

Jury orders Delaware parish to pay \$3 million to sex abuse victim

WILMINGTON, Del. – A Superior Court jury in Delaware’s Kent County has awarded clergy sex abuse victim John Vai \$3 million in damages from St. Elizabeth Church in Wilmington for the parish’s negligent supervision of former priest Francis DeLuca when he was stationed at the parish.

The jury also awarded Vai \$30 million in compensatory damages from DeLuca, who admitted in a deposition that he had abused Vai in the late 1960s.

According to news reports, the jury was to reconvene beginning Dec. 6 to decide whether to award additional punitive damages.

Wilmington Bishop W. Francis Malooly issued the following statement after the Dec. 1 verdict was announced:

“First and foremost, I wish to convey, once again, my sincere apology to Mr. John Vai for the suffering he experienced as a child at the hands of Francis DeLuca while DeLuca was a priest for the Diocese of Wilmington. I also reiterate my apologies to anyone who suffered child abuse by priests of this diocese, and I reaffirm my deep commitment to creating and sustaining a safe environment within the church for our children and youth.

“I am disappointed that the jury found the people of St. Elizabeth’s liable for the acts of Francis DeLuca,” he added. “It is unfortunate that the parish community of St. Elizabeth’s is being made to pay for the criminal and sinful acts of someone who was assigned by the diocesan bishop at the time to be one of their priests. It continues to be my position that the bishop of the diocese is responsible for the actions of the priests of his diocese.

“The diocese will continue to seek a just and equitable settlement with Mr. Vai and all survivors of sexual abuse through the mediation process which we have pursued in good faith since July of this year,” Bishop Malooly said.

Representatives of St. Elizabeth's Parish were not immediately available for comment.