Catholic Order to Pay $16.5 Million in Sex Abuse Scandal

An order of the Roman Catholic Church has agreed to pay $16.5 million to more than 400 adults who said they were sexually abused as children by religious leaders, the parties announced on Thursday in separate statements.

The victims claimed abuse at schools and child-care facilities belonging to the Christian Brothers and the Christian Brothers of Ireland, Inc, in 17 U.S. states and Canada from the late 1940s or early 1950s until the 1980s, said James Stang, a lawyer representing the plaintiffs.

The settlement agreement reached in U.S. bankruptcy court also enables the victims to pursue more assets from the Christian Brothers such as real estate or insurance claims, Stang said.

A committee representing the accusers, who claimed abuse by mostly brothers of the order, agreed to the settlement terms.

In 2011, the Christian Brothers filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in response to the sexual abuse claims.

“Intense negotiations during the past three months have led to painful concessions in bringing about this mutually agreed upon settlement. This settlement will allow an opportunity to recommit ourselves to bringing the gospel of Jesus,” Brother Kevin Griffith of the Christian Brothers said in a statement.

Both sides noted the agreement establishes safeguards to protect children from future abuse.

In April, the Vatican said Pope Francis wanted the Catholic Church to “act decisively” to root out sexual abuse of children by priests and ensure the perpetrators are punished.

The Catholic Church’s crisis began in Boston in 2002 when media began reporting how cases of abuse were systematically covered up and abusive priests were shuttled from parish to parish instead of being defrocked and handed over to civil authorities.

Since then, the Catholic Church in many countries has set up new guidelines to deal with cases of past abuse, prevent new cases, report abuse to police, and stop potential abusers from entering the priesthood in the first place.