

# National Report

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## Rare Kind of Scandal Accord in Spokane Diocese

By SARAH KERSHAW

SEATTLE, Feb. 1 — The Roman Catholic Diocese of Spokane, Wash., one of three in the country to have filed for bankruptcy in the aftermath of the sexual abuse scandals, agreed Wednesday to pay nearly \$46 million to settle claims by 75 people who allege abuse by priests, lawyers involved in drawing up the settlement said.

If approved by a bankruptcy court and the plaintiffs, the agreement will provide one of the largest payouts per victim of any of the settlements reached across the nation since the church encountered crisis in 2002 with disclosure of abuse in the Boston Archdiocese.

But victims' advocacy groups and lawyers familiar with the agreement's details said it was also significant because it included rare nonfinancial concessions by Bishop William S. Skylstad.

Among those concessions is an agreement by the diocese to stop referring to "alleged victims" of priests' abuse rather than simply "victims," said Tim Kosnoff, one of the plaintiffs' lawyers. The victims, Mr. Kosnoff said, are to be allowed to return to the parishes where they came into contact with their molesters and possibly face them, a provi-

sion that victims' groups said appeared to be a first. They will also be permitted to write about their experiences in the diocesan newspaper, with a full page devoted to that purpose each month for the next three years.

Further, Mr. Kosnoff said, the bishop will lobby state lawmakers to abolish statutes of limitations on child sex crimes and will go to every parish where any plaintiff was abused, tell the parishioners that an abusive priest had ministered there and encourage them to report any suspicions of abuse.

Diocesan officials did not return telephone calls seeking comment Wednesday.

But at a televised news conference, Bishop Skylstad, who is also president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, said, "To those of you who say this settlement will be a burden, I would say that this scandal is a burden we can no longer afford not to resolve."

The bishop apologized to the victims in his 82-parish diocese "for the terrible wrongs inflicted on you in the past."

David Clohessy, national director of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests, based in Chicago, said the nonfinancial "prevention

and healing reforms are unusual and encouraging."

Mr. Clohessy, who was in Spokane on Wednesday and said he had read most of the settlement's details, added, "It's very tough to get bishops to agree to much of anything else, to say, 'Look, you were hurt,' rather than " 'You've got us over a barrel, here's some money, go away.' "

In addition to the Spokane Diocese, which sought bankruptcy protection in 2004, the Dioceses of Portland, Ore., and Tucson, Ariz., have also filed for bankruptcy in the face of costly sex-abuse claims.

In the Portland and Spokane cases, judges have ruled that all parish and church buildings are legal assets, after the dioceses argued that other than the chancelleries and other main buildings, they did not technically own those properties.

Those rulings were important, Mr. Clohessy said, because they vastly increased the assets considered available for payments to plaintiffs seeking compensation for sexual abuse.

A federal judge in Portland ruled last month that trials involving as many as 100 plaintiffs there could move forward. The Tucson Diocese reached a \$22.2 million settlement last summer.