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Legal situation spurs concern at church

As a Geneva resident and a parishioner of St. Peter Parish in Geneva, I would like to pose a couple of questions pertaining to the Catholic Diocese of Rockford's ongoing refusal to comply with Kane County judge Timothy Sheldon's order to turn over documents pertaining to sexual abuse allegations made against the Rev. Mark Campobello regarding his alleged abuse of a 14-year-old girl in 1999.

This week, the parishioners of St. Peter's received a letter from the parish indicating that the contribution from the parishioners are lower when compared to last year's totals. The letter mentions the economy as the primary reason for the drop in contributions.

I personally know of numerous parishioners that have either stopped or reduced their contributions to the parish and their reason for doing so has nothing to do with the economy. The diocese and the parish are not being honest with themselves if they believe that the diocese's position on refusing to cooperate with the Kane County investigators in the Campobello investigation isn't a significant cause of the reduction in the weekly contributions.

I'm not aware of any attempt on the part of the diocese or parish to explain to the congregation the diocese's rationale for willfully refusing to assist the Kane County authorities by providing information that the diocese has on Campobello that may be germane to the case. Does the diocese really believe that by paying their attorneys to stonewall the Kane County State's Attorney's office investigation, which one can argue is a perverted misuse of the church's first amendment protections, is in the best interests of justice and fairness to the alleged victim, her

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family or to the parish?

Second, I am having a difficult time reconciling the diocese's handling of this matter with the purported message that the Catholic church preaches regarding the general themes of social justice, fairness and the pursuit of the truth. Sadly, I find that in this situation, and other sexual abuse allegations that have recently occurred, that the Catholic church appears to live by a double standard that seems more concerned with protecting the "reputation" of the accused rather than providing a sense of compassion to the victim.

Such appears to be the case here at St. Peter's, where the diocese seems more apprehensive about the impact that releasing its own investigative reports on Campobello may have on future civil litigation than in seeking justice for the alleged victim.

That is a truly sad commentary on the mind-set of the Catholic church. It is also unfortunately demonstrative of how unwilling the church is to admit fault and move forward, which is supposedly one of the cornerstones of the Catholic faith.

Although my faith as a Catholic is strong, I feel ashamed of the diocese's handling of this matter and question whether the diocese truly believes in the doctrines that it preaches every Sunday.

I am not alone amongst St. Peter's parishioners in raising these issues and in questioning whether it is appropriate to continue to financially support a church that appears to act in an unethical manner. By refusing to financially support a diocese that seems to value the reputation of an alleged sexual abuser over his victim appears to be the only way to get the diocese's attention.

If enough parishioners follow suit and I know some already have, this will hopefully bring about a change in the way the Catholic church handles these types of situations in the future. In my view, the diocese's position to willingly defy Judge Sheldon and remain in contempt of court

is morally bankrupt and not in any way reflective of what I have come to expect from the Catholic church.

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