

Abuse settlement increased

Jerry Filteau/CNS

WASHINGTON — Negotiations for a settlement of 542 sexual-abuse lawsuits against the Boston Archdiocese apparently moved into a higher gear in late August as the archdiocese reportedly offered up to \$65 million Aug. 21 to settle all cases.

That was \$10 million more than the offer of \$55 million that Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley had made through his attorney Aug. 8, the week after he was installed as the new archbishop of Boston.

In a separate action Aug. 23 the archdiocese announced that four priests who face allegations of abuse have accepted voluntary leave of absence from their posts, pending a full investigation and resolution of the claims, at Archbishop O'Malley's request.

When civil lawsuits against three of the priests were filed in January, Bishop Richard G. Lemmon, then apostolic administrator, decided not to remove them from their posts. In the fourth case a years-old investigation had exonerated the priest, but Archbishop O'Malley decided the

claim deserved a new review.

John J. Geoghan, the defrocked Boston priest whose widely reported serial molestations of children sparked the national clergy sexual-abuse crisis in 2002, was brutally murdered in his prison cell Aug. 23 by a fellow inmate, who jammed the cell door long enough to carry out the act before guards could get in.

Two other former priests serving sentences for child molestation in Massachusetts, Kelvin Iguabita and Ronald J. Paquin, were reportedly transferred to their prison's hospital ward out of concern for their safety.

Ironically, under Massachusetts case law Geoghan's death could result in his conviction being vacated because he is unable to be present for a pending appeal. That was what the state's highest court ordered in the case of John Salvi, who killed two receptionists at Massachusetts abortion clinics in 1994 and committed suicide while in prison before the appeal of his conviction was heard.

In the Diocese of Fall River, Mass., Bishop George W. Coleman placed Father Hernando Herrera, 36, on administrative leave Aug. 15 from his posts as diocesan director of youth ministry and parochial vicar of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Seekonk, following allegations of "inappropriate conduct with two minors."

The diocesan communications of-

fice announced the bishop's action Aug. 21. It said the Massachusetts Department of Social Services was notified Aug. 15 and Bishop Coleman met with parish representatives Aug. 19.

In other developments around the country in mid-August:

- A Milwaukee jury Aug. 22 found Father Marvin Knighton not guilty of the alleged sexual abuse of a teenage boy in the late 1980s.

- In Utah, Judge Paul G. Maughan Aug. 22 dismissed an \$80 million lawsuit by two brothers, now in their 40s, against the Salt Lake City Diocese, the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales and others over alleged abuse in the 1970s. Their alleged abuser is a former priest of the order, James F. Rapp, who is currently serving a 40-year prison sentence in Oklahoma for child sexual abuse there. The judge said the plaintiffs failed to meet the statute of limitations for making a claim and offered no proof that the principal defendants knew Rapp was a child abuser at the time.

- In St. Louis, a second trial of Father Bryan Kuchar began Aug. 26 on charges that he sexually molested a 14-year-old boy in 1995.

- In Miami, prosecutors said Aug. 26 that Florida's statute of limitations prevented them from prosecuting Father Ricardo Castellanos for alleged sexual abuse of several altar boys in the 1970s. The archdio-



Angela Rowlings/CNS

Boston Archbishop Sean Patrick O'Malley, shown at his installation, has asked four priests accused of abuse to go on leave pending an investigation. The archdiocese has also increased its offer to settle abuse suits.

cese had not yet decided whether to return him to ministry. Three days earlier another priest accused along with Father Castellanos, Father Alvaro Guichard, was reinstated in his parish on the recommendation of the archdiocesan review board. Prosecutors had notified the archdiocese in July that no charges would be pressed against Father Guichard.

Bishop: Nuns should hear confessions

Luke Copen/CNS

LONDON — An English bishop has suggested that Catholic lay women should be allowed to administer the sacrament of reconciliation.

Auxiliary Bishop Vincent Malone of Liverpool said there might be circumstances in which it was more appropriate for a woman to give absolution than a man.

In a new book, the bishop com-

pared the confessional to a medical practice, where patients are routinely given the choice between a male and a female doctor, and he asked whether the time had come to offer Catholic women a similar choice of confessor.

The bishop also questioned whether the church should continue to keep lay men and women from administering the sacrament of anointing of the sick.

Bishop Malone insisted that he did not want his comments to provoke an acrimonious debate.

"I'm not banging a big drum. I am making a little murmur, asking: 'Is this worth thinking about?'" he wrote.

In his book, *Healing Priesthood: Women's Voices Worldwide*, the bishop said that although the church's tradition was divinely inspired and free of error it "may sometimes seem only to inhibit the freedom to engage with difficult questions."

"Within any tradition it is a refined art to distinguish between what is at the heart of the principles it en-

shrines and what is simply the current, perhaps variable, practice surrounding those principles," he wrote.

The bishop pointed out that the Catholic tradition broadly decrees that only priests may administer the sacraments, and yet lay people are involved in administration of the sacrament of marriage and, in cases of necessity, the sacrament of baptism.

Bishop Malone, episcopal liaison to the National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales, said, "It is not difficult to conceive circumstances in which a female minister could more appropriately than a man be the receiver of the humble confession that opens a soul to hear the glad words of the Lord's forgiveness."

Lay administration of the sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick are forbidden under canon law.

Bishop Malone insisted that his reflections were not meant to provoke disobedience among the faithful.

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Pop

John Thavis/CNS

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II travels to Eastern Europe in September, he'll face an intensifying Catholic Church of Europe's social culture.

In recent months, he's hammered the risks of losing its "Catholic" identity, consolidates its ecumenical ties, and recently disappointed European constitutional reference to the Christian heritage, he has urged Catholic countries to change that text in the direction of a

At the same time, in Eastern Europe, Slovakia recognizes members are influenced by the materialism of the post-communist faith may suffer a

In Slovakia, a country set to join the Union in 2004, all tensions are simmering as the string of liturgical Sept. 11-14.

The debate in Slovakia is wider European dialogue involves questions of history. For example, sources said, some to remove references to Methodius, who evangelized the region, from the constitution.

But more recent focus is on a concrete issue: abortion. The strengthening provisions, allowing it up to 12 weeks in case of pregnancy defect, was passed in August this summer.

When President Kovachik vetoed the bill in July, it drew cries among politicians bringing down his government. The legislature is expected to override the veto soon. Church-backed politicians meanwhile, have a national challenge.

What is especially concerning church leaders is the recent opinion poll showing more of Slovaks support a referendum measure.

Cardinal Josef Tomin, a leading churchman and head of the Vatican congregation, said Catholics may be the cause of a "ferocious" fight against moral values.