

8-12-08 - Chicago archdiocese settles priest sex-abuse cases for \$12.7 million

2 lawsuits involved convicted ex-clergyman Daniel McCormack

By Manya Brachear and Azam Ahmed, Chicago Tribune reporters

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago will pay \$12.7 million to settle lawsuits brought by clergy sex-abuse victims, including boys molested by Daniel McCormack, a former priest on the West Side, church officials said Tuesday.

The settlement covers cases involving 16 abuse survivors and 11 priests, including McCormack, who pleaded guilty last year to abusing five boys and has been sentenced to 5 years in prison. Two of the suits settled Tuesday involved McCormack, and the archdiocese said it has now settled four of the five cases against him.

Cardinal Francis George said he hoped the payouts would help bring closure for the victims.

"My hope is that these settlements will help the survivors and their families begin to heal and move forward," George said. "I apologize again today to the survivors and their families and to the whole Catholic community.

"We must continue to do everything in our power to ensure the safety of the children in our care."

Lawyers for the victims identified the priests or former priests involved in the settlement as McCormack, Joseph Bennett, Norbert Maday, Robert Mayer, James Hagan, Robert Craig, Robert Becker, Thomas Kelly, James Steel, Joseph Owens and Kenneth Ruge.

As George was announcing the settlement, two abuse victims and their lawyers held a somber news conference a short distance away to thank the archdiocese.

"This goes a long way to help those survivors in their recovery," said Jeff Anderson, one of the attorneys in the case, during the news conference at the Loop offices of Kerns, Frost & Pearlman.

Still, it was clear from the two victims that the settlement could not provide closure to an ugly chapter in their lives.

"After all these years burying it deep inside, suicide attempts, I know that it wasn't my fault," said Bob Brancato, who was abused by Steel, his priest at St. Joseph the Worker Church in Wheeling, when he was 12 and 13. "I now can have a life without the fear and shame that surrounds the abuse that we victims have gone through."

But there is no amount of time or money that can change what happened, Brancato said.

"The best way I can express this is you never get over this, you get used to it," he said.

The latest settlements bring the total number of abuse claims settled by the archdiocese to 250 over the last 30 years.