

July 16, 2007 - Cardinal Gives Apology - Los Angeles, CA
The New York Times, By LAURIE GOODSTEIN

A day after agreeing to a record-breaking \$660 million settlement with 508 people who said they were sexually abused by clergy members in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Cardinal Roger Mahony apologized this afternoon for "this horrible sin and crime" and said he hoped the settlement would bring a "final resolution."

Four years of legal combat ended in a settlement agreement late Saturday night - just two days before the Monday start of a trial in which Cardinal Mahony would have been forced to testify.

The settlement is the largest yet in any Catholic diocese - amounting to about \$1.3 million per person involved. The Roman Catholic Church in the United States has paid more than \$2 billion in settlements and legal judgments to victims of sexual abuse and their families.

Attorneys for the archdiocese and the plaintiffs said they are still negotiating details, but that they expect to present an agreement for approval to the judge in the trial on Monday morning.

Some Roman Catholic parishioners in Los Angeles said that they were eager to see the victims compensated, but that the drawn-out legal battle had soured them on Cardinal Mahony's leadership.

"I don't think they're getting enough money. There's no amount that can compensate them," said Cheryl Ortega, 59, a parishioner at Our Mother of Good Counsel church, in Los Feliz.

Steve Mills, 52, a parishioner there for 25 years, said he was appalled that the negotiations took so long and cost the archdiocese so much money that could have been used to help the poor or build schools.

"My opinion of the cardinal has gone down because of all this," Mr. Mills said. "And it seems with everybody I talk to this is true."

Cardinal Mahony said that \$250 million would be paid by the archdiocese, \$227 million by insurers and \$60 million by religious orders whose priests and brothers are accused of perpetrating some of the abuse. He said the remainder, \$123 million, would come from "other sources," including religious orders "not yet participating" in the settlement.

He said that to pay for the settlement, the archdiocese would sell some properties, liquidate some investments and borrow some money. He said the archdiocese would not need to end any "core" functions, or to sell any parish properties or schools.

The size of the settlement may reflect the archdiocese's tremendous financial risk had it taken these cases to trial, said Carl Tobias, the Williams Professor at the University of Richmond School of Law, in Virginia.

"California judges and juries are more used to big settlements, or big verdicts," he said. "When the defendants are more concerned about their exposure, there is more willingness to pay more in a settlement."

People in Los Angeles who contended they were sexually abused said they were eager to move on, but had some misgivings because they believe that Cardinal Mahony and other church leaders who were culpable would likely never be held personally accountable.

Tony Almeida, a Los Angeles firefighter, said he had been emotionally preparing himself to testify at the trial that was to open Monday that the Rev. Clinton Hagenbach repeatedly molested him and other altar boys, and once pinned him down and raped him. Mr. Almeida, who is 44, said he attributes his alcoholism, aggression, depression and two broken marriages, in part, to the abuse and the years of suppressing the memories.

"My life is just a mess. With therapy, I think I'm doing a little better. This settlement is not going to fix everything, I understand that," he said, but added, "It is a compensation for what I've gone through. But I still feel the church needs to be held accountable for what they've done to me, and my life."

