

SAN FRANCISCO

Diocese settles 4 abuse lawsuits

Victims will receive total of \$4 million

By Jaxon Van Derbeken
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The San Francisco Roman Catholic Archdiocese has agreed to pay a total of \$4 million to settle four lawsuits filed by victims of defrocked Monsignor Patrick O'Shea, who recently acknowledged in civil depositions to having molested altar boys over several years.

The suits against O'Shea were among 60 cases filed against the archdiocese in 2003 under a state law that allowed alleged victims one year to file claims seeking damages for decades-old abuse. Hundreds of other similar suits have been filed against other dioceses in California.

Of the suits naming San Francisco's archdiocese, 31 have been settled for a total of \$41 million, said Maurice Healy, an archdiocese spokesman. Insurance payouts cover about two-thirds of the cost, he said.

The four cases resolved Friday targeted O'Shea, 72, who has twice escaped prosecution on molestation cases because courts ruled the charges were filed after the statute of limitations expired. He was convicted last year of embezzling about \$200,000 from the church and was sentenced to time served.

The largest settlement award was for \$1.7 million for Kenneth McDonald of San Francisco. He was an 11-year-old altar boy and student at Mission Dolores Basilica when O'Shea began molesting him in 1968, he said.

The molestation continued for two years during trips to Lake Berryessa, where the priest owned a cabin, according to McDonald's suit.

O'Shea said in depositions in the case that although he had gotten some boys drunk during trips to Lake Berryessa and molested them, McDonald was not one of them.

McDonald's attorney, David Mattingly, called the settlement a proper one for his client.

"My client is pleased that his rights were vindicated and that there was an acknowledgement by the church that wrongdoing occurred," Mattingly said.

Healy did not have details about the other three settlements, and attorneys for the plaintiffs in those cases could not be reached.

Bishop John Wester, administrator for the archdiocese, said that "it is our hope that the settlements will help to provide lasting healing to these individuals for the suffering they have endured. On behalf of the archdiocese, I express my sincere apology for the pain felt by victims of clergy child abuse. While we cannot change the past, we can ensure diligent efforts to protect children in the future."

O'Shea served in local churches for 36 years starting in 1958, and for many years was pastor at St. Cecilia's parish in San Francisco's Parkside district. He was also director of the San Francisco Society of the Propagation of the Faith, which supports the church's missionary work, and once headed an outreach program to the gay and lesbian community. He was defrocked in 1994, after the molestation accusations arose.

Healy said two lawsuits are still pending in which plaintiffs claim that O'Shea molested them.



Patrick O'Shea

E-mail Jaxon Van Derbeken at jvanderbeken@sfchronicle.com.