

Biggest US Catholic archdiocese reaches record deal on sex abuse

By Gillian Flaccus in Los Angeles

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Hundreds of people who claim they were abused by Catholic clergy in the archdiocese of Los Angeles can expect to be paid more than \$1m (£500,000) each in a \$660m settlement of their lawsuits.

The archdiocese is America's largest, and the deal is by far the biggest settlement in the Church's sexual abuse scandal.

Last night the cardinal of the archdiocese, Roger Mahony, apologised to the victims: "There really is no way to go back and give them that innocence that was taken from them. The one thing I wish I could give the victims ... I cannot," he said, adding: "It should not have happened, and it will not happen again."

Some Roman Catholic orders the Servites, Claretians and Oblates will be carved out of the agreement because they refused to participate, a source said. The settlement also calls for the release of confidential priest personnel files after a review by a judge assigned to oversee the litigation.

The settlements push the total amount paid out by the US Church since 1950 to more than \$2bn, with about a quarter of that coming from the Los Angeles archdiocese.

The release of the priest documents was important to the agreement, said Ray Boucher, the lead plaintiff's lawyer, because it could reveal whether archdiocesan leaders were involved in covering up for abusive priests. "Transparency is a critical part of this and of all resolutions," he said.

Steven Sanchez, a plaintiff who had been expected to testify, said he "hoped all victims would find some type of healing" as a result of the agreement.

Cardinal Mahony recently said the archdiocese was selling its high-rise administrative building and considering the sale of about 50 other non-essential church properties to raise funds for the settlement.