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Court: Diocese can't appeal abuse victims' \$12.8 million claim

by Nigel Burnham by Catholic News Service

YORK, England -- A Catholic diocese in northeast England has been refused the right to appeal a court ruling that found it responsible for a \$12.8 million compensation claim by victims of child sexual abuse.

The Court of Appeal in London Nov. 9 rejected Diocese of Middlesbrough's application to appeal to the Supreme Court what is believed to be the largest award to abuse victims in English history.

The diocese was found liable in October for the claims of 158 former pupils who were abused at St. William's Community Home, in Market Weighton, near York, between 1960 and 1992.

Judges ruled that the De La Salle Christian Brothers, which staffed the home, had no legal responsibility, leaving the Catholic Child Welfare Society of the diocese liable for the compensation claim.

One of the victims, Graham Baverstock of Catterick, North Yorkshire, said he was pleased with the ruling.

"The church has tried to evade their responsibility to the victims all along and they now need to say sorry," he said. "We have been campaigning for years for them to apologize."

The 52-year-old Baverstock was 14 when he first was sent to the home, which provided residential care and education for boys with emotional and behavioral problems. Baverstock, who spent more than a year at the home, said he was systematically abused in 1973 and 1974 and subsequently attempted suicide.

Christian Brother James Carragher, now 74, who was principal at the home for more than 20 years, began serving a 14-year prison sentence in 2004 for a long list of sex crimes against students.

Attorney David Greenwood, who is representing the victims, said he hoped the Middlesbrough Diocese would work to reach compensation settlements with each abuse survivor.

Following the Court of Appeal decision, the only option remaining for the diocese is to appeal directly to the Supreme Court.

"Our lawyers are considering the matter," a diocesan spokesman said.

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