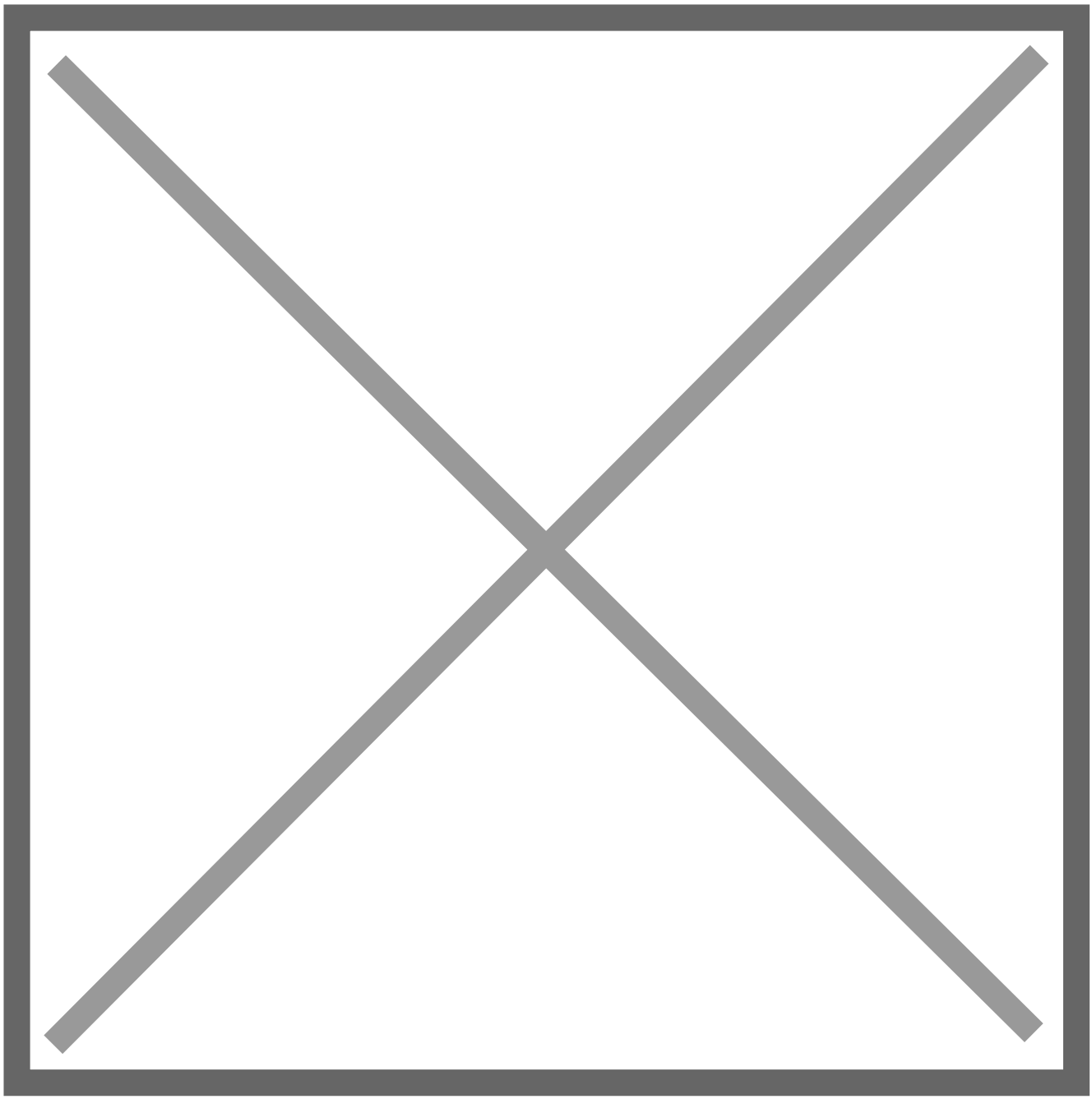
News



Bishop Mark O'Connell of Albany, N.Y., is pictured in a Feb. 6, 2024, photo. Over three years after filing for Chapter 11 protection, the Diocese of Albany reached a $148 million settlement agreement with the survivors of sexual abuse by diocesan priests and others on March 27, 2026. (OSV News file/The Pilot/Gregory L. Tracy)

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Albany, N.Y. — April 1, 2026
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Just over three years to the date after filing for Chapter 11 protection under the crush of nearly 440 Child Victims Act claims, the Diocese of Albany reached a $148 million settlement agreement with the survivors of sexual abuse by diocesan priests and others on March 27.

"This day is a day to honor survivors, to honor those who were very shamefully hurt by the Diocese of Albany and by priests and by the placement of them by bishops and that's where the focus is today," said Bishop Mark O'Connell at a press conference at the diocesan pastoral center.

"I do not want to take away from their very painful day and I just send my apologies, along with the leaders in the Diocese of Albany," he said. "With all my heart I want to say how sorry we are, how sorry I am and to promise to diligently protect all as best as I can."

The agreement will provide payment to survivors for acts perpetrated against them by clergy, religious, lay employees and volunteers of the diocese.

Although the settlement amount remains subject to a creditor vote and court approval, the amount has been accepted by the Tort Committee, which is a group of individuals who survived sexual abuse when they were children by clergy members and employees within the diocese.

Since the diocese filed for Chapter 11 protection on March 15, 2023, there has been legal maneuvering, delays and accusations but little movement between the diocese and the lawyers representing the survivors.

Yet, it took O'Connell, who was installed Dec. 5, along with other diocesan leaders just over three months to break through with this major agreement. As for what changed, it was a question that was asked of O'Connell.

"When I was able to speak to some of the survivors and their lawyers at our last mediation, I told them I know (the monetary agreement) has to hurt, I know it has to be a huge sacrifice (for the diocese)," he said. "I think that attitude helped people here go with me and reach the number that we had to reach and so I am very grateful to the parishes and very grateful to the other entities and to my staff for recognizing the truth in what I was selling. It has to hurt. It has to be a sacrifice and I think what we did today fulfills both of those.

"I don't like to compare to other dioceses because in bankruptcy, you pay what you can, but you certainly don't pay what (the survivors) deserve," O'Connell said. "There is no amount of money that can erase the pain. We paid from our hurt, from our sacrifice, but there's no way that this is enough where everyone is happy. I have no regrets in leading the Diocese of Albany to reach this number."

Of the $148 million, $50 million will come from the parishes and the rest from the diocese and its entities, known as the "Catholic family," which includes The Evangelist, the diocesan news outlet.

"I know that we had to come to a place with our parishes and our entities and say we have to do this. We have to do it now. We can't wait anymore. … We're moving forward, I think, in a sacrificial way," O'Connell said. "I hope that sacrifice is accepted in some way by those who we hurt."

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This figure does not include contributions from the insurance companies that provided coverage to the diocese. Negotiations are continuing with the insurance carriers with the goal of achieving what is known as the "global settlement," which would pool money from the diocese and the insurance carriers.

The agreement also includes ongoing discussions about enhanced child protection protocols that will add to robust measures already in place to protect young parishioners, students and other vulnerable individuals within the diocese under the Office of Safe Environment.

In a statement, the diocese added that "the discussions on child protection have been productive, collaborative and extensive and Bishop O'Connell has been personally engaged throughout the process."

The groups are expected to announce these enhanced measures soon.

"This settlement marks a significant step toward the conclusion of this bankruptcy case and closure for all survivors who have lived with this pain throughout their lives." said John Ciota and Rick Salamone, co-chairs of the Tort Committee. "The Tort Committee wants to express its gratitude to each survivor involved in this case and assure all survivors that it is working to achieve the best result for them.

"The Tort Committee looks forward to working further with the diocese to enhance its child protection protocols and with the Diocese's insurers to reach a global settlement of survivor claims."

The financial agreement is a giant step forward in a dark chapter in the Diocese of Albany. On Aug. 15, 2019, New York state's Child Victims Act, or CVA — which expanded the statute of limitations for child sex abuse cases, allowing victims to file civil lawsuits until age 55, extended criminal prosecution limits until age 28, and included a "look-back window" which allows lawsuits against abusers and institutions for past abuse — went into effect.

During the two-year window to file claims, the diocese was named in nearly 440 claims.

As the press conference was nearing its end, BO'Connell — who worked as a canon lawyer when the abuse crisis erupted in the Archdiocese of Boston in 2002 and was named last year as the chairman-elect of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People — was asked if the $148 million figure would allow the diocese "to move past this."

He emphatically said no.

"Excuse me for being strong in this answer, absolutely not. We are not moving past this. This will be part of my time in Albany as long as I'm here," he said. "And speaking from my heart, we're not moving past, we are meeting what was asked for in a humble way with an apology and doing what we can, but what we're doing can't be enough. … I feel strongly that this is not in the past.

"I think there is a vigilance. Again, I've spent 25 years on this in my life. I was in the eye of the storm in Boston when it first hit. I was living literally in the chancery building," he continued. "I was meeting with all the tsunami of cases and I've been moved to the tribunal where I was the chief judge and prosecutor. I have been in every part of this. It has changed my life, it has changed my perspective and every part of me is sorry that our church collectively did this to these poor people who were hurt deeply. Every part of me is sorry."