# Bishop Paul Sirba’s remarks at the press conference (as prepared)

Today, the bankruptcy court has approved the joint agreement we reached earlier this year with survivors of clergy sexual abuse. This means survivors of clergy sexual abuse will receive financial compensation for what they have suffered, and the diocese will emerge from bankruptcy after four years.

Our first thoughts today are with the innocent people who suffered abuse. We know that no amount of money can heal their suffering. We believe only Jesus brings that kind of healing. But for us the compensation can be a sign of our repentance and accountability and solidarity. Those who have suffered abuse in the Church are, in our eyes, our brothers and sisters who have been harmed. They deserve and always have deserved our particular love and support. Their courage and insistence in speaking out, while hopefully helping them on their journey of healing, has also helped us to be accountable and to do the right things in ways we had not managed to do on our own. I thank them for this.

The agreement will affect the whole diocese. We will be a poorer church financially for many years. In addition to insurance money and funds from the diocese itself, each of the more than 70 parishes in our diocese has voluntarily contributed to the settlement, as have many other Catholic entities in the diocese. The diocese has contributed from savings, from the sale of the bishop’s residence, and by going into debt.

In terms of our faith, we are experiencing a purification that continues. The faithful of the diocese have had a mix of emotions: compassion for those hurt, anger at those who hurt them or failed to protect them, disappointment, frustration, grief, doubt, betrayal, fear, fatigue, and more.

As Catholics, we believe that we share a communion, a unity, in Jesus, and within that, when one person among us suffers we all suffer, and when one sins, we are all wounded by it. My invitation for the Catholic faithful is to think of these events in that light. Even if we have not been abused ourselves, we have a share in the suffering of those who did. Even though we didn’t commit the evils of abuse or its cover-up personally, we still have a share in making reparation for our brothers who did. Our clergy have already taken that on in a very concrete way, donating more than $70,000 of their own money to the settlement, in grief at what their brothers in ministry have done.

I’m mindful, too, of a danger of fatigue. In our diocese, we have been working hard since 1992 to wipe this scourge of abuse from our midst, and it has made a vast difference. From the daily headlines, it seems at times our whole society is learning these lessons too. But without vigilance in putting what we’ve learned into practice, what’s to prevent a recurrence? We can’t grow weary here. Today’s events don’t mean it’s “all over now.” It should give us the humility and determination to keep that commitment to protecting the vulnerable in our midst. Many of those commitments are also reflected in our settlement.

The mission for the Church here in Duluth remains what it has always been, and it’s a hopeful and essential one: holiness and faithfulness to Jesus and bringing the joy of His friendship to our part of the world, making Him known and loved in northeastern Minnesota, and being ministers of His mercy, which is His love where people are hurting.

We can be confident that God, in the mystery of His providence, brings good out of everything, even our suffering and poverty and broken hearts. Please pray that one good He will bring from all this is reconciliation and healing within the Church.

I want to express my gratitude to U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Robert Kressel, the creditor’s committee, the attorneys representing the victims, our attorneys, my staff, the clergy, religious and faithful of the diocese, local government officials, law enforcement and the media, who have all been instrumental in the resolution of this process.

I close by again offering my deep sorrow and humble apology on behalf of the local Church, all its clergy, and all its faithful, to anyone in our midst who has been harmed by sexual abuse. We hold you close in prayer and stand ready to hear you, to offer whatever pastoral assistance we can, and, as we have for many years, to assist you in obtaining counseling to help in your healing process.

Thank you.  
  
I would be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.