



ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

Settlement Announcement

Statement by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.

July 1, 2008

For the past three years the Archdiocese of Denver has faced a series of lawsuits regarding the sexual abuse of minors by two priests of the archdiocese, Harold Robert White and Leonard Abercrombie. These lawsuits relate to incidents that occurred between the years 1954 and 1981. Both accused men are now deceased.

Recently, we have settled 16 lawsuits and two additional claims. All of these 18 claims involved White and Abercrombie, except for one claim against another priest, Lawrence St. Peter, who is also deceased. The archdiocese paid \$5,505,000 to settle these 18 claims. With the settlements announced today, only two lawsuits remain against the Archdiocese of Denver.

It is my hope that these settlements help the victims and their families to heal. I've offered to meet personally with every victim. Some of them have responded to this request. I've also met with some of their family members who have been open to meeting with me. I've expressed an apology on behalf of myself, our clergy, and the whole Catholic community and I apologize to them again today.

Since August 2005 when these lawsuits first began, the archdiocese has sought to mediate these claims rather than to litigate them. In May 2006, we established a mediation program, directed by retired Judge Richard Dana, and an independent mediation panel consisting of Littleton, Colorado Chief of Police Heather Coogan and rehabilitation specialist Jack Dahlberg. Through that voluntary process, the majority of the cases were resolved.

Some victims and their counsel desired mediation that involved a single mediator. For them, we initiated a separate voluntary mediation process. At the request of the plaintiffs' lawyers, the archdiocese agreed to use the services of mediator Richard Calkins, the former Dean of Drake Law School. Through the work of these mediation efforts, recently 16 lawsuits and two un-filed claims were resolved.

As a part of the latest settlements, the archdiocese made a portion of Robert White's file available to the plaintiffs because they believed it would help them heal and was central to the settlement. This was an unusual step for the archdiocese. We have always defended and will continue to defend the right to privacy of all our archdiocesan personnel. I took this step at the insistence of some victims and to secure closure for them, but also because Robert White is deceased and because of the number of cases against him.

The file shows that, prior to 1981, White engaged in wrongful behavior. The file also contains information about decisions made a quarter-century ago by archdiocesan officials that would not satisfy current archdiocesan policies for handling allegations of sexual abuse. In light of what we know today about sexual abuse, many of the decisions made by archdiocesan leadership during the years 1961 to 1981 regarding Robert White would now be very different. After 1981, White's file contains no evidence of abuse by him. Judge Dana has confirmed this fact to the satisfaction of plaintiffs' attorneys.

We cannot undo the sins and failures of the past. Neither can we undo the suffering these events caused. White's file, despite its painful content, stands in sharp contrast to the life of our Church. For the last 20 years, the archdiocese has worked hard to understand the nature of sexual abuse, to prevent it and to protect our children from it. Our strict policy is that no priest, deacon or lay employee with a credible allegation of sexual misconduct with a minor is allowed to minister in our archdiocese.

These past experiences of sexual abuse have been tragic for those who've endured them and for the wider Church community. Victims need our help and support for their continued healing. I'm grateful that they've accepted mediation and I continue to pray they find peace in this resolution.