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Archdiocese raised more than \$1.6 million from property auction

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An eight-day online property auction raised close to \$1.68 million for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe's bankruptcy effort, an executive with the auction company said this week.

Louis B. Fisher III of SVN Auction Services said some contracts still must be signed, so the total isn't yet certain. The archdiocese also will pay closing costs of 1 percent or a bit more.

The archdiocese hopes to generate enough money through insurance, property sales such as those in the online auction and donations to settle a bankruptcy case with about 385 people who have claimed sexual abuse perpetrated by Catholic clergy whom Church officials have found to be "credibly accused."

Fisher said the auction sold about 140 properties, many of them bundled with others.

The lots were in Bernalillo, Sandoval and Valencia counties.

Among the parcels sold was Santa Barbara Park in Albuquerque, just west of Albuquerque High School. The city of Albuquerque reported Tuesday it had placed the winning bid of \$60,000 for the park. Dave Simon, the city's parks and recreation director, said the site is "important to the community and we look forward to preserving it for generations to come."

Failing to meet an undisclosed amount of settlement money in the bankruptcy case could require the archdiocese to sell essential properties, such as community centers, schools and churches. The institution has said it wants to limit sales to nonessential properties, such as the small, vacant parcels in the auction, most of which had been donated.

Fisher said this summer he hoped the auction would generate a “few million” dollars. But he expressed satisfaction this week that the money raised ultimately would help victims of clergy abuse and the archdiocese.

“I think it’s a good day for the entire case,” he said Tuesday.

Tom Macken, the archdiocese’s executive director of property and construction management, said the organization was “pleased with the result” of the auction.

Catholic dioceses across the nation have claimed Chapter 11 bankruptcy amid the national and global sex abuse scandal that has rocked the Church since the early 1990s.

BishopAccountability.org, a group tracking clergy pedophilia and sex abuse cases, said 29 dioceses and Catholic organizations have filed for bankruptcy. The Gallup diocese was among them.

That diocese settled its case with about 55 victims for more than \$20 million.

SVN, based in Florida and Louisiana, will hold a second auction for the archdiocese in November. Fisher said the sale would feature properties that are “more challenging” to sell. They are distributed among 15 counties.

The bankruptcy case is being overseen by the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in New Mexico.

The court agreed the auction service should receive up to \$62,730 for advertising and marketing the event.

Property buyers paid a 10 percent commission on top of their purchases.

Fisher said he hoped the auction signaled “things are coming to a head” in the case but admitted it could still be a long time before there is a resolution.

Rick Ruggles

Reporter