

St. Peter story raises more questions

As tiresome as it is to continually defend against the "facts" you print in your obvious witch hunt against my parish, St. Peter Church, and the Rockford Diocese, I am compelled once again to respond to what I find to be unfair reporting.

The article "Did diocese hide priest's sex abuse?" of June 23 raises far more questions and concerns than answers about this sad story.

Much of the article accuses the parish and diocese of not giving the allegations proper credence when they termed them hearsay and gossip, and yet, you report, "in 1999, the teacher whispered the tale into Houston's ear." Sounds to me like the "longtime teacher" and Barbara Houston were gossiping.

You report the teachers faced a "moral dilemma" - one they apparently didn't feel the need to act on quickly. How can they excuse themselves for not reporting it to DCFS for three years if they were certain the story was true?

The fact that the teacher and Houston chose to remain silent and claim not to have known until September 2002 about the state's mandated reporting law doesn't ring true.

I do not work in a profession that serves children and yet I am aware of that law and of one's moral and ethical responsibility to protect children.

Although she claims to have been concerned about Mark **Campobello's** behavior toward the girl, the teacher chose to step back, to not press, to not ask questions and then brought the girl to Aurora Central to confront **Campobello**. That is one of the most egregious statements in the article.

Time and time again, the teacher and Houston place blame on the parish and diocese. However, when given the opportunity to act, believing a 14-year-old girl was being abused by a 34-year-old man, the teacher behaved like a teenage cohort of a spurned girlfriend rather than the responsible, mature role model she should have been. Is her choice to remain anonymous her defense against questions any reasonable adult would have as to the shirking of her responsibility?

Houston chooses to hide behind her excuse of being "a scared Catholic" and claim of being intimidated by Mrs. Bray. Outrageous.

I am appalled by the delayed action of the teacher and Houston and their self-righteous attitude in blaming the parish and diocese. So many people in this young girl's life failed her - including the teachers who gossiped rather than acted. Houston was correct when she said, "we're all humans, and we've made mistakes." I hope she includes herself in that comment.

The girl and **Campobello** spoke on the phone for an hour a day, they exchanged inappropriate presents, they spent an inordinate amount of time together. Where was the family? The family who "wouldn't respond" to the diocese's inquiries or return phone messages and yet wasted no time in filing a civil suit against the diocese.

Question: Is the family also suing the teachers who kept silent for three years? Probably not. Two parochial school teachers don't have the deep pockets of a diocese of 105 parishes.

Yes, the allegations did prove to be more than gossip, but hindsight is 20/20, isn't it? Unfortunately, no one - even the leaders of our diocese - can look into the future and know what the outcome will be, hence the reason for extreme caution in bringing charges of such a nature.

As to Monsignor Joseph Jarmoluk's alleged comments to Houston, I take them for no more than what they are: hearsay. Yet again, because Father Joe chooses appropriate silence and dignity over blabbing to the media, he is the one positioned as in the wrong.

To say it is unfair is an understatement - it is another example of the media's hideous injustice to a fine man.

The expectation that the parish and diocese should "publicly air its past" is highly uncalled for. They are the only players in this story who have tried to maintain a sense of privacy on behalf of all.

As for the "unanswered questions still troubling the St. Peter community," I am far more troubled by the Daily Herald's propensity for presenting hearsay as fact and gossip as truth. If the Daily Herald is going to purport itself to be "Suburban Chicago's Information Source" and claim that its mission is "to tell the truth," I would ask that you look into all sides of a story rather than reporting such obvious one-sided prejudice.

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