



JEFFREY WARD

The local
columnist

Zeal to defend priest takes wrong turn

There are some things in life you cannot prepare for. Getting married, your first child and Paris Hilton singing fall into that category.

I attended the Sept. 5 City Council meeting in Geneva anticipating outrageous quotes from the anti-Aldi crowd. Even though my newspaper doesn't trust me with press credentials (and I don't blame them), I sat at the media

table. To show just how bereft my life can be, it was a thrill sitting with the reporters.

But, it became apparent if I had to attend these meetings on a regular basis my first call would be to Dr. Kevorkian.

Ray Pawlak gave his impassioned oratory and voted against everything. Paul DesCoteaux was at his curmudgeonly best, but usually voting "aye!" Jim Radecki's poignant recognition of the late Herb

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WARD

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Granquist was a reminder that even aldermen are human beings.

Then Mayor Kevin Burns said, "Is there any other business?"

Staring straight ahead, gripping papers and trembling with anger, St. Peter Catholic Church parishioner Kim Koehley marched to the dais. Three times she demanded the mayor explain his comments regarding St. Peter Monsignor Joseph Jarmoluk. Each time, Burns explained his personal opinions were not city business, but he would meet with the group outside.

As each attempt to commandeer the meeting was rebuffed, the jeers from the gallery grew louder. When Koehley ignored the mayor and continued the inquisition, the council adjourned to the anguished dismay of the pro-Jarmoluk supporters in attendance.

The question remains, even among parishioners, as to when Jarmoluk knew about former priest Mark Campobello's 1999 sexual abuse of an eighth-grade girl at St. Peter School. Campobello is serving an 8-year sentence after pleading guilty to that crime as well as the abuse of an Aurora Central Catholic High School student.

In August, Bishop Thomas Doran ordered Jarmoluk to apologize to his parish for unspecified actions and to dismiss his personal attorney. Jarmoluk sent a letter of apology to parishioners and personally asked forgiveness at a special Mass.

Burns responded, "If this [letter] is to be intended or received as an act of contrition, it falls far short of that. It is really just an act of following orders. ... Blaringly absent in that letter is an admission of wrongdoing by Msgr. Jarmoluk."

The group of 30 followed the mayor outside. Standing next to the mayor facing this mob is an experience I will never forget. The only thing missing was the burning cross. Camera flashes and camcorder lights replaced the torches.

They screamed at the mayor, berated him for having an opinion, and told him exactly what to believe for 50 minutes. Some shouted down anyone who disagreed. The mob demanded "evidence" of any wrongdoing on Jarmoluk's part and chastised the mayor for using his position to "harass" him. Though Burns did not make his statements in any official capacity, how can anything he says ever be divorced from his office?

And, where was this group of "concerned" citizens when Jarmoluk used his position to denounce parishioners at church services? Attendees spoke of the attack on Barb Houston, the teacher who reported the Campobello abuse. Jarmoluk, from the pulpit, claimed that the report was motivated out of revenge against him.

Then there was the verbal assault on Frank Bochte at another Mass. Bochte, a longtime parishioner, had the temerity to suggest that donations to the Rockford Diocese cease until they handed over the results of their internal investigation of Campobello. This attack was so outrageous that a major Chicago newspaper did an entire column on it.

The most egregious example of this abuse of power came during the funeral Mass of a Burns relative. In a letter to Jarmoluk that was never sent, Kevin's wife, Terry Burns, wrote: "During the homily, you chose to take advantage of the opportunity to defend yourself . . . I was shocked that you would go so far as to use the pulpit to say that [our Aunt] regularly affirmed your leadership . . ."

Let's say that in each of these instances Jarmoluk

was in the right. To use the pulpit for any type of harassment is unconscionable. If this isn't mounting evidence of wrongdoing and a pattern of behavior then I'm lost. And what manner of leap of faith would it take to believe that Jarmoluk knew about the Campobello abuse?

If anyone thinks the Catholic Church is taking the sexual abuse epidemic seriously, I have two words for you — "Daniel McCormack."

When reporters started asking for names, the mob dispersed like cockroaches that scatter when you turn on the kitchen light. At least Koehley had that guts to stand up for her beliefs, but I would rather run into Richard Simmons in a dark alley than have to face her on the street at noon.

Please understand, I do not believe this group truly represents St. Peter Church.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." Sinclair Lewis wrote, "When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying the cross." Well, Sinclair, it's come to Geneva.

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