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Jesuits sued over sex abuse bankruptcy

Lynne Terry The Oregonian | Feb. 21, 2011

PORTLAND, Ore. -- Lawyers representing a group of people who accuse Jesuit priests of sexual abuse filed 37 lawsuits Thursday in bankruptcy court, asking for about $3 million.

The lawsuits claim that the Roman Catholic order paid money to various entities before declaring bankruptcy two years ago, and that that money should actually be part of the order?s assets.

Some of money went towards training priests and other funds were spent on faculty and student tuition at a time when abuse victims were seeking millions in dollars in damages against the order, said James Stang, the attorney for creditor?s committee that brought the lawsuits.

Stang said the suits do not contend that the Jesuits were trying to protect their assets from abuse claims.

The Jesuits? Northwest Province filed for bankruptcy in 2009 in the face of sex-abuse lawsuits. From 2001-2009, the order settled more than 200 legal claims, paying out $25 million. The Jesuits would not comment on the new lawsuits.

The lawsuits were brought against a range of groups, from a prep school to universities and from a funeral home to a magazine. The smallest suit, for about $17,000, was brought against Jesuit Volunteers Corp. in Oregon; the largest, seeking about $320,000, was filed against senior living centers in Washington and California.

When the order filed for bankruptcy, it faced more than 150 lawsuits alleging priest abuse. There are now more than 500 people seeking compensation.

[Lynne Terry writes for The Oregonian in Portland, Ore.]

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