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## Santa Fe Archdiocese says property auction postponed

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The Archdiocese of Santa Fe announced in a community letter that the effort to auction 732 properties for a bankruptcy settlement has been delayed.

The Rev. Glennon Jones, vicar general of the archdiocese, said last week in the letter the auction company doesn't have a final list of properties because surveyors' work continues, property titles still need to be acquired or analyzed, and opening prices haven't been set.

Jones suggested the postponement reflected no setback and the auction would simply be rescheduled.

About 385 victims of sexual abuse by archdiocese clergy members have sued, prompting the Archdiocese of Santa Fe to declare bankruptcy three years ago. The archdiocese now seeks to raise money to settle the case, but the amount hasn't been determined, an attorney for victims said. Numerous Catholic dioceses across the country have filed for bankruptcy because of abuse by priests.

Brad Hall, an Albuquerque attorney who represents a number of victims, said the survivors themselves would vote on whether an amount is appropriate. No such vote is imminent.

The archdiocese, parishes and insurance companies are "shooting for enough to get a successful plan approved by all," Hall said. "If it blows up, it blows up."

The property auction, to be handled by SVN Auction Services of Florida and Louisiana, had been scheduled for July 21 but will be pushed back, Jones wrote. No replacement date has been set.

A Santa Fe attorney representing three people in the case said Thursday that the entire situation reflects the "legal principle" of karma.

"I think when they embrace their own teachings and truly fall to their knees in service of others, then all of this will happen in a smoother way," Merit Bennett said of the archdiocese's effort to raise money.

If archdiocese officials only have to sell properties, “they’re getting off pretty good,” Bennett said. The attitude should be: “We beg for forgiveness. How can we help?” he said.

“This is what it looks like when you molest generations of children,” the attorney said. “They’re constantly haunted by the abuses they suffered as children.”

Jones alluded to this in his letter. “In all of this, we should never forget that the claimants have been living with this nightmare of past abuse for decades,” Jones said. “Parishes can rebuild, but these persons are scarred for life.”

The archdiocese Thursday called Bennett’s comments “unfortunate” and indicative of not knowing what the archdiocese has done. For 25 years, the archdiocese “has worked diligently to produce a safe environment for children and young people,” it said in a written statement.

The organization has a “zero tolerance policy” for abuse, the statement said, performs background checks on clergy members, workers and volunteers, and has them complete sexual abuse awareness training.

The archdiocese said it strives “to provide support and healing for those who have been harmed by clergy sexual abuse” but acknowledged that nothing can compensate them adequately. The archdiocese recognizes their pain, offers apologies and gives financial compensation, the statement said.

If a settlement falls through, Jones wrote in the letter, the onus could fall on Catholic parishes to sell properties, conceivably even churches and parish halls. If the archdiocese must go on without a settlement, he wrote, lawsuits “will likely proceed against individual parishes, resulting in much greater costs for those parishes.”

Jones said the auction company has assured the archdiocese that there will be several weeks of advertising beforehand. The website that will be used for information will be [ASFbankruptcyauction.com](http://ASFbankruptcyauction.com).

Bennett said this is the price of perpetrating evil. “That’s the law of karma,” he said. “It’s sad, but it’s been coming. Karma’s that way. You can ignore it, but eventually it will be knocking at your door. It’s a legal principle.”

The archdiocese’s statement said it filed for bankruptcy not to avoid responsibility but because the Chapter 11 process “is the most merciful and equitable way for the archdiocese to address its responsibility.”

The complexities of the case and the property sales have led the church to hire attorneys, a land-use planner, real estate brokers and accountants. The dilemma also had led to the question of how much money the archdiocese’s insurers will pay in a balancing act with the church and its parishes.

Hall said the survivors ride “an emotional roller coaster in this process” and “just keep battling.”

Bennett said faith can be promulgated without large amounts of money. “Christ wasn’t rich. He didn’t need a big church. He was poor,” Bennett said.

He said to the Catholic Church: “Step up. This is the test time.”

**Rick Ruggles**

Reporter