

Catholic Diocese of Jackson

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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 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**.

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