

Diocese still hasn't learned

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The way the Catholic diocese of Paterson has handled the latest issue involving one of its priests is yet another example of the church's failure to be candid with its followers.

About 360,000 Roman Catholics make up the Paterson Diocese, encompassing three counties and numerous towns.

These Catholics have legitimate concerns and they should not have to learn about important church issues from the newspapers.

Yet that is what happened in the matter involving the Rev. Phillip Briganti.

Many of the Catholics in Morris County ask a rhetorical question: Why does the Paterson Diocese have to be so secretive?

It is a question that is not answered.

When Briganti resigned from his post at St. Joseph's Church in Mendham last week, parishioners found out about it from a newspaper, not their own congregation.

The story is still unclear but authorities said Briganti resigned because he was the victim of an attempted extortion.

On Sunday, when Briganti was not present for services, churchgoers were told that the pastor was sick.

It is no way to hear about a priest leaving a parish, whether the priest is acting responsibly on behalf of the parish, or not.

Secrecy only makes people question and questions do not provide answers for the faithful.

At his induction as bishop for the diocese more than six months ago, Bishop Arthur J. Serratelli was asked what challenges are facing the current church.

He talked about preaching the Gospel clearly, evangelizing the young and strengthening family life in society.

He didn't look at the true problems facing Catholicism today: A sincere doubt that dioceses are meeting the valid needs of parishioners.

He never discussed the scandals of priests and child abuse that have forced the church to pay out millions in settlements, or the legitimate concerns of the victims who experience such pain.

He didn't discuss the healing necessary for Catholics, who seek something quite simple: a clear answer to how the church responds to abuse and controversy.

Most importantly, he never discussed the shroud of secrecy that pervades the diocese like a thick, black robe.

The best way to counteract scandal is to be open about it.

That requires a clear answer to the problems that priests and this diocese face, whether someone attempts to extort money from a priest, or whether a priest has charges pending against him.

Secrecy does not promote faith, it only inhibits it.

It is time for the diocese, and Serratelli, to stand up and face controversy with the faith that only God can provide.