

Jury finds against Davenport diocese in priest abuse trial

DAVENPORT (AP) - A Scott County jury on Monday sided with a man who claimed that Diocese of Davenport officials did nothing to address the sexual abuse he suffered at the hands of a priest more than 40 years ago.

The jury, after deliberating for six hours, awarded the man about \$1.5 million in damages for future medical expenses, lost wages, lost function of the mind, and pain and suffering.

The man's attorney, Craig Levien, initially requested \$2.3 million in the lawsuit against the Davenport diocese, claiming church officials did nothing about sexual abuse allegations against Monsignor Thomas Feeney and other priests. The man claimed he was abused by Feeney from 1957 to 1963 while he served as an altar boy.

Levien later asked that Scott County jurors grant \$744,000 for pain and suffering.

In May, the diocese acknowledged that Feeney sexually molested children and encouraged victims to come forward. He has been named in at least six abuse cases.

The diocese had said it would go to court in this case because it couldn't afford to settle any more cases regarding alleged sexual abuse by its priests. In a statement issued Monday afternoon, the diocese said that it was "deeply saddened and disappointed with the finding of the jury."

"The Diocese believes that the evidence overwhelmingly showed that the Diocese had no knowledge of any abuse perpetrated by Monsignor Thomas Feeney over 40 years ago and that the statute of limitations should apply," the statement said.

During the trial, attorneys for diocese accused the man of exaggerating his story over the years and filing the lawsuit solely for monetary purposes after declaring bankruptcy a few years earlier.

They also noted during the trial that the man remained an altar boy after the alleged abuse stopped and had Feeney at his wedding in 1973.

After the verdict, the man said the case was not about money, but about getting answers from the diocese.

"This is about the victims," he said. "I feel better. Hopefully, we'll get some help for other people."

Steve Theisen, director of Iowa SNAP, or Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, said the group applauds the man for his courage, and the jury for its decision.

"We hope this verdict will encourage others who were hurt by clergy and are still suffering in shame, silence and self-blame to do what he did: find the strength to step forward, report the crime, and get help," Theisen said.

The trial began Sept. 11.

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