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Ex-priest, diocese agree to settlement

■ Placer County man, an alleged sex abuse victim, will receive \$17 million

By Brian Anderson

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OAKLAND — A former priest and the Catholic Diocese of Oakland have agreed to pay a one-time church volunteer more than \$17 million to settle a lawsuit blaming them for sexual abuse.

After weeks of trial, Robert E. Freitas, 58, of San Leandro agreed Monday to pay the \$16 million bulk of the settlement to a Lincoln (Placer County) man who said Freitas molested him in 1979 and 1980.

Diocese officials agreed to pay \$1.05 million to cover counseling for the victim over the next five years.

Freitas was a priest at the Santa Paula Church in Fremont when then-15-year-old Mark Bogdanowicz — now 38 and living in Lincoln — helped set up for Mass and perform other duties. During a 12-month period, the boy was molested twice, he said, one of those times behind the church altar, according to court records.

"It's not about the money, it's about accountability," Bogdanowicz told reporters at an Oakland press conference. "This is about uncovering the truth and not letting it be a cover-up anymore."

Freitas also worked at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Pittsburg in the 1980s.

Freitas was arrested in 2002 and charged with two counts of molesting the boy. He pleaded guilty in December in an agreement that would have handed him a six-month jail term. But the criminal case was dismissed earlier this year after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a state law that had allowed

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decades-old molestation cases to go forward.

Kevin Murphy, the Alameda County deputy district attorney who handled the criminal case, said the settlement brings a "small measure of justice" for Bogdanowicz.

Sister Barbara Flannery, the Oakland diocese chancellor who has worked extensively on church-related sexual abuse matters, said diocese officials long believed there was truth behind the victim's allegations.

"I would certainly hope that this would begin the healing process," Flannery said.

Former Bishop John Cummins had been expected to take the witness stand Tuesday, a point R. Lewis Van Blois, the Oakland lawyer who represented Bogdanowicz, said was not lost on diocese officials.

"There is very dangerous evidence in there that should be brought to the public," he said.