



Catholic Church of Eastern Montana
DIOCESE OF GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS

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PRESS RELEASE

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Diocese of Great Falls-Billings moves toward settlement in abuse claims

The Diocese of Great Falls-Billings has taken a major step toward bringing resolution to 72 current claims of abuse of minors by diocesan priests, religious community priests, women religious and lay workers who have served in the diocese.

On March 31, 2017, the Diocese is filing a chapter 11 reorganization case before the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Montana to fulfill a pre-bankruptcy mediated negotiated agreement with known abuse survivors and the Diocese's liability insurance carrier.

Bishop Michael W. Warfel and the Diocese have chosen a pastoral approach which provided the basis for its having entered this confidential mediation process. The recent mediation resulted in the beginning stages of general parameters of proposed settlements with the victims and the insurance carrier. The details of that comprehensive agreement are still being worked on by the parties. Under the supervision and ultimate approval of the Bankruptcy Court, the diocese and its insurance carrier would both contribute to that comprehensive settlement, which would compensate the currently identified victims. There will be additional settlement funds for additional and unknown victims. The process of obtaining Bankruptcy Court approval included the opportunity for victims and creditors to vote on the proposed settlement. The Diocese expects that its reorganization will be expedited by the pre-bankruptcy negotiations with all the affected parties.

"On behalf of the entire Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, I express my profound sorrow and sincere apologies to anyone who was abused by a priest, a sister, or a lay Church worker," said Bishop, Warfel. "No child should experience harm from anyone who serves in the Church." Bishop Warfel also indicated: "I want to assure you that none of those who have been credibly accused remain active in parish ministry at this time. In fact, nearly all of those accused are deceased."

For over two decades, the diocese has had abuse prevention programs in place, including screening and training for employees, volunteers, priests and seminarians. The diocese has an independent board to review claims of abuse, whose members include several parents, a judge, two former law enforcement officers, a social worker, and a counselor. Anyone wishing to report sexual abuse of a minor may contact the Victim's Advocate for the diocese at (406) 750-2373 or victimassistancecoord@gmail.com.

Bishop Warfel indicated: "We remain unwaveringly committed to promoting the Good News of Jesus Christ. Once the reorganization proceedings conclude, we will be able to plan confidently for future ministry for the people of the Church of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings."
