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Ex-Geneva priest charged with sexual assault Teen says former St. Peter clergyman victimized her in 1999 when she was 14

**Author(s):** Tona Kunz and Alicia Fabbre Daily Herald Staff Writers  
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A former St. Peter Catholic Church priest called compassionate by parishioners was charged Tuesday with sexually assaulting one of them.

The case marks the Tri-Cities' introduction into the current scandal eating away at the church and the first time such an accusation has been leveled at any house of worship in Geneva.

Mark A. **Campobello**, 37, who served as the associate pastor at St. Peter on Kaneville Road for five years, was charged with five counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse and five counts of criminal sexual assault for incidents between January and May 1999 involving a student at St. Peter Elementary School who was 14 at the time, Geneva police said.

The girl hired an attorney and contacted Geneva Police after she turned 18, police said.

Conviction of criminal sexual assault carries a mandatory prison sentence of 4 to 15 years and requires that convictions for separate incidents be served consecutively.

Charges of aggravated criminal sexual abuse carry a possible prison sentence of three to seven years.

When reached at the St. Peter rectory, the Rev. Joseph Jarmoluk deferred to the Rockford Diocese, saying he knew nothing about the matter.

Police arrested **Campobello** without incident at St. James Catholic Church Parish Center in Belvidere, where he's been serving as the parochial administrator since June 4, 2001.

Church officials there declined to comment on the arrest.

Owen Phelps, director of communication for the Rockford Diocese, which includes Geneva and Belvidere, issued the following statement:

"We are saddened by the allegations in this case involving Father Mark **Campobello**, and most especially we express our sorrow to the alleged victim and her family. On the basis of the charges filed against him and in accord with diocesan policy, the Diocese of Rockford has relieved Father **Campobello** of all duties at St. James Parish in Belvidere and removed his faculties to function as a priest as outlined in the Code of Canon Law.

"Sexual abuse of minors is both a tragedy and a travesty, and we will not tolerate it in our diocese. If anyone has any allegations to report against any employees or volunteers of the Rockford Diocese, we continue to urge them to call the police immediately."

Phelps said he was not aware of any previous complaints against **Campobello**. And while **Campobello** has been at six parishes and one school since his ordination in 1991, Phelps noted the frequent moves are not unusual for an associate pastor.

In addition to serving at St. Peter's Catholic Church in Geneva, **Campobello** also served as an associate pastor at Holy Angels Parish in Aurora in 1996, assistant principal and spiritual director at Aurora Central Catholic High School from 1997 to 2000 and as associate pastor at St. Thomas the

Apostle Parish in Crystal Lake from October 2000 to June 2001.

Phelps described **Campobello's** most recent job as parochial administrator as having oversight of the church, but not as much responsibility as a priest.

In light of the recent flurry of accusations against Catholic priests, parishioners didn't hotly defend **Campobello** but also said they didn't have enough information to issue judgment.

"That's a shock to me," said St. Peter parishioner John Lance of St. Charles. "He was just a normal guy. A nice guy."

Others remembered the burly man as gregarious and always carrying a smile.

Geneva Police began investigating **Campobello** in October. Lt. Joe Frega declined to comment on details of the abuse or where it took place other than to say it was within city limits.

Police declined to comment on how **Campobello** may have come into contact with the girl, saying only that it was through church functions and not the adjacent elementary school.

Geneva police are not looking into any other cases of abuse there.

"It is always possible that there are other victims, but we have not heard any other people come forward," Frega said.

**Campobello** was released Tuesday on \$75,000 bail pending a court appearance Jan. 9 in Kane County Circuit Court. He could not be reached for comment at his home, current parish or parents' home in Crystal Lake where he grew up.

His father, Richard **Campobello**, declined to comment before learning all of the allegations.

Kane County State's Attorney Meg Gorecki could not be reached for comment. The state's attorney's office will hold a news conference at 11 a.m. today to discuss the charges.

- Daily Herald staff writer Veronica Gonzalez contributed to this report.

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