

July 19, 2007 – EDITORIAL: Prevent future tragedies

Our position: L.A. archdiocese should have to reveal more details on its abusive priests.
Orlando Sentinel (FL)

The Catholic Church finally is paying for decades of failing to protect children from sexual abuse by priests. Last week the Archdiocese of Los Angeles announced the largest settlement yet, agreeing to pay \$660 million to 508 people who claimed abuse by priests and other church employees dating back as far as 70 years.

The next largest settlement, in Boston, paid victims \$157 million. Across the country, claims of abuse by priests have led five Catholic dioceses to file for bankruptcy protection.

Yet the church's pattern of covering up its response to abuse by priests persists in the Los Angeles settlement. It was reached on the eve of the first of 15 scheduled civil trials to adjudicate abuse claims against the archdiocese and individual priests. The leader of the archdiocese, Cardinal Roger Mahony, was expected to testify.

While the archdiocese has apologized for shielding some alleged abusers, Mahony fought attempts by victims and prosecutors to get access to confidential church files with details on accusations against priests and how he and other church leaders reacted.

The settlement calls for the archdiocese to release its files on accused abusers to a retired judge, who will decide what to release to victims and the public. But it is not yet clear whether the church will turn over all those files, or claim that some are still "privileged."

Justice demands not only that the victims be compensated, but that the church reveal the full truth of what happened. Such disclosure also is the best hope for preventing similar tragedies in the future.