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## Diocese, Priest to Settle Sex-Abuse Suits

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OGDENSBURG (AP) — The Ogdensburg Roman Catholic Diocese has agreed to pay a total of \$180,000 to four women who accused a former priest of sexually abusing them as children and fraudulently practicing medicine on them.

The diocese had faced \$17 million in lawsuits from the women, who claimed they were abused by the Rev. Liam O'Doherty in the 1980s and 1990s while he was a priest assigned to St. Andrew's Catholic Church in Sacketts Harbor and the now-closed St. Michael's Catholic Church in Antwerp.

"This ends the litigation with these parties against Liam O'Doherty and the diocese," said the Rev. Terry LaValley, a diocesan spokesman.

Despite the settlement, O'Doherty categorically denies any wrongdoing, his attorney said.

"He didn't have sexual contact with any of them," said Peter Carmen, O'Doherty's lawyer.

O'Doherty is contributing \$15,000 to the settlement because he thought it impossible to get a fair trial in this environment of clergy sexual-abuse scandals, Carmen said.

O'Doherty, 63, served as a priest at seven parishes in northern New York, beginning in 1966. In 1999, the diocese relieved him of his privileges to perform as a priest, but he remains a priest. He resides at Vianney Renewal Center, a retreat for priests in Dittmer, Mo.

The settlement does not bar O'Doherty from again performing priestly duties or include any requirement that the diocese take steps to make him leave the priesthood, Carmen said.

A Franklin County grand jury accused O'Doherty in February 1979 of having sexual contact with three 14-year-old girls while he was a parish priest in St. Regis Falls. The Ogdensburg diocese permitted O'Doherty to return to parish work after the misdemeanor sexual-abuse charges were dismissed.

The four women in the latest lawsuit alleged that the diocese was negligent for not warning them of O'Doherty's propensity to abuse women and children.

One woman said O'Doherty sexually abused her in 1991 when she was 10 years old at St. Andrew's Rectory in Sacketts Harbor.

Another woman said O'Doherty often fondled her breasts between 1985 and 1991, when she was 8 to 13 years old, and once forced her to sleep nude with him in the rectory.

An Oswego County woman alleged that in 1998, when she was 22 and O'Doherty was pastor at St. Michael's Church in Antwerp, he told her he was a licensed physician and persuaded her to let him perform a vaginal exam.

A second Oswego County woman accused O'Doherty of fraudulently posing as a psychiatrist and counseling her.