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CATHOLIC CHURCH ABUSE SCANDAL

Archdiocese of Santa Fe to hold another auction in hopes of raising cash for clergy abuse victims

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The Archdiocese of Santa Fe will hold another online auction beginning Jan. 31 to sell more parcels of land for a settlement with close to 400 victims of clergy abuse.

No settlement has been reached since the archdiocese filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy three years ago. The archdiocese hopes to raise enough money through property sales, donations, insurance and other methods to work out a group settlement, so each victim isn't addressed in separate lawsuits.

The online auction will conclude Feb. 7. The auction's website, www.ASFbankruptcyauction.com, will be available on Jan. 3 and will list the parcels involved.

SVN Auction Services of Florida and Louisiana will oversee the auction, as it did the first one in September. That auction generated about \$1.4 million for the archdiocese, said Louis Fisher III of SVN, although officials are still closing on some of the transactions.

"I think the buyers in most cases were pleased with their purchases," Fisher said.

Attorney Aaron Boland of Santa Fe, who represents one of the victims, said the archdiocese's insurance policies — and how much insurance companies will pay out — are a much bigger matter than the auctions.

"The real issue here is, there's a lot of insurance that covers a lot of different things for the archdiocese," Boland said. "The issue is whether the insurance is going to ... pay out on the policies that they sold the archdiocese."

The Rev. Glennon Jones, archdiocese vicar general, wrote in late September “we’re negotiating with the insurance companies ... unfortunately, that may take a while, but there’s no way to speed it up.”

Attorney Merit Bennett of Santa Fe, who represents four victims, said it’s good the archdiocese is trying to liquidate assets. “This should be their top priority,” Bennett said of archdiocese’s leaders. Some victims “need help; they need therapy, emotional support. ... They can’t afford it.”

He said lives have been shattered to the point where some victims can’t work or function adequately. The Catholic Church, he said, must “get that wrong somehow semi-righted.”

Fisher said the second auction would include 427 properties packaged into 80 bundles in 16 New Mexico counties. He said he hoped the archdiocese could generate \$2 million to \$4 million, but that it was hard to estimate.

About 20 parcels will sell individually, but most in the auction are small tracts that were donated to the archdiocese. They tend to be rural pieces of property and don’t have addresses, he said. The properties will use uniform property code numbers set up by the counties in which they are found, he said.

He said he recommended hiring a New Mexico real estate broker, who would be paid out of SVN’s 10 percent commission. The broker would help a prospective buyer figure out exactly where a property is if the buyer needs such help, he said.

Bennett, who called the process a test of the Catholic Church, said of the archdiocese’s effort to resolve the bankruptcy: “Well, they always need to try harder. ... This is the time when the rubber meets the road.”

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