

11-9-07 - Scranton Diocese to Pay \$3 Million in Sex Abuse Case

By SEAN D. HAMILL, The New York Times

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton, Pa., has agreed to pay \$3 million to a man who said that as a teenager he was sexually abused by one of its priests, it was announced yesterday.

The settlement is one of the largest individual awards made by a Catholic diocese to a victim of sexual abuse by clergy members, said lawyers familiar with such suits and the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests, a victims' rights group.

The settlement was reached Wednesday, after two days of testimony at a federal civil trial by priests and lay people revealed that the diocese had been warned about the conduct of the priest, Albert M. Liberatore Jr., "but the diocese did nothing about it," said the victim's lawyer, Daniel T. Brier.

The victim, who was not identified, had been scheduled to testify Wednesday. Mr. Brier said his client was now 22, lived in New York and hoped to become a lawyer.

Mr. Liberatore, who was defrocked in June 2006, pleaded guilty in 2005 to a criminal charge of attempted sexual abuse stemming from the case and was sentenced to 10 years of probation. Also in 2005, he received five years' probation in a separate case after pleading guilty to indecent assault and other charges.

As part of the settlement, the diocese agreed to set up a meeting with the victim's mother so that the diocese's former bishop, James C. Timlin, now retired, and the Rev. Joseph R. Kopacz, who was vicar of priests when the abuse occurred, could apologize to her.

In a statement, the diocese, which covers 11 counties and 200 parishes in northeastern Pennsylvania, said that part of the cost of the settlement would be paid for by insurance and part by the diocese, but that no parish money would be involved.

"Today's settlement represents the diocese's efforts to assist the victim to heal and to move on to achieve a productive and fulfilling life," the statement said.

Mr. Liberatore first met the victim in 1997 when he was 12 and the priest was helping to console the boy's mother as she coped with her husband's debilitating illness.

Then, starting in 1999 and continuing until 2002 — as the sexual abuse scandal in the church was gaining national attention, Mr. Brier noted — Mr. Liberatore repeatedly took advantage of his fatherlike position and abused the victim.

As soon as the victim came forward in 2004, the diocese said, it removed Mr. Liberatore from the ministry and began proceedings to defrock him.