

Irish parishes asked to help with abuse settlements

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DUBLIN, Ireland -- The Diocese of Ferns is asking its parishes for additional funds to help cover the cost of legal settlements stemming from cases of clerical child abuse.

The diocese paid more than 10.5 million euros (\$14.2 million) in legal settlements to victims, payments to lawyers and fees for treatment programs for offenders, Bishop Denis Brennan of Ferns told the annual general meeting of the diocesan finance committee March 1.

The bishop said 48 cases were settled while 13 others were pending.

"The issue continues to receive priority attention and I am glad to report continued progress," he said.

Eugene Doyle, diocesan finance officer, told RTE News that the diocese took out a 20-year loan for \$1.8 million euros (\$2.4 million) to help meet its financial commitments. He said loan payments cost 120,000 euros (\$160,000) annually, but the diocese currently can afford to pay half of the amount.

The diocese is considering the sale of property to cover the shortfall, according to Doyle, who cautioned that selling real estate during an economic recession is not ideal.

Instead, the diocese decided to turn to parishes to raise additional funds, Doyle said.

"People who suffered abuse are not the cause of our problems; the actions of individual perpetrators, along with mismanagement, poor understanding and/or lack of resolve are," Bishop Brennan said in explaining the decision.

"As we look to complete this road, it will be necessary to invite the parishes to become part of the process financially," he said. "Funding sought is not about sharing the blame, it is about asking for help to fulfill a God-given responsibility. 'That I did not cause the problem' is not the response of the Christian. 'That I would like to help in the work of justice, healing, reconciliation, a safer environment for children in the future, proper financial stewardship and overall good economic health' is."

Colm O'Gorman, founder of the victims support group One in Four, who first disclosed clerical abuse in Ferns, said he believed the diocese should not be turning to the laity to pay for institutional failings.

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