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Diocese settles more abuse claims

\$1.7 million paid in cases of four people who said priests molested them

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In 2003, Jeff Alfieri, a burly 43-year-old business agent for Teamsters Local 117, drove to the parking lot of Holy Family Parish in Kirkland and shot himself in the head. It was months after he told his parents and the archdiocese that the Rev. Gerald Moffat had repeatedly molested him in the early '70s.

Yesterday, lawyers for Alfieri's estate and parents said the Archdiocese of Seattle had settled the case for \$600,000. But the dollar figure did little to ease their grief -- or even offer resolution.

"Getting the money, I can't tell you what an empty feeling that is," said Sue Alfieri, Jeff's mother. "To equate the life of someone with money, it's just horrible."

Both she and her husband, Ralph, said the ordeal had only convinced them to keep working to ensure that the church is held accountable into the future.

"The question is really, what's happening now?" said Ralph Alfieri. "Does a settlement end the problem with the church? That just answers the economic part of the claim, but we still don't know what's really happening. It's like the lights are off in the stadium, but the game is still going on and we can't see it."

Most troubling of all to the Alfieris is their lack of knowledge about exactly what sanctions were brought against the priest. Moffat, most recently a pastor at St. Hubert Parish in Langley, was placed on administrative leave in 2002, after Alfieri accused him of abuse. A lawyer for the archdiocese said the 74-year-old priest is effectively retired but is awaiting a final decision from the Vatican on his status.

Moffat's lawyer, Steve Moen, said the priest denies the accusations and had been saddened by Alfieri's death.

"He regretted very much that the man took his life," Moen said.

The Alfieris' attorney, Mary Fleck, also announced the settlement of a case involving three siblings -- two sisters and a brother -- who said they were abused by the Rev. Edmund Boyle over the course of two years in the late '50s. The siblings, who filed anonymously last year, received a total of \$1.1 million, the law firm said.

The siblings said Boyle, while assigned to St. James Cathedral, molested them in their childhood home, on camping trips and in the rectory. Boyle died in 1995 at age 78, after retiring in 1984 and moving to Nevada.

The archdiocese has said it was not aware of any problems with Boyle until 1987, when, according to the Reno Gazette, he was charged with exposing himself to a 12-year-old mentally retarded boy in a

Reno hospital while working there as a part-time chaplain. Boyle pleaded guilty to one count of lewdness with a child.

"Although they have settled with the archdiocese, Father Boyle is dead," Fleck said of the siblings, who live in the Puget Sound area. "It's hard to feel like they've really gotten justice."

Several calls to the Seattle Archdiocese were not returned yesterday.

Earlier this week, The Associated Press reported that dioceses across the country have incurred more than \$1 billion in abuse-related costs over five decades -- a figure guaranteed to rise, possibly by tens of millions of dollars, with hundreds of claims pending.

The AP found that a compensation fund of as much as \$120 million, announced last week by the Diocese of Covington, Ky., pushed the figure past the billion-dollar mark. A large share of the costs -- at least \$378 million -- has come in just the past three years, when the crisis erupted in the Boston Archdiocese and spread nationwide.

Monsignor Francis Maniscalco, a spokesman for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said church leaders believe the payouts "should be just to all sides."

The bishops are set to meet in Chicago next week to review their plan for protecting youngsters.

The exact financial effect on the church is hard to determine, since each diocese owns property separately and settles cases on its own.

But some of the damage is plain. The Boston Archdiocese and several others have agreed to sell property to cover multimillion-dollar settlements, and three dioceses -- Portland, Ore.; Tucson, Ariz.; and Spokane -- have filed for bankruptcy.

MILLIONS PAID OUT

Attorneys yesterday announced that the Archdiocese of Seattle has agreed to pay \$1.7 million to settle the cases of four people who said they were sexually abused by priests decades ago, including one man who committed suicide outside the parish where he said he had been raped as a child.

Including those settlements, the archdiocese has paid at least \$17.7 million in expenses related to more than 100 sexual abuse cases, including restitution, therapy bills and legal fees. That includes a \$7.87 million settlement reached in 2003 for 15 men who said they were molested by the Rev. James McGreal, a serial pedophile who worked as a priest in the archdiocese for 40 years.

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