

Archdiocese reaches agreement with more than 500 claimants

LOS ANGELES - The Los Angeles Archdiocese July 15 announced the largest church settlement of sexual abuse lawsuits to date, agreeing to pay more than 500 alleged victims a total of \$660 million.

Cardinal Roger M. Mahony again offered his personal apology to every victim of sexual abuse by a priest, religious, deacon or layperson in the archdiocese.

“It is the shared hope of everyone in our local church that these victims, many of whom suffered in silence for decades, may find a measure of healing and some sense of closure with today’s announcement,” he said in a statement.

“Although financial compensation in itself is inadequate to make up for the harm done to the victims and their families, still this compensation does provide a meaningful outreach to assist the victims to rebuild their lives and to move forward,” he said.

The settlement - reached by attorneys for the archdiocese and 508 people suing the archdiocese - came the weekend before the first of 15 civil trials in Los Angeles County courts was to begin July 16. With the agreement in hand, Cardinal Mahony and attorneys for both sides were instead to appear in court to present the formal settlement to Judge Haley Fromholtz for approval.

The archdiocese in December had announced the settlement of 45 lawsuits for \$60 million.

Under the latest agreement, the archdiocese will pay \$250 million and the balance will come from a combination of payments from insurance carriers and religious orders whose members have been accused in the abuse cases.

In a statement announcing the agreement, Ray Boucher, lead attorney for the plaintiffs, and Michael Hennigan, who represents the archdiocese, said they were

confident they would have a workable proposal to present to the judge.

According to a tally prepared by the Los Angeles Times, the previous largest settlement of abuse cases in the United States since 2002 was the \$157 million the Boston Archdiocese agreed to pay to 983 claimants in several different settlement agreements. The Archdiocese of Portland, Ore., agreed to pay \$129 million to 315 claimants; the Diocese of Orange, Calif., agreed to pay \$100 million to 90 claimants and the Diocese of Covington, Ky., settled with 350 claimants for \$85 million.

Cardinal Mahony said the settlement and the one for \$60 million announced in November “will have very serious and painful consequences for the archdiocese.” He said the archdiocese will re-evaluate all ministries and services, “since we will not be able to offer them at the same levels as in the past.”

The archdiocese will sell “nonessential properties” to fund its portion of the settlement, he said, adding that no parish properties or schools would be affected.