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 Argentine diocese
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Agence France-Presse | December 13, 2013 8:52pm

Argentine diocese apologizes for pedophile priest

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An Argentine diocese apologized for abuse committed by a pedophile priest on Friday and, in a first for the country's Catholic church, announced compensation for his victims.

Father Jose Mercau, who is serving a 14-year sentence, was pastor of the St. John the Baptist church in San Isidro diocese on the outskirts of Buenos Aires and ran a home for destitute children.

"The diocese of San Isidro, and in particular the bishop and his priests, publicly apologize to the young people who were affected by Father Jose Mercau's actions," the Catholic news agency AICA said.

The agency also reported that the office of San Isidro's bishop, Monsignor Jorge Ojea, was willing to compensate the four males who filed a complaint against the priest.

Father Maximo Jurcinovic, a spokesman for the bishop, told news channel C5N that a financial settlement had been reached and that the diocese would sell some of its properties to fund it.

This is the first time that the Argentine Catholic church has voluntarily assumed responsibility for financially compensating abuse victims.

The sale of church assets to pay for reparations in abuse cases is also unprecedented in the



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South American country.

"This is a historic event because for the first time the Catholic church accepts that Argentina was a participant in a case of sexual abuse and rape of children," sociologist Fortunato Mallimaci told AFP.

He added that the move shows other abuse victims in Argentina and Latin America that they can sue and that the church will have to take responsibility for the crimes committed.

Since assuming his duties in March, Pope Francis, the first Argentine and Latin American pontiff, has shown a willingness to fight pedophilia after repeated scandals rocked the church.

Earlier this month, he formed a committee to combat the scourge in a landmark initiative after thousands of abuses and cover-ups.

According to Mallimaci, Mercau's abuse was known back when Francis, or Jorge Bergoglio as he was known at the time, was the archbishop of Buenos Aires.

Mercau is currently serving his seventh year behind bars.

A criminal case against him began in 2005 and he was convicted after pleading guilty to abusing at least four children.

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