

Geneva victim sues priest and diocese

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Mark **Campobello** used his position as a priest, confidant and family friend to sexually abuse a young Geneva girl, and the Rockford Diocese was negligent in allowing that to happen, according to a lawsuit filed Wednesday.

The civil lawsuit seeks compensatory damages of more than \$50,000 and unspecified punitive damages from **Campobello**, the Rockford Diocese and its head, Bishop Thomas Doran.

Joliet attorney Keith Aeschliman expects to file a second civil lawsuit against the diocese next week on behalf of **Campobello's** second victim.

Exactly how the diocese and Doran failed in their duties to protect the two girls will come to light during the discovery process, Aeschliman said. He will seek all the documents that can show the diocese's "pattern and practice" of dealing with abusive priests, which he said could lead to new disclosures about other priests and victims.

The recent appellate court ruling ordering the diocese to hand over documents to a Kane County trial judge, Aeschliman said, "helps in that it will be more difficult for them to make an argument as to what is or isn't privileged."

Last month **Campobello** pleaded guilty to sexually abusing both girls when he was a resident priest at St. Peter Catholic Church in Geneva and assistant principal at Aurora Central Catholic High School during 1999 and 2000. He has begun serving an eight-year prison sentence.

"We're not going to be arguing about whether or not he committed these acts," Aeschliman said. "The case will primarily be what they knew, when they knew it and what they should have done about it. It's therapeutic for the victims to find out what the truth is."

**Campobello** became friends with the Geneva girl's father in 1994, when the girl was 9 years old, frequently attending dinners, holidays and social gatherings, the seven-page complaint said.

"In the ensuing months and years defendant **Campobello** observed plaintiff transition from a child, to a pubescent, to an early adolescent experiencing the first awakenings and perceptions of her own sexuality," the complaint said.

He used that relationship to "gain knowledge of plaintiff's adolescent hopes, fears and yearnings," using that authority to start a sexual, romantic relationship with the 14-year-old in 1999.

During this time, the diocese negligently failed to have policies and monitoring in place that would have protected the girl, the lawsuit alleges. It also "furnished **Campobello** with continual opportunity for unrestricted, unsupervised and unmonitored one-on-one interactions with adolescent girls."

Because of the abuse, the 19-year-old now feels shame, guilt, a loss of self-esteem and a mistrust of intimacy, according to the lawsuit.

Aeschliman has handled priest abuse cases since 1993 and has gone through a similar discovery process with the Joliet Diocese seeking to establish its pattern and practice of dealing with abusive priests.

Within the next 30 days, the diocese and **Campobello's** attorneys can file motions in response to the lawsuit. Aeschliman said he has not had any direct contact with the diocese.

As of Wednesday, the diocese had not been served with the complaint and had no statement, a spokesman said. **Campobello's** attorney could not be reached for comment.