerald Herbert, file)

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A New Jersey Catholic diocese has agreed to a $180 million settlement to resolve allegations of clergy sexual abuse, a figure far exceeding agreements in some large dioceses but still dwarfed by other massive settlements.

Bishop Joseph Williams of the Diocese of Camden, covering southern New Jersey and its Philadelphia suburbs, announced the settlement Feb. 17 in a letter.

"For the survivors of South Jersey, this day is long overdue and represents a milestone in their journey toward restored justice and the healing and recognition they have long sought and deserve," Williams said.

Mark Crawford, state director of the Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests, said in a phone interview Feb. 18 that the settlement was long overdue but he was glad the ordeal was coming to an end. He praised the bishop for listening to survivors and for pledging transparency, contrasting him with his predecessor, who fought a legal battle over a state investigation into alleged clergy abuse.

"This settlement and this bishop have acted very differently," Crawford said. "I hope it sends a message that this is possible, that this is right."

Greg Gianforcaro, one of the attorneys representing victims suing the diocese, credited survivors' persistence in reaching the agreement. The diocese has said there are about 300 survivors of abuse raising claims.

"It's been an extremely long and arduous battle," he said in a phone interview.

It's the latest agreement in a scandal set off more than two decades ago when the scale of the abuse and the church's effort to hide it came to light in Boston. The New Jersey settlement agreement is more than the roughly $80 million settlements in Boston and Philadelphia, though settlements in California ranged much higher. In 2024, the Los Angeles Archdiocese agreed to an $880 million payment.

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The Camden settlement comes less than a year after the diocese withdrew its objection to the state of New Jersey's grand jury investigation into decades of alleged sexual abuse of children by religious. The state Supreme Court has since ruled the state's investigation could move ahead.

The Camden Diocese, like others nationwide, filed for bankruptcy amid a torrent of lawsuits after the statute of limitations was relaxed.

In 2022, the diocese agreed to pay $87.5 million to settle allegations involving clergy sex abuse against some 300 accusers, one of the largest cash settlements involving the Catholic church in the U.S. The latest settlement announcement includes these funds, according to victims' attorneys.

The diocese covers six southern New Jersey counties outside Philadelphia. The agreement must still be approved by a bankruptcy court.

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