

## **The New Haven Register**

### **EDITORIAL: Diocese should drop fight to hide past**

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The Roman Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport has come a long way from the dark days when complaints about priests who sexually abused boys were ignored and the priests shuttled to new assignments where they remained in contact with children.

Bridgeport was part of a plague of sexual predation that became an international church scandal.

In 2001 and 2003, the Bridgeport Diocese reached multimillion-dollar settlements of lawsuits in which there were more than 50 claims of sexual abuse by its priests. At the time of the 2003 settlement, a spokesman for the diocese said the settlement was “all about transparency, ... about healing, about doing the right thing, about closure.”

Indeed, Bishop William E. Lori helped write the American church’s policy on dealing with priests who are child molesters. Lori arrived in Bridgeport in 2000 to replace Edward M. Egan, who became archbishop of New York.

In 2002, Lori forced out three priests within a month of receiving a complaint from a man that he had been molested as a teenager 20 years before. Cases of abuse are now reported to authorities as required by a state law that was long ignored.

Last week, Pope Benedict XVI called for “a frank and complete acknowledgment of the weaknesses of her (the church’s) ministers.”

But, the diocese is still seeking to hide its past. Despite its commitment to transparency and healing, it has waged a more than seven-year legal battle to keep secret more than 12,000 pages of court documents in the sexual abuse cases that were settled in 2001.

Reports based on some of those documents reveal that Egan, who was bishop of the Bridgeport Diocese for 12 years and is now a cardinal, never reported abuse to police. He greeted complaints of abuse with disbelief and in some cases only acted in the face of a lawsuit or when more than one report of abuse was received.

The court documents were sealed to ensure the defendants received a fair trial. That original purpose has long since been served. In May, the state Supreme Court held that virtually all of the sealed information was public. The diocese has asked the high court to reconsider. It is the diocese that should reconsider if it wants to complete the process of healing, understanding and closure to which Lori is committed.