

BISHOP GREGORY SHOWS COURAGE: PRIESTS HAVE RIGHTS, TOO

Bishop Wilton Gregory, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has refused to release the mental health records of a retired priest accused of sexual abuse. The alleged acts occurred in the 1970s in the Illinois Diocese of Belleville; the diocese is now led by Bishop Gregory. As a result of his decision, the Belleville diocese is being cited for contempt of court.

The diocese has appealed the ruling, maintaining that at the time when the priest was treated for mental health, his records were protected under Illinois privacy laws. Furthermore, the diocese insists it cannot turn over the priest's records without his approval.

We did not flinch from supporting Bishop Gregory. Here is our comment to the press:

"Bishop Gregory is an honorable man who is totally committed to the plight of the survivors of sexual abuse. But he is also totally committed to the due process rights of priests. There is no inherent contradiction in this: justice demands that the guilty pay, but it also demands that the rights of the accused be protected. It is the latter right that is operative in this case at this moment.

"Not surprisingly, some are now condemning Bishop Gregory. Their interest in the cause of victims has apparently blinded them from the cause of justice. No priest should have his rights sacrificed simply because of past injustices committed by church officials. Indeed, he is entitled to the same aggressive defense that is routinely afforded celebrities accused of a crime. To suggest otherwise is to embrace a double standard that smacks of anti-Catholicism.

“All Catholics should stand with Bishop Gregory and reject the politics of revenge. Those who think this is ‘pay back’ time need to be confronted. Get the guilty but protect the innocent. To their shame, that’s a motto the critics of Bishop Gregory cannot embrace.”