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ABUSE | Order of nuns in Nelson County agrees to pay $1.5 million in abuse lawsuit

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sented by a different lawyer did not participate in the settlement, Adams said. Their cases remain pending.

Gail Miller of Clarksville, Ind., said last night that "I would have liked to have gone in front of a jury trial, but that probably wasn't going to happen." She said she was happy with the settlement.

"Even though they're still not admitting guilt, to me they're admitting guilt by settling," she added.

Gladys Cambron of Louisville said, "I'm just glad it is settled and we are able to get past it and put it behind us."

Diane Curtis, a spokeswoman for the order, said the money will come from various resources. The order is pursuing insurance, but because of the age of the cases that is proving difficult, she said.

The sisters believe they can continue ministry at current levels by carefully managing their funds, Curtis said.

The order said in a statement: "After much prayer and discernment, we have entered into a settlement. ... We have made this decision based on a number of reasons, most importantly a desire to bring about closure and healing for all involved in the lawsuits.

"... We want to emphasize that we believe in the goodness of the sisters and former members who were accused, most of whom are long dead."

McMurry said the settlement marks "the first time in United States history any victims of a Catholic orphanage have recovered (a payment due to) childhood sexual abuse." He said all other cases have been dismissed on the grounds they were filed too long after the alleged abuse.

The settlement "restores dignity to folks that have deserved it for so many decades," he said.

Asked if it was enough, he replied, "Quite frankly, when you're dealing with a charitable organization that takes a vow of poverty ... what are you to demand ...that gives you a sense of satisfaction that you've had your pound of flesh?"

Several plaintiffs praised McMurry for the way he handled the case, but not all were pleased with the settlement.

"Now we don't get our day in court," said Ann Wilson of Mississippi, 68, one of five biological sisters who filed suits. Her lawsuit said she was sexually abused by the Rev. Herman J. Lammers, the orphanage chaplain who died in 1986, and by a nun.

"I feel like we was not only forgotten about in the orphanage, that nobody believed us in the orphanage," but that "the system didn't care about us again."

"It's not about going to court and the jury awards you all this money, it's letting the world know how ... you were really" treated, she said.

On average, the settlement would bring $33,333 per plaintiff before legal costs, but McMurry said the way the money will be divided is confidential. He said his fee is 40 percent for most cases.

More than 20 plaintiffs accused Lammers of abusing them.

Lammers was director of Catholic Charities from 1939 to 1976 and a live-in chaplain at St. Thomas-St. Vincent Orphanage near Anchorage.

The St. Thomas-St. Vincent home, which closed in 1983, was formed by the merger of previously separate boys' and girls' orphanages. Plaintiffs alleged sexual abuse at all three orphanages.

The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth operated St. Thomas-St. Vincent on behalf of Catholic Charities, which owned it.

Many plaintiffs said in court documents that they complained to nuns about alleged abuse by Lammers and others but that nothing was done about it.

The litigation began in July 2004 when seven plaintiffs filed a lawsuit against the order. Other plaintiffs then joined in the suit.

The agreement was reached in a mediation session on July 27 and became public after the Sisters of Charity filed orders of dismissal that judges approved yesterday.

Some of the plaintiffs alleged sexual abuse by nuns at schools where they taught.

In 2003, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Louisville agreed to pay $25.7 million to 243 plaintiffs who alleged the archdiocese covered up the sexual abuse of children by dozens of priests and other church workers.

Reporter Peter Smith can be reached at (502) 582-4468.

The deal "restores dignity to folks," attorney William McMurry said.

SETTLEMENT FACTS

First lawsuit: Filed July 15, 2004.

Defendant: Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, an order of about 600 nuns based in Nelson County. Its members work in the United States and five foreign countries.

Plaintiffs: 45. (The lawsuits of two other plaintiffs remain active.)

Accusation: Sexual abuse at orphanages and schools supervised by the nuns.

Terms: $1.5 million payment. Nuns do not admit liability but agree not to refer to plaintiffs as "alleged victims."

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