

Lori's Apology Sparks Victims' Anger for Egan

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By DANIEL TEPFER

October 19, 2003 - Bishop William E. Lori's apology last week to those abused by priests in the Bridgeport Diocese was welcomed by the victims, but it also dredged up hard feelings they have about New York Cardinal Edward M. Egan.

"The one thought that kept going through my mind as I watched Bishop Lori's apology on television is, wouldn't it have been nice if Egan had handled it the same way," said Sharon See.

Egan served as bishop of the Bridgeport diocese from 1988 to June 2000. Records obtained by the Connecticut Post revealed that Egan, while in Bridgeport, failed to notify authorities of abuse allegations. The 10 years of the Post's reporting on abuse allegations also revealed that Egan allowed several priests facing such complaints to continue working.

In January 1993, See filed the first lawsuit against the diocese, claiming the Rev. Raymond Pcolka abused her.

The Rev. Chris Walsh, then the diocese's director of communications, told the Connecticut Post at the time that the diocese did not have any abuse complaints against Pcolka or any other priest in the diocese.

The diocese's lawyers publicly blasted See's lawyer, T. Paul Tremont, for suggesting that the diocese had previous knowledge of complaints against priests, contending See's complaint was "like a bolt out of the blue."

Fairfield lawyer Henry Lyons then revealed that he had been negotiating with the diocese for a month regarding an abuse complaint against Pcolka a complaint that had initially been made 10 years before.

The number of victims represented by Tremont kept mounting, but the diocese still denied having any prior knowledge of abuse by its priests.

But as a result of the court civil discovery process, documentation was released showing that Egan and the diocese had been aware of the abuse for decades.

The hundreds of documents handed over to Tremont by the diocese included a faded, one-page memo from Monsignor William Genuario about a Dec. 2, 1964, meeting of diocese officials regarding an assault by the Rev. Laurence Brett on a 19-year-old man who was a Sacred Heart University student.

The memo states the man had gone to Brett to discuss a sexual problem and Brett ended up performing oral sex on him; it then explains that Brett was being sent away.

Then, at a Bridgeport Superior Court hearing in September 1998, Monsignor Laurence Bronkiewicz, the diocese's director of clergy personnel and then-Bishop Egan's No. 2 man, testified that in the mid-1980s, the diocese paid settlements to six people who claimed that as children they were sexually abused by three priests.

Jason Tremont, who, along with Cindy Robinson, represents the 40 victims in the recent \$21 million settlement, said Lori's apology is not only a vindication for the victims, but also for his father, who died in March 1999.

"From the beginning in 1993 my father, Paul Tremont, believed in the victims of clergy abuse and instinctively knew that they had been horribly wronged," he said. "He was at the forefront of what became a national crisis, serving as a strong and passionate voice for these young men and women.

"The settlements in these cases are a culmination of his extraordinary vision and his unflinching refusal to give in to the determined efforts of the diocese to hide these abuses from the public."

Both Tremont and the victims said they are very grateful for the way Lori has handled complaints, agreeing to meet with victims something Egan never did.

"Since arriving in the diocese more than two years ago, and during his years of service in the Archdiocese of Washington, Bishop Lori has made outreach to victims and an expression of remorse and forgiveness the hallmarks of his approach to the scourge of sexual abuse," said Diocese spokesman Joseph McAleer. "This is who he is. It is an important part of his ministry and his role as a pastor of 375,000 faithful in the diocese."

The closest Egan ever came to making an apology came in an April 2002 letter to parishioners in New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral.

"It is clear that today we have a much better understanding of this problem," Egan wrote. "If in hindsight we also discover that mistakes may have been made as regards to prompt removal of priests and assistance to victims, I am deeply sorry," he wrote.

Egan has consistently defended his actions and those of the Bridgeport Diocese in handling those cases. The letter to date is the furthest he has gone in acknowledging that any mistakes may have been made.

Even last week, Egan, through a spokesman, declined comment on the settlement.