



Saint Matthew's / Saint Mary / Saint Francis

DIOCESE SETTLES SEX ABUSE CASES Homily, July 29/30 by Fr. Wirkes, Abuse Settlement

My brothers and Sisters, Thanks be to God that an ugly, horrible chapter in the Diocese of Syracuse, which first came to light in 2001, has finally come to an end. The Diocese has reached a settlement with the 411 victims of sexual abuse who were suing the Diocese and individual Parishes for the crimes committed against them as minors, and covered up by Church authorities.

We fully acknowledge that the Church, through some of its priests, lay employees and volunteers violated the sacred trust given to us in the horrible crime of abuse. These acts have caused extreme pain to those individuals who suffered and their families. Nothing can ever fully heal those who were abused, but with this settlement they will receive some little bit of justice in this life.

The Diocese has agreed to contribute \$100 million dollars into the "Victims Trust Fund", and the victims have agreed to drop their lawsuits. The Diocese will contribute \$50 million dollars, the 119 Parishes will contribute \$45 million dollars and other Catholic entities will contribute \$ 5 million dollars.

The Diocese entered into "Bankruptcy Protection Proceedings" in June of 2020 (3 years ago). This process enables the victims to receive a just amount in reparation for the crimes committed against them, while the Diocese and each Parish retain enough money to continue operating as normal.

What does this mean for our three Parishes? St. Matthew's will contribute \$345,240.00 to the Victims Trust Fund; St. Francis will contribute \$346,582.00 and St. Mary's will contribute \$ 487,863.00. Where will we get this money? From our savings accounts which have been built up over a generation.

What will we have left to operate our Parishes? St. Matthew's will have \$331,701.00; St. Francis will have \$ 332,991.00 and St. Mary's will have \$415,863.00.

Why do all of the Parishes have to contribute? With this agreement, Parishes will not be liable for individual lawsuits that could reach millions of dollars and force the disruption of all ministries in a given Parish. Legally, this is known as a "Channeling Injunction" which prohibits any further liability for the Parish.

Further, as Parishes that make up the Diocese of Syracuse, we all have a responsibility to bring whatever healing and reconciliation we can to survivors of abuse.

Soon after these crimes were revealed in 2001, the Diocese established the "Safe Environment Program", which insures that all Church employees and volunteers who are in close proximity to children and minors are fully investigated and trained in Safe Environment Protocols. These Protocols are strictly enforced.

Also, and very importantly, soon after 2001, the Diocese entered into a compact with the District Attorneys of the seven Counties which make up the Diocese. If an allegation of sexual abuse is made, it is immediately turned over to the District Attorney and local law enforcement. They, and not the Church, handle the entire matter within the Criminal Justice system.

A letter from Bishop Lucia to us is in all Church Bulletins this weekend. Details of the Settlement, Frequently asked Questions and a video from the Bishop can be found on our website www.faithalive1.com, or the Diocesan website www.syracusediocese.org.

Thanks be to God we are now entering a new phase in the life of the Diocese and Parishes. An ugly Chapter has ended and we begin a new era of Praising God, serving others and witnessing to the Gospel in our lives. May God bless the victims with healing, and all of us with grace and hope.

Yours in Christ, Fr. Wirkes