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Jesuit Fr. Gregory Bonfiglio, pastor of St. Ignatius Parish in San Francisco, celebrates Mass in late April 2026. Bonfiglio wrote that the parish paying its assessment for the archdiocese's settlement of clergy sex abuse cases was "an act of solidarity with survivors." (Courtesy of St. Ignatius Parish)



by Sean Piccoli

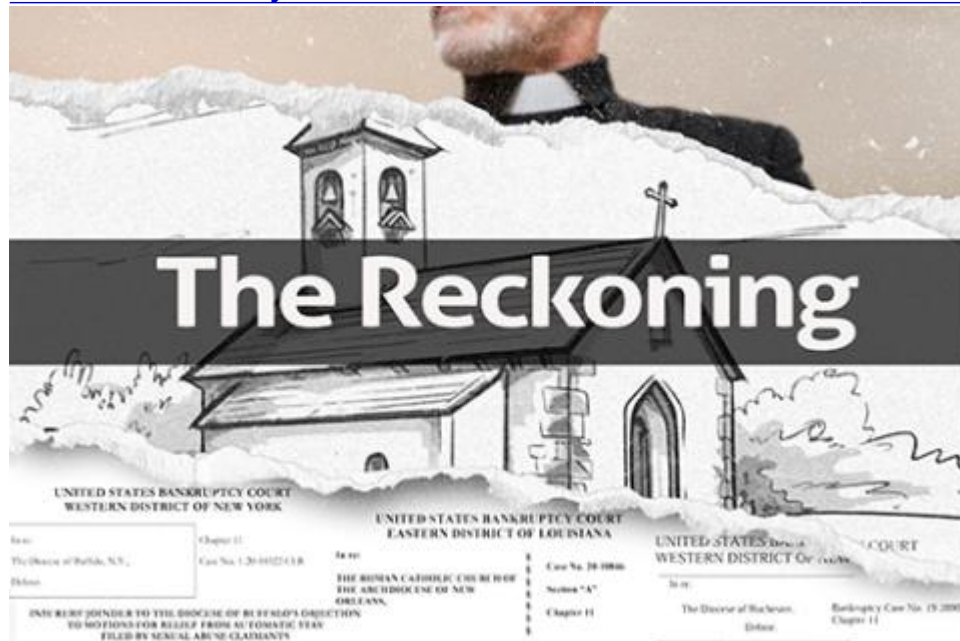
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(NCR logo/Toni-Ann Ortiz)

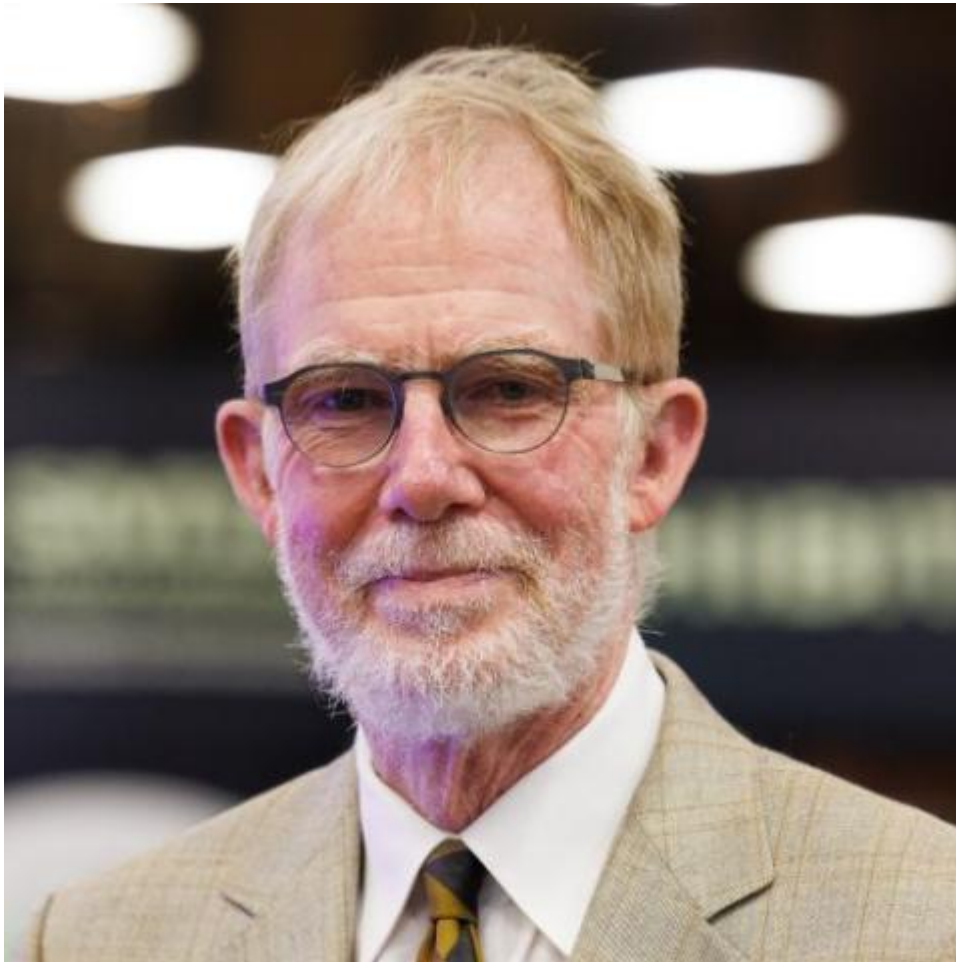
When the Archdiocese of San Francisco announced in late June that it would [pay \\$395 million](#) to hundreds of people who were sexually abused as children by Bay Area priests, archdiocesan leaders also quietly sent word to local parishes, schools and other church-run facilities: The cost of the archdiocese's Chapter 11 bankruptcy settlement would be theirs to bear, too.

Soon after, the bills — called assessments — began arriving, with news of each parish's obligation spelled out in letters from pastors and meetings with parish officers across an archdiocese that is home to 442,000 Catholics in San Francisco, San Mateo and Marin counties. In [a letter](#), Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone wrote that the archdiocese could not shoulder the settlements alone.

"For the past decades, the chancery has handled these claims and shouldered the financial burden for any settlements with the goal of shielding our parishes and schools and other members of the local Catholic family," he wrote. "This simply was not possible in this round of lawsuits."

And that means parishes and other Catholic entities are facing massive bills, prompting some parishioners to question how the archdiocese calculated who owes what, and leaving pastors to figure out how to shoulder the financial burden while

also standing in solidarity with victims of sexual abuse.



Rob Boguski is a parishioner at St. Agnes Church in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. (Courtesy of Rob Boguski)

For St. Agnes Church, founded in 1893 in San Francisco's storied Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, longtime parishioner Robert Boguski learned in July that the tally is \$5 million — a figure that will "decimate" the investment account the parish maintains to help pay operating expenses, Boguski told NCR, citing conversations with members of the St. Agnes finance committee.

"We're devastated," Boguski said of the church where he was married in 1983. "We don't know how we can manage this."

It's a scenario playing out over and over in an era of [reckoning](#) for the Catholic Church in the United States: pastors and parishioners learning that their houses of worship are facing [settlement obligations](#), some totaling millions of dollars,

regardless of whether they were linked to past misconduct. Parishes nationwide are scrambling to help cover compensation for survivors of sexual abuse.

Forty-four U.S. Catholic religious organizations in more than a dozen states and one U.S. territory, Guam, have sought federal bankruptcy protection, beginning in 2004, according to a [Penn State University database](#) tracking Catholic bankruptcies arising from abuse litigation. According to the database, as of March, 15 organizations are at different stages of bankruptcy: 11 dioceses; two archdioceses including San Francisco; a Franciscan Friars ministry in Oakland, California; and a single parish in Scarsdale, New York.

As states including California, New York, Rhode Island and New Mexico have temporarily lifted the statute of limitations for suing sexual abusers and organizations accused of enabling them, civil legal claims from thousands of long-term abuse survivors against the Catholic Church skyrocketed.

Catholic entities, with and without turning to bankruptcy, spent [more than \\$5 billion](#) just between 2004 and 2023 to settle more than 16,000 allegations of sexual abuse of minors by priests, deacons or religious brothers, according to a 2025 report by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University.

And the settlements have kept coming since then: [\\$880 million from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles](#) to more than 1,300 survivors, on top of earlier settlements to other survivors totaling more than \$600 billion; [\\$323 million from the Diocese of Rockville Centre](#), N.Y., to about 600 survivors; and [\\$180 million from the Diocese of Camden](#), N.J., to about 300 survivors.

To varying degrees, parishes and schools are helping to pay those settlements. In Rockville Centre, for example, 136 parishes representing more than a million Long Island Catholics [paid \\$53 million](#) — roughly 16% — toward that diocese's \$323 million settlement, in amounts ranging from five to seven figures.

San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, pictured in a file photo celebrating Mass outside

San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, pictured in a file photo celebrating Mass outside the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption, said diocesan entities must pay assessments toward a \$395 million settlement with longtime survivors of clergy sexual abuse. (OSV News/Archdiocese of San Francisco/Dennis Callahan)

In San Francisco, the parish assessments appear to be higher, based on publicly available data and interviews with pastors and parishioners. The archdiocese declined a request from NCR to provide a complete list of assessments. Parishes, all told, will contribute "less than 40 percent of the total agreed-upon settlement," a spokesman for the archdiocese, Peter Marlow, told NCR by email.

In aggregate, that leaves a community with about half as many Catholics as Long Island facing at least twice the financial burden. Even in a region buoyed by tech industry wealth, assessments in San Francisco have been greeted at some of the archdiocese's 88 parishes with shock and disbelief.

"So much cries out to be explained," John Van Hagen, a former priest turned psychologist and author, told NCR. At St. Teresa of Avila Church, Van Hagen's parish near the city's Mission District, staff confronting a \$1.8 million assessment have discussed layoffs, with remaining staff taking on housekeeping duties and giving up meal allowances in order to cut expenses.

"It's not clear how we're going to get the money," Van Hagen said. St. Teresa is a "relatively small parish," he said, speculating that their obligation could also come out of a bill-paying investment fund that would be then reduced to a fraction of its current value.

Van Hagen said his pastor, Fr. Gregory Houck, disclosed the \$1.8 million obligation after Sunday Mass on July 26. Houck declined to comment.

Marlow told NCR that "parish demographics, operational obligations, passive income streams, monetizable real estate assets, long-term sustainability, school circumstances, and ministry needs were all considered."

A file photo shows the exterior of the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption in San Francisco.

A file photo shows the exterior of the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption in San Francisco. The Archdiocese of San Francisco in June agreed in principle to a \$395 million settlement with longtime survivors of clergy sexual abuse. (OSV News/Reuters/Robert Galbraith)

The diocese "took the additional step to call upon pastors who are outspoken, fair-minded, and respected," Marlow wrote. "These highly regarded pastors have deep

familiarity with parishes throughout the archdiocese, and they reviewed the proposed assessments to help ensure that both financial realities and pastoral considerations were weighed carefully. This was intended to give the parishes a representative seat at the table in determining these assessments. The goal was not mathematical equality but rather a fair and equitable distribution of responsibility among entities with very different circumstances."

"Other Catholic entities are also making substantial contributions toward the settlement, and the archdiocese/chancery is leading from the front by carrying the largest share of the responsibility while seeking meaningful participation from the broader Catholic community."

The settlement closes out more than 500 cases filed against the archdiocese, its churches, schools and other properties for claims of childhood sexual assaults that occurred before 2024.

Asked about a timeline for parishes to pay assessments, Marlow wrote, "Our goal is to fund the proposed settlement trust by the end of the year."

Several parishes are being asked to contribute at least \$1 million.

St. John the Evangelist, a parish and school in a less affluent section of the city near a major freeway, received an assessment of \$1.2 million, according to a [letter posted to the parish website](#).

St. Augustine, in the suburb of South San Francisco, in San Mateo County, was asked to pay \$1 million toward the settlement by Aug. 15, Fr. Raymond Reyes, the pastor, wrote in a July 19 [parish bulletin](#). Reyes assured parishioners that St. Augustine had the necessary funds without disrupting planned renovations. Star of the Sea, a parish near Golden Gate Park that operates two schools, will pay \$1.5 million.

People attend Mass at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption in San Francisco May 19, 2024.

People attend Mass at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption in San Francisco May 19, 2024. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

"The good news is that this settlement will bring these lawsuits to a close and protect us from future claims," Fr. Joseph Illo, Star of the Sea's pastor, wrote in [a weekly bulletin](#) in July. "The bad news, of course, are these reprehensible crimes

themselves, and the failure of Church leadership to discipline her bishops and priests."

"The Church is undergoing a crucifixion, as did her Lord, and we must accept this humiliation as a penance for the salvation of souls," Illo wrote.

In neighboring Marin County, Fr. Gabriel Wankar wrote to parishioners at St. Anselm Church that their combined obligation of \$1 million would be divided 80-20 between the school in San Anselmo and the parish in Ross, respectively.

"I shared this information immediately with our Finance Committee," he wrote. "Like every one of us, they found this assessment exceedingly difficult to accept, but we began praying and discerning how we might meet this obligation responsibly, prudently, and faithfully."

In an email to NCR, Wankar, who became pastor at St. Anselm in 2024, wrote, "While no financial settlement can erase the pain experienced by survivors, our participation demonstrates a commitment to acknowledging their suffering and helping to bring a measure of justice and closure.

"Like any act of sacrifice," Wankar added, "we're surely going to be impacted by this participation, but we believe it is the right thing to do, and God will continue to sustain our ministries and outreach, even as the safe environment measures adopted by the USCCB (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) have proven very effective in the last couple of decades."

Back at St. Agnes, parishioner Boguski voiced sympathy for his pastor, Fr. Samuel Musiimenta, having to contend with the \$5 million assessment — one made "without consultation of the Finance Council or Fr. Sam," according to a July memo, viewed by NCR, from the parish's four-person finance council to the congregation. It illustrates that not every pastor participated in the discussions meant to give parishes "a representative seat at the table," as the archdiocesan spokesman put it.

A spokesperson for St. Agnes referred questions about the assessment back to the archdiocese.

Boguski said his perception is that the ire of parishioners is more focused on Cordileone than on individual pastors. "Everybody is universally upset about this," Boguski said when asked if parishioners might balk at a \$5 million assessment from

a leadership whose attitude toward the laity he described as "pay, pray and obey."

For its part, the archdiocese told NCR that the assessments are "final" and there is no appeal process.

"Reasonable people may disagree about particular aspects of this process, but the success of the settlement depends upon the participation of all Catholic entities at the assessment levels provided, enabling our local church to emerge from bankruptcy and move beyond this difficult chapter in our history," the archdiocese's spokesman wrote to NCR.

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Boguski said the greatest fear of some at St. Agnes is that the parish could be shut down and its real estate holdings sold off.

The archdiocese's website acknowledges the "financial strains" that the assessment may cause parishes but addresses the [possibility of parish shutdowns](#) only ambiguously.

"We have no current plans to close schools or parishes to reach the proposed settlement," it reads in part. "Contributions to the settlement will create financial strains for our parishes and schools, and it is possible that this, coupled with other factors, could lead to restructuring decisions in the future, but those decisions would be made only after a process of pastoral planning based on sound mission and financial judgements with appropriate consultation with parish and school leadership."

While parishes grapple with the financial hit awaiting their budgets, some church leaders are urging Bay Area Catholics to see their challenges within the larger context of justice for victims of abuse.

At St. Ignatius Parish, Jesuit Fr. Gregory Bonfiglio published [a letter](#) on Aug. 13 to brace parishioners for the news. Without revealing the amount of the assessment, he wrote, "Our participation in the settlement ... is neither an admission of culpability nor an act of collective punishment. Rather, it is an act of solidarity with survivors and a recognition that, as members of this Body, we share responsibility for repairing, as best we can, grievous harm done by the Church."

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This story appears in the **The Reckoning** feature series. [View the full series.](#)