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## CHURCH SETTLES WITH VICTIMS

COVINGTON DIOCESE TO PAY \$5.1 MILLION

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The **Diocese** of Covington has agreed to pay more than \$5.1 million to 27 people who were sexually abused by Roman Catholic priests and religious workers.

Attorneys for the **diocese** and lawyers for the victims reached settlements Friday. The agreements must be approved by the courts.

Covington Bishop Roger J. Foys praised the outcome.

"On my own behalf and on behalf of the **Diocese** of Covington, I am very pleased that we are able to take this important step, and I pray that it will be the beginning of healing and reconciliation with those who have been deeply hurt as children by priests," he said in a statement released yesterday.

Twenty-two of the victims had brought suit in Fayette Circuit Court and were represented by Lexington attorney **Angela Ford**. Ford also represented two other victims who had not yet filed suit. The three other victims were represented by Covington attorney Barbara D. Bonar.

While sex abuse lawsuits are often contentious, Bishop Foys sought to avoid a lengthy and acrimonious court battle.

In August, he traveled twice to Lexington to personally apologize for the sexual abuse. He held individual meetings with 16 victims, listened to their concerns and promised to do all he could to prevent abuse in the future.

"Bishop Foys deserves a great deal of credit for the success of these negotiations," Ford said. "He was committed to helping these victims of abuse."

Ford's clients were abused in the 1960s and 1970s, when Lexington and Eastern Kentucky were part of the Covington **diocese**. That's why it is the Covington **diocese** -- not the Lexington **diocese** -- which is taking responsibility.

Ford's 24 clients will split \$4,415,000: an average of about \$184,000 per person, before legal fees.

The three other victims -- who said they were abused at St. Patrick's Church in Maysville almost 35 years ago -- will split \$750,000.

The amount of money individual victims receive will depend in part on the severity of the abuse they endured, Ford said. The abuse ranged from inappropriate touching to rape.

About \$3.2 million of the settlement funds will be paid by the **diocese's** insurer. The rest of the money will come from the church's "accumulated savings," said Covington diocesan spokesman Tim Fitzgerald.

The settlement comes one month after the Boston archdiocese agreed to pay \$85 million to settle lawsuits brought by more than 550 victims. In June, the Louisville archdiocese agreed to pay \$25.7 million to 243 victims.

The Covington **diocese's** settlements don't mean they're free of litigation.

Two people who say they were abused by priests are still bringing suit in Fayette Circuit Court. In addition, a class action lawsuit is being brought in Boone County Circuit Court.

But for these 27 people, the legal battles are apparently over.

Libby Jones, a Lexington woman who was sexually abused by Father Leonard Nienaber when she was a student at Mary Queen of the Holy Rosary School, said she is satisfied with the settlement -- and glad that she won't have to go through a trial.

"I don't want to relive that. I want to find some peace," she said.

Jones has already testified before a grand jury about the abuse, which began when she was in second grade and continued through eighth grade.

She says she told church workers "many times" -- during the period when the abuse was occurring -- about Nienaber's predatory behavior, but wasn't believed.

Years later, a grand jury believed her and other victims. In 1994, Nienaber pleaded guilty

to charges of sex abuse crimes from 1964 to 1977. Now, a bishop is listening and believing her, too.

But the wounds have not healed. She has nightmares, and it's too painful for her to attend a Roman Catholic Church.

"I have attempted to go back several times. I cannot sit through a Mass without crying yet," she said. "When I get to that point, I'll know I'm on the right road."

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Abuse costs Louisville Archdiocese pays out \$500,000 in addition to \$25.7 million settlement. Page B4