

Settlement Reached In Connecticut Priest Abuse Case

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STAMFORD, Conn. -- A former altar boy who claimed he was molested by a priest reached a financial settlement of his civil lawsuit against the Roman Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport, his attorneys said Tuesday.

The plaintiff, known in court documents as John Doe, said he was molested at age 14 by the Rev. John Castaldo in the early 1990s when Castaldo was a priest at St. Teresa Church in Trumbull.

His name and the terms of the settlement were not released at his request, said his attorneys, Ernest Teitell and Paul Slager.

The settlement means New York Cardinal Edward Egan will not have to testify next week, the attorneys said.

Egan, who was the Bridgeport bishop when the alleged assaults occurred, had received a subpoena which required him to provide sworn videotaped testimony about his knowledge of the case.

"We hope that this settlement will allow our client to find some closure," said Teitell. "While no amount of money can make him whole for what happened, the financial settlement here is substantial and demonstrates that the diocese is accepting responsibility. Our client hopes that the information gathered by the many depositions taken in this case will put the diocese on notice so that corrective measures can be taken to prevent this from happening again."

Joseph McAleer, spokesman for the Bridgeport diocese, declined to comment. The diocese earlier had reached multimillion dollar settlements of other abuse cases.

The case was settled after two days of jury selection.

In motions filed in court, Teitell and Slager said Castaldo had been ordained by the Bridgeport Diocese despite its prior knowledge of numerous irregularities in Castaldo's background.

They said Castaldo had two disturbing psychological assessments that noted he "was fearful of his own aggressive drives," had "difficulty accepting his own sexual urges and desires as normal," and was preoccupied with his "unresolved sexual urges."

Before ordaining Castaldo, the Bridgeport Diocese also knew Castaldo had been expelled from his seminary for "remarkably bizarre behavior," and that the president-rector of the seminary had warned officials of the Bridgeport Diocese in 1985, two years before Castaldo was ordained, that Castaldo was not fit to become a priest, the attorneys said.

Egan's spokesman has denied he ignored warning signs.

"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 last 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.

In his deposition in the civil case, Castaldo admitted his conviction was the result of a "sickness" he had, and that he had the same sickness throughout the entire time he served as a priest, according to court papers.

"For our client, this case is about more than money," Slager said. "He had the courage to bring this case because he read about Castaldo's arrest for sexual misconduct with another adolescent boy, and he wanted to make sure it never happened again."