

Former altar boy accuses church officials of recklessness

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STAMFORD, Conn. -- A former altar boy who says he was molested by a priest is accusing the Roman Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport of recklessness, citing new evidence obtained as his lawsuit heads to trial.

New York Cardinal Edward Egan, who will testify in a deposition in the case later this month, is likely to provide further support for the new reckless claim, according to the attorney for the former altar boy. Egan is scheduled testify on Jan. 27, just days before the trial starts.

"Plaintiff has just learned of critical evidence that now supports a recklessness claim against the diocese," lawyer Paul Slager wrote in court documents.

The plaintiff, known in court documents as John Doe, claims he was molested by the Rev. John Castaldo in the early 1990s when Castaldo was a priest at St. Teresa Church in Trumbull.

The recklessness accusation, which is in addition to allegations of negligence, does not provide details of the new evidence but said it comes from recent depositions of three priests and a new witness. One of the priests dismissed Castaldo from the seminary.

The evidence shows the diocese knew the risk of sexual abuse posed by some priests, including Castaldo, Slager argues.

Joseph McAleer, spokesman for the diocese, declined to comment.

Slager says Egan, when he was the Bridgeport bishop, ignored disturbing psychological reports on Castaldo. Egan also knew that Castaldo had been dismissed from the seminary "for erratic and rebellious behavior," according to court papers.

Castaldo gave a deposition in which he said he was dismissed from the seminary because of his complaints that as many as 15 seminarians engaged in "sordid behavior," including homosexual acts, court papers state.

Attorneys for the diocese have said the psychological reports should not be admitted as evidence during the trial, arguing the information is not related to potential sexual abuse of minors.

"There was no indication whatsoever that this priest was engaging in any kind of inappropriate behavior," Joseph Zwilling, spokesman for the Archdiocese of New York, said earlier this week.

Castaldo was a spiritual adviser to Trinity Catholic High School in Stamford and a priest at St. Maurice Parish in Stamford in the late 1990s. He was removed from both posts in May 2001 after he was arrested on charges of engaging in a sexually explicit online chat with someone he believed was a 14-year-old boy.

Castaldo pleaded guilty in 2001 to a felony charge of attempted dissemination of indecent material to a minor and was sentenced to one weekend in jail and five years of probation.