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PLAINTIFFS, DIOCESE REACH SETTLEMENT IN ABUSE CASES

JACKSON, MS. A settlement has been reached between 19 individuals who were sexually abused as children by priests or who had loved ones who were abused and the Catholic Diocese of Jackson, attorneys for the parties announced today. The announcement came following years of litigation and over a year of mediation efforts to try to resolve the cases which were filed beginning in 2002.

The Catholic diocese and its insurers have agreed to pay the total sum of \$5,162,500 to the group of 19 individuals whose claims are being settled. The settlement also includes certain non-monetary terms, such as the Catholic diocese's agreement to issue a public apology, the diocese's agreement to remove any person against whom there has been a credible allegation of abuse from any position of influence over policy and decision making regarding sexual abuse claims; and, the diocese's obligation to publicly disclose any policy changes which have been implemented by the church to 1) deter abuse of this nature; 2) promote reporting of such actions; and, 3) ensure prompt investigation upon receipt of allegations of abuse and prompt remedial action if necessary. According to the diocese, the non-monetary terms in this settlement agreement reflect the Catholic diocese's long-standing commitment to protect children of the Church.

Quote from John Hawkins, one of the lawyers for plaintiff-victims:

As one of the lawyers for these brave individuals, I cannot emphasize enough how proud I am to represent them. Like other victims in other parts of the world, these victims of clergy sex abuse have demonstrated the courage to face their deepest fears and emotional pain and have fought bravely to seek justice for the horrific abuse they suffered at the hands of the catholic church. I can only hope that this settlement may, in part, allow each of these brave victims to reach some level of peace so they may continue moving forward with their lives, knowing they had the courage to

stand up for themselves and hold the church and its clergy accountable for the wrongdoing that has caused incalculable damages to so many lives.

Statement of Bishop Joseph Latino Regarding the Settlement with Victims of Sexual Abuse by Priests

The Diocese of Jackson has reached a settlement with nineteen of the twenty plaintiffs who have cases pending in Mississippi. These settling plaintiffs were seeking compensation for the harm they suffered as victims of sexual abuse by priests. The claims of the plaintiffs are for acts occurring from the early 1960s to the early 1980s.

I would like to thank the settling plaintiffs for participating in this difficult process. We would also thank the mediators, Paul Finn of Boston, Massachusetts, and Bobby Sneed of Jackson, Mississippi, who worked tirelessly to bring these cases to a close. It has not been easy for the victims or the Church to relive the agonizing moments of the past that have brought great pain upon so many.

I sincerely hope that this settlement will bring a sense of peace to all those who have suffered as a result of the acts of a few. On behalf of the entire Church, I apologize from the depths of my heart to all of you for the pain, grief and shame that have been brought about by these actions. I pray that we will be able to reconcile and heal the deep, deep hurts of the past and move forward together to a future of hope.

We are mortified that the crime of sexual abuse took place in our Church and are determined that it will not happen again. As a diocese, we will continue our many positive efforts to create a safe environment in our churches for all and to educate everyone about the scourge of childhood sexual abuse in our society.

The settlement will be funded primarily by insurance coverage, with diocesan funds totaling \$731,250. Such a settlement is costly for us as a Church, but it will allow us to move forward with all the good works we do on a daily basis. No funds from the Catholic Service Appeal, the Catholic Foundation, Catholic Charities, or parish funds were used in the settlement of these cases.

The Diocese of Jackson is committed to protecting children. Sexual misconduct by church personnel violates human dignity and the mission of the Church. The Diocese of Jackson is committed to ensuring that children being served by the Church are not at risk of sexual abuse by Church personnel. The spiritual well-being of all victims, their families, and others in the community is of particular concern to the Church. Beginning in 1986, the Diocese implemented a written policy and procedure regarding reporting and handling of sexual misconduct claims for lay and church personnel. That policy was updated in 1994 with the addition of a Diocesan Review Board and again in 2002 so that it would reflect the U.S. Bishops' Charter adopted in June 2002 in Dallas.

Again, I urge anyone who has been a victim of abuse by church personnel, who has not yet reported the abuse, to come forward and do so. Our victims' assistance coordinator, Linda Raff, a licensed social worker, is available to assist in making a report. Please contact Mrs. Raff at 601-355-8634, ext. 728. For more information about our policies and procedures, we encourage you to visit our diocesan website at www.jacksondiocese.org.

Press Notes:

1. The following cases are being settled: *Kenneth Morrison, et al. v. Catholic Diocese of Jackson, et al.*, Cause No. 251-02-744CIV; *John Does 2 through 5 v. Catholic Diocese of Jackson, et al.*, Cause No. 251-02-1819CIV; *John Does 6 through 9 v. Catholic Diocese of Jackson, et al.*, Cause No. 251-02-1816CIV; *John Does 10 and 11 v. Catholic Diocese of Jackson, et al.*, Cause No. 251-02-1814CIV; *John Doe 12 and Jane Does 1 and 2 v. Catholic Diocese of Jackson, et al.*, Cause No. 251-02-1812CIV; *John Does 13 and 14 v. Catholic Diocese of Jackson, et al.*, Cause No. 2004-0040.
2. Plaintiffs in the cases included the Morrison brothers who were previously profiled in the Jackson Free Press.
3. Plaintiff lawyer contact information: John F. Hawkins, Esquire, Baria, Hawkins & Stracener, PLLC (601) 969-9692; Anthony Simon, Esquire, Richmond, Simon & Abston; and, Ayres Haxton, Attorney at Law.
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