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Jesuit Diocese in Bankruptcy Compensates Abuse Victims

The Northwest Jesuits and their insurers have agreed to a \$166.1 million settlement to compensate more than 500 victims of sexual and physical abuse in five states. Some accounts of abuse date back as far as the 1940's and originate from dioceses from Alaska to Montana.

The agreement to make compensation came 766 days after the region's Jesuit leadership filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The filing came after a long series of payouts by the Portland-based Society of Jesus (Oregon province) amounting to about \$25 million in abuse claims dating back to 2001.

Lawyers representing a total of 534 creditors said most of their clients were sexually abused by Jesuit priests across the province, which encompasses Oregon, Washington, Montana, Idaho and Alaska. About 25 creditors said they were subjected to physical abuse by priests and nuns.

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This latest settlement of \$166.1 million is the highest payout by a Catholic order or diocese since the US Catholic church's sex abuse scandals broke out in 2002 in the Archdiocese of Boston.

The settlement agreement stipulates that the province will pay \$48.1 million and its insurer, Safeco, will pay \$118 million. About \$6.4 million of that money will go into a pool to settle future claims. Up to 40% of the settlement money will be used to pay attorneys and settle legal fees.

None of the Jesuit properties, including Beaverton's Jesuit High School, Seattle University or Spokane's Gonzaga University will be affected by the settlement. However, the settlement agreement does not annul 37 lawsuits filed last month against Jesuit High, Gonzaga University and other organizations. In these lawsuits, plaintiffs are claiming about \$3.1 million that the province paid out before filing for bankruptcy last year. There are also up to 7 other claims lawyers are pursuing from two of the Jesuits' insurers apart from the settlement.

The Society of Jesus Oregon province's top official, Rev. Patrick Lee declined to comment on the settlement, saying, "Due to the Society of Jesus, Oregon Province's current Chapter 11 Bankruptcy status, as well as out of respect for the judicial process and all involved, we will not comment on today's announcement."

Although none of the 1,245 students presently studying at Jesuit High is affected, the school's president, John Gladstone said the settlement gave

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him a sense of satisfaction for victims. Others who were beneficiaries of the good works of the Jesuits were gutted to hear the news about the settlement.