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Diocese Settles: \$150,000, 'Apology' a Letter of " Pastoral Concern" Satisfies an Oswego Family in a Molestation Case

By Jim O'Hara
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The Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse agreed Friday to pay an Oswego County family \$150,000 - and offered a letter of apology - to settle a lawsuit accusing a former priest of molesting two young boys more than a decade ago.

"I feel pretty happy right now," the boys' mother said Friday after agreeing to the settlement. "I feel we had a victory today."

The money was about three times what had previously been offered to settle the lawsuit. It was the letter of apology, however, that clinched the deal, according to the woman and her lawyer, Mark David Blum.

"That's exactly what I wanted," the woman said.

According to Blum, the diocese agreed to provide a letter reading, "Please accept this letter as an apology for any unfortunate happenings which you feel may have occurred to you and your family stemming from your participating in church activities."

Paul Hanrahan, the lawyer for the diocese, said he would not characterize the letter as an apology. He said he thought it was "a brief statement of probably pastoral concern."

However it was characterized, it settled the case that was set to go to trial Monday before state Supreme Court Justice William R. Roy.

The case involved allegations that the former Rev. Daniel W. Casey Jr. molested the 10- and 12-year-old brothers during an outing to the Laker Hall swimming pool and gymnasium in December 1987. Casey was then the associate pastor at St. Paul's Church in Oswego and director of religious education at the parish's elementary school. He since has resigned from the priesthood.

The lawsuit, filed in 1992 and seeking \$16 million in damages, claimed church and school officials were negligent in hiring Casey and monitoring his activities because they knew or should have known about his "propensity" to engage in offensive sexual conduct with young boys.

Friday's settlement is the second one involving allegations against Casey. The diocese recently agreed to a reported payment of \$325,000 to settle claims Casey molested another Oswego boy back in 1988 and 1989.

Blum said he was prepared to present evidence at trial next week that Bishop Thomas Costello had admitted to several witnesses that church officials were aware of a problem with Casey and had been trying to deal with him for 15 years. Roy recently ruled Blum could call witnesses to testify about those reported conversations with Costello.

"I hope the Church has learned a lesson," Blum said Friday after agreeing to the settlement. "I hope they now clean up their house."

The boys' mother said she appreciated the Church's willingness to accept responsibility, adding it was an important step in her sons' therapy. But she said she and others will continue to press for change in order to help other victims of abuse by priests in the Church.

"We do love the Church and appreciate their willingness to accept a little of the responsibility for what happened," she said Friday.

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