

# \$1.9m damages in Catholic abuse case opens door for others

**ELENA COUPER**

A FORMER altar boy who was sexually abused by a priest has been awarded \$1.9m in damages to be paid by the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne.

The judgment is the first of its kind, paving the way for other victims to take similar action against the Archbishop and the Archdiocese.

Catholic priest Desmond

Gannon was jailed in 2009 for abusing the victim three times between 1968 and 1970.

The former altar boy proceeded to lodge civil action for damages and injuries he endured as a result of the abuse against Peter Comonsoli, the current Archbishop.

The lawyer for the victim, Michael Magazanik, partner at Rightside Legal, said that his client was "totally delighted"

with the judgement. "(He's) thrilled that he has changed the law for other survivors," he said.

"The result is a slap in the face for the church which denied any responsibility for the horrific abuse my client was subjected to, and tried to persuade the judge it did not owe my client a single dollar.

"The judge saw through all of that, held the church clearly

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responsible and assessed record damages, including \$525,000 in general damages, the highest award for an abuse survivor in Australia."

Gannon told the church in 1993 that he had sexually abused children but was permitted

to resign for health reasons and was given the title Pastor Emeritus.

In 1995 Gannon was convicted of nine counts of sexual abuse of four boys and was sentenced to one year in jail. He was later convicted over separate abuse charges from 1997-2003.

"The church knew Gannon was an abuser years before he got to my client and did noth-

ing about it – yet still the church could not face up to its responsibility and fought my client in court," Mr Magazanik said.

"The question is whether the church will wake up to itself, and move into the 21st century in dealing with its appalling abuse history."

The church received 25 sexual abuse claims against Gannon in total.