

# Archdiocese sent nearly bankrupt

Catholic properties are sold to help pay compensation to child-abuse victims

By HARRY MOUNT  
NEW YORK

THE pedophile scandal in Boston three years ago nearly sent the Catholic archdiocese bankrupt.

Boston's archbishop, Cardinal Law, was forced to resign, and, in the largest settlement by a US diocese to resolve sexual abuse claims, great tracts of church land were sold, the archbishop's Italianate palazzo was put on the market and dozens of parishes had to close.

The church was ordered to pay \$US120 million (\$A150 million) compensation after it emerged in January 2002 that priests had abused 815 children over the previous 50 years.

There were 550 lawsuits by abuse victims, who got between \$US80,000 and \$US300,000 in a settlement that new Archbishop Sean O'Malley brokered.

The archdiocese had to sell 15 properties and much of its head-

quarters, including the archbishop's residence and 22.6 adjoining hectares, for \$US100 million.

Archbishop O'Malley pledged that no parish or archdiocese operating money would be used to settle the cases.

But more than 40 parishes have closed since the scandal, as the archdiocese pays legal bills and other debts, as well as debts brought on by declining attendance.

Sexual abuse scandals are said to affect almost all 194 US dioceses, and more than 1200 priests are thought to have abused more than 4000 children over the past six decades.

The first victim to sue the church went public in Louisiana in 1984.

Estimates of the ongoing financial cost to the 194 Roman Catholic dioceses in the US range from \$US300 million to more than \$US1 billion.

The previous highest pay-

ments before the Boston scandal were in the Dallas diocese in 1998, when \$US23.4 million was paid to eight altar boys and the family of a ninth. In Bridgeport, Connecticut, the diocese paid \$US12 million to settle 26 cases in 2001.

Two Catholic dioceses in northern California have settled 42 clergy child sex-abuse lawsuits for \$US45.6 million, the lawyer for the plaintiffs said on Thursday.

Lawyer Larry Drivon said he was in "intense negotiations" with two other Catholic dioceses in northern California to try to settle more than 100 other similar lawsuits.

The nearly \$US46 million in settlements notched on Wednesday include the second largest such agreement for a California diocese.

The largest settlement was an agreement by Orange County's diocese to pay \$US100 million to 90 plaintiffs. TELEGRAPH, REUTERS



LEFT: Cardinal Bernard Law was forced to resign. ABOVE: Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, who faced calls to resign. BELOW: Christopher Clonan, who fled to Australia. Pictures: AP, Reuters



## More claims on way, church told

By STEPHEN BATES  
LONDON

THE Catholic Church in Britain has been warned it is likely to face further claims for compensation for the prolonged sexual abuse of children by a priest.

The warning came after the English High Court awarded a priest's victim a record £635,000 (\$A1.49 million) damages.

The figure, awarded to a man, 35, who was abused over 10 years by Christopher Clonan, is the largest settlement the church has conceded in Britain and is the first claim decided at a court hearing.

The man, known as A, was abused between the ages of seven and 18, from 1977 to 1988, while Clonan was an assistant parish priest at the Christ the King Church in Coventry.

The court was told the victim was now schizophrenic, suffered post-traumatic stress disorder and had lived for the past five years in a mental health home.

Justice Clarke, hearing the case in Manchester, said: "A told no one of the abuse until 1992. Thereafter his life fell apart. He has never been the same again and has never regained the same

enthusiasm for life that he once had.

"The revelation of the abuse had severe consequences for his family ... (Clonan) was trusted and admired. The abuse was the grossest breach of the trust that A and his family placed in him."

The court heard that Clonan had begun by fondling the boy and later the abuse proceeded to mutual masturbation. By the time the boy was 12 he was being anally raped and forced to perform oral sex. Clonan told the boy he would not be believed if he made accusations.

When the allegations came to light in 1992, Clonan fled to Australia, where he is believed to have died in 1998. A West Midlands police investigation was stalled when documents were lost.

The award is a serious setback to the church's efforts to recover from abuse scandals that culminated in calls for Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor to resign.

A spokesman for law firm Clifton Ingram said the firm was representing eight further claimants, and added: "This could quite feasibly cost the church millions and millions of pounds." GUARDIAN