

Pastor to seek parish's pardon

Bishop orders Geneva priest to ask for forgiveness, fire attorney

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More than six years have passed since two girls were assaulted by former St. Peter Catholic Church priest Mark Campobello.

But the 2,800-family Geneva parish remains divided into factions that are violently at odds about how the church handled the controversy.

Monsignor Joseph F. Jarmoluk, pastor at St. Peter, sent a letter to parishioners Friday advising them that he had been ordered by Rockford Diocese Bishop Thomas Doran to fire his personal attorney and stop production of a documentary that focuses on Jarmoluk's role in the Campobello case.

Doran told Jarmoluk to "seek forgiveness of people whom I might have offended and to forgive those who have offended me," according to the letter.

To that end, Jarmoluk wrote that he will hold a Mass on forgiveness at 7 tonight.

"I applaud the bishop's efforts," said Frank Bochte, a St. Peter parishioner who has spoken out against Jarmoluk's handling of the Campobello case. "This is a positive step."

The documentary, "Forsaken: A Monsignor's Silent Fight to Save his Faith," is being produced by CTL-TV, according to that group's Web site.

"Despite endless media attacks over a two-year period, wrongful accusations by people including a city's mayor, an FBI agent, a state's attorney and other highly influential and powerful individuals' attempts to silence him, a loyal monsignor continues to shepherd his parish through these trying times," the Web site states. "We uncover the real facts concerning a calculated conspiracy to ruin the pastor's leadership and priesthood, those who have misplaced the blame and the reasons why they wanted to point the finger at someone else."

Jarmoluk's letter comes as depositions in the two girls' civil case against the Rockford Diocese are taking place.

And it follows an Aug. 24 altercation outside St. Peter, in which four people say they were verbally assaulted by two parishioners after an 8:30 a.m. Mass, Geneva police confirmed. The Kane County state's attorney's office is investigating the incident.

"The letter is well-written and intended to deliver a very strategic message, but what's glaringly missing is any admission to wrongdoing," said Geneva Mayor Kevin Burns. "Bishop Doran has taken Father Jarmoluk by the ear and told him to say 'sorry.' It's unfortunate that

he didn't have the courage do it by himself."

According to the letter, Doran issued what's known as a nonpenal precept based on canonical law, but it did not include punishment for disobedience. Doran also told Jarmoluk to stop production of a radio show Web cast from the CTL site and take down a message board created by the company.

Months ago, the message board began as a place where people who disagreed about Jarmoluk's handling of the Campobello case could discuss their concerns. It quickly became a forum for vicious attacks and intimidating threats.

"The sooner CTL leaves town and stops fanning the flames, the better the parish will be," Bachte said.

Owen Phelps, spokesman for the Rockford Diocese, called the order from Doran a "private communication" that Jarmoluk was not required to share.

"We have been assured that he has nothing to do with the documentary," he said.

CTL's office address listed on its Web site is a post office box in New York City. It is not registered with the city of New York or the New York secretary of state. Calls to the company went unanswered.

"While I do not know whether the producer will comply with my request, I have done as the bishop has asked and requested that the producer cease these activities," Jarmoluk wrote in his letter.

Several parishioners — including some who have supported Jarmoluk — contacted by the Daily Herald declined to comment. Jarmoluk did not respond to questions that were faxed to him.

The troubles at St. Peter began in the fall 1999 when Barbara Houston, a teacher at the parish's school, told Deborah Bray, the principal, about abuse by Campobello.

Bray later told her it had been taken care of, but when Houston questioned Jarmoluk in the fall 2000, he said he didn't know about the Campobello abuse.

Houston and Bray were not available for comment. Bray did not return to the school as principal this year.

In May 2004, Campobello pleaded guilty to two counts of sexual abuse of two girls beginning in 1999. He remains in prison on an eight-year sentence.

The charges were from two separate incidents. One was between January and May 1999 involving a student at St. Peter Elementary School who was 14 at the time, Geneva police said.

The other involved a student at Aurora Central Catholic High School who was 16 and 17 at the time of the incidents between November 1999 and March 2000. Campobello was an administrator at the school.

A group of current and former St. Peter parishioners allege that Jarmoluk has never been fully forthcoming about what he knew about the Campobello abuse and when he knew it.

They want Jarmoluk to reveal that information and help the parish heal, Bochte said.

Through his attorney, Canice Timothy Rice Jr. of St. Louis, Jarmoluk confronted critics and hinted they might be sued. Phelps said Jarmoluk couldn't sue without Doran's approval.

Rice also wrote a report to the church's pastoral council defending Jarmoluk's role in the Campobello affair.

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