



**Ray Benedetto and members of St. Peter's Catholic Church in Geneva, speak to the press in support of the church's pastor.**

St. Peter's members hold press conference in defense of parish  
Campobello case: Rev. Jarmoluk's lawyer shot down in attempt to sanction another attorney

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By [STEVE LORD](#) Staff Writer

GENEVA -- Parishioners at St. Peter's Catholic Church said Thursday that their patience has run out.

A group identifying itself as "registered and true parishioners" of St. Peter's Parish here, and supporters of the church's pastor, the Rev. Joseph Jarmoluk, held a press conference at which they said they wanted to set the record straight about their parish.

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(Craig Watson/Staff Photographer)

Their comments were directed at what they said were wrong impressions and information about the parish that have been broadcast, published and circulated as fallout from the case of Mark Campobello, a priest-in-residence at the parish, who pleaded guilty in 2004 to two counts of criminal sexual abuse against two teenage girls. The abuse took place in 1999.

Since that time, through Campobello's arrest and criminal trial – as well as a civil case brought by the victims against Campobello, the parish and the Rockford Diocese – periodic press reports have said the parish is divided, and that some parishioners want more information about what Jarmoluk might have known.

"The opinions of a few do not constitute a 'divided parish,'" said Ray Benedetto, one of the parishioners who spoke at the press conference. "We are united through 80 active and thriving ministries. Our parish is strong."

Finances looking up

Various speakers at the press conference pointed out that St. Peter School is packed, with 500 students. Another 1,500 students from public schools are taking religious training classes at the church, they said.

They also said the church has more volunteers than ever before, and disputed claims that contributions are down because of questions relating to the abuse case. A Beacon News story in October 2006 reported that figures in church bulletins at that time said weekly collections had dropped from about \$32,000 to \$20,000, and that some parishioners had talked about reducing services.

But Benedetto claimed contributions are going up, and the church is about to start another capital campaign to raise money to pay down its debt. Parishioner Joan Benedetto said the church has maintained all its financial commitments to organizations and has "maintained a strong stewardship" throughout the community.

"Our food pantry serves almost 200 families every two weeks," said Ray Benedetto. "We've been able to support the community."

Threat of contempt

The parishioners held their press conference after a court appearance Thursday morning before 16th Circuit Court Judge Keith Brown on a motion connected to the civil lawsuit against Campobello by the sexual abuse victims. The motion was made by Canice Timothy Rice Jr., Jarmoluk's attorney, in connection with the fact Jarmoluk has been compelled by the court to testify in the civil case.

Rice filed a motion for a hearing to see if Michael Brooks, the attorney for the victims, violated a court order by revealing Jarmoluk's name as a witness. The court order barred attorneys from releasing sensitive information.

Rice accused Brooks of identifying Jarmoluk by talking to a newspaper. But Brooks and Brown both said Jarmoluk's name was mentioned in open court, and was mentioned by Rice himself in a court pleading.

Brown denied Rice's motion for a separate hearing, and said the court deposition would take place March 20 as planned. He even chastised Rice for "insinuating" the judge had a conversation about the case with Brooks away from court, and that the court might have purposely been involved with releasing Jarmoluk's name.

The contentious hearing came to an abrupt end after Brown made his ruling and threatened Rice with contempt of court if he kept arguing the motion.

"This hearing's done," Brown said. "Don't say another word."