

Archdiocese reaches end of abuse cases

Nearly \$30 million spent since 2002

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The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Louisville has released its final accounting of more than four years of sexual-abuse related litigation that rocked the church and cost it \$29.7 million.

With the last of the abuse-related lawsuits resolved in April, the archdiocese is now -- for the first time since April 2002 -- free of litigation seeking financial damages for abuse by priests and others associated with the church.

(One lawsuit, filed in Wisconsin in August, is pending but seeks no money -- only the names of all abusers throughout the country.)

In an interview this week, Archbishop Thomas C. Kelly downplayed the significance of the accounting milestone.

"I would not use the expression 'closing the books,' " he said. "... I'm hoping that we have reached the victims. They are the primary concern in all of this. I hope we've got them all, but if we haven't, the door is always open and we're always anxious to help with counseling if we can."

He said the archdiocese also will continue efforts "to prepare our children and the people who work with children" to prevent and respond to sexual abuse.

Annual report

The archdiocese's latest figures come in its newly released annual accountability report, a wide-ranging audit of the church's finances and activities in the past year.

The audit said that in the fiscal year ending June 30, the church spent \$759,137 on settlements and other legal costs.

The audit also noted that church revenues exceeded the \$24.4 million spent last year for the archdiocese's headquarters and 21 agencies.

"Our financial health is good, and that's reflected in the financial statements," spokeswoman Cecelia Price said.

The report touts numerous accomplishments, such as the launching of a lay ministry training institute with 387 participants and the collection of nearly \$1 million for Gulf Coast hurricane relief.

In the area of sexual abuse, the archdiocese says its \$759,137 in expenses last year included:

\$350,000 in legal settlements and support for victims. The bulk of that, \$300,000, was spent in April to settle the last of more than 250 suits filed in 2002 and 2003, accusing the archdiocese of covering up sexual abuse by dozens of priests and others associated with the church.

\$339,135 in legal fees, most of which went for lawyers to respond to a second wave of lawsuits filed in 2004 over alleged abuse in archdiocese-owned orphanages. The plaintiffs in that case eventually dropped claims against the archdiocese and reached a \$1.5 million settlement with another defendant, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, which staffed the orphanages.

\$27,924 for prevention and education; \$16,882 for counseling for victims; \$3,669 for the archdiocese's share of a national audit; and \$21,527 in medical and housing costs for priests removed from ministry for sexual abuse.

Some accused priests have been removed from the priesthood, but the church continues to support some elderly priests who committed abuse and have been ordered to live out their days in prayer and penance.

Most went to settlements

Most of the \$29.7 million spent in expenses related to sexual abuse since 2002 went toward settlements with victims, which were not covered by insurance.

(The archdiocese did receive \$3.5 million in insurance and donations to defray legal fees and other expenses related to training and other items.)

The report said the archdiocese trained more than 2,000 people in the past fiscal year in preventing and reporting sexual abuse, bringing the total number of employees and volunteers trained to more than 10,000.

Vince Grenough of the local chapter of the lay activist group Voice of the Faithful acknowledged that the archdiocese has made strides in several areas.

But, "I would not like it if the impression was given that this completes the diocesan responsibility to all of the victims," he said. "We hear this from virtually all the survivors -- that the money wasn't important, what they wanted was for the bishops to reveal and to admit culpability and to open the records and warn other people where these priests still are."

Shannon Age, one of the victims who settled with the archdiocese in 2003, gave mixed reviews to the church's response.

"I think that they're trying, but they're not doing enough," she said. For example, while the church has counselors available to talk to any victims that contact the church, Age urged them to arrange more meetings at parishes, particularly at those where one or more abusers worked.

She said it's difficult for people to report their experiences being abused, but such meetings would "make it more possible for people to find the courage to come forward."