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Roman Catholic Diocese of Helena Files Bankruptcy, Proposes Settlement to 362 Sexual Abuse Victims

(MISSOULA, Mont.) – Jan. 31, 2014 -- Attorneys for sex-abuse survivors on Friday announced a major step toward potentially resolving 362 claims of minors sexually abused by diocesan priests and others who served in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Helena. On Friday, January 31, 2014, the Helena diocese announced that it plans to file a Chapter 11 reorganization case before the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Montana to complete pre-bankruptcy mediated negotiations with known abuse survivors and the Diocese's liability insurance carriers.

It is anticipated that the Diocese will propose a settlement in Bankruptcy Court, subject to victim approval and the supervision and ultimate approval of the Bankruptcy Court. Under the proposal, the Diocese would be required to adhere to stringent reporting criteria and non-monetary terms and guidelines to ensure the protection of children and prevent future instances of abuse. In addition, \$15 million would be paid to the currently identified victims, with additional settlement funds reserved for other and unknown victims. The process of obtaining Bankruptcy Court approval will include the opportunity for victims and creditors to vote on the proposed settlement.

"We did not choose to have the Diocese file for bankruptcy protection, however, we believe that the bankruptcy process will provide the most efficient resolution for our clients, rather than years of litigation and trials with uncertain outcomes," said Molly K. Howard, attorney with Datsopoulos, MacDonald & Lind, P.C. "Given the age and ill health of many of the victims, this is in their best interest."

"Any resolution will include non-monetary terms to protect future generations of children and respect the abuse survivors," Howard said, noting that the majority of the victims in this case came forward to protect future generations of children.

Milt Datsopoulos and Molly K. Howard of Datsopoulos, MacDonald & Lind, P.C. and their four-firm legal team of attorneys represent 271 of the 362 victims in this case. The group of plaintiffs filed their case in Lewis and Clark County District Court in Helena, Montana in September 2011. This group also represents survivors with claims currently pending against the Roman Catholic Diocese of Great Falls-Billings.

"Bishop Thomas and Diocesan attorneys worked in concert with the Plaintiffs' groups in this unique and difficult case. Bishop Thomas has admitted the Diocese's responsibility, and worked toward the common goal of healing for survivors of abuse at the hands of Catholic clergy," said Milt Datsopoulos. "This process will give survivors the right to vote on a global settlement proposal with a distribution process to avoid years of trials and retraumatization of victims."