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Winter scores/standings
High school calendar
Sports video player
Past Sports Standings, Scores
Every week
Past Pictures of the Day
Okanogan County Commissioners
Ferry County Commissioners
Elected Officials
Okanogan Centennial
Chronicle construction
Class Reunions
Meeting notices
Legal Notices
Real Estate Sales
School menus
This week's front news page
This week's front sports page
Links/Blogs
A Journal of Healing
Trisha Weighs In
AG Blog: All Consuming
Eagle Newspapers
Road conditions/web cams
Eastern Washington weather
Malo/Curlwe News
National Weather Service
OCTN Omak-Okanogan Shuttle Schedule
Pollen Count
National Forest rec reports
Okanogan school 2006-07 calendar
Omak school Key Communicator
Grizzly Bear Outreach Project blog

Posted: Friday, Jan. 4, 2008 - 3:53 p.m. PST
\$4.8 million settles abuse complaint against former Omak Jesuits

The Society of Jesus, Oregon Province, and 16 claimants who attended St. Mary's Mission and School near Omak on the Colville Indian Reservation announced Jan. 3 they had reached a settlement.

The settlement for \$4.8 million concerns allegations of abuse by a Jesuit priest and a Jesuit brother in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The terms of the settlement include the money to be shared among the claimants, as well as a personal commitment by the Provincial of the Oregon Province to raise at least \$200,000 over the next year for a homeless shelter or homeless services in the Omak area.

"I am profoundly sorry for the pain and suffering of these people, and for the violation of trust which they have felt," said the Very Rev. John D. Whitney S.J., Provincial Superior of the Oregon Province.

"It was at the invitation of the Native communities that Jesuits first came to the Northwest, and we hold that as a sacred calling," he said. "We are deeply apologetic for the ways in which we have not fully realized the grace of this invitation. We hope that this settlement can be the beginning of a healing process by which these survivors and the whole community can become stronger and more at peace."

"We are very pleased that this settlement was reached without the long and grueling battle in the courts we've seen in too many other cases," said Spokane attorney John Allison, who represented the claimants along with attorneys Michael Pfau and Timothy Kosnoff of Seattle.

The allegations involve Fr. John Morse and Br. James Gates and were initially brought forward during the Spokane Diocese bankruptcy proceedings in 2006. While he denies the allegations and may yet seek reinstatement through an appeal to the Province Review Board, Morse was removed from active ministry when the Province was first notified, in accordance with Province policies. Morse currently lives in Spokane, under a safety plan reviewed and approved by Praesidium Corporation. Gates lives, similarly, in a facility in Michigan, where he is also under a safety plan.

Today's settlement recognizes the claimants' allegations, provides them with financial compensation, and supports a social service cause that serves the entire community, according to Allison.

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- Department of health warns of possible parrot fever
- State to open Patterson Lake Jan. 1 for fishing
- Fire destroys Omak house Wednesday evening
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