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A time for healing at St. Peter parish

In his final sermon before being transferred from St. Peter parish in Geneva to St. Patrick's in St. Charles, the Rev. Akan Simon made this poignant statement: "It was hard to walk down the aisle toward the altar each Sunday knowing that people would look at you and wonder, 'Is he one of the bad ones?'"

It was Father Simon's way of saying he was hurt and ashamed by what had taken place regarding sexual molestation crimes in the Catholic Church, and particularly two jolting incidents at St. Peter in the past year - the sentencing of Father Mark **Campobello** in a sexual abuse case and the arrest of choir director Michael Pavone in connection with a murder in New York.

St. Peter parishioners have since struggled emotionally with issues of trust, conscience, accountability, consequences and forgiveness. In the aftermath of this turbulent year, they have been left with:

- A segment of the parish still uncertain about pastor Monsignor Joseph Jarmoluk's awareness of either incident, and a segment supporting him.
- A "due diligence" report from Father Jarmoluk's attorney Canice Timothy Rice Jr., giving an account of who knew what and when in relation to **Campobello's** crimes against two teenagers.
- A series of letters and opinion pieces in area newspapers, ranging from urging parishioners to voice concerns to the Rockford Diocese, to urging a healing process for the victims, to finding holes in Rice's report.
- A circuit court judge ruling the Rockford Diocese does not have to make public internal church documents related to **Campobello's** past.
- A teacher dismissed for failing to report what she knew about **Campobello's** crimes.
- An assurance the parish will thoroughly scrutinize future hires.

St. Peter has long served its community well with vocations and spiritual strength, but it is not surprising that wounds fester in light of recent events. We currently sense a "cooling off" period in which emotions will be subdued in knowing St. Peter, like many other Catholic churches, has experienced a trauma that forces change.

There will be changes in handling future incidents, hiring future employees and explaining church policies.

We encourage this healing process and hope St. Peter in particular, and the Catholic Church in general, takes into account a major step in credibility. Many Catholics simply want bishops at one level and pastors at another to accept blame for their roles in allowing these types of scandals to exist. It has left a bad taste for many when church leaders balk at admitting guilt when issuing apologies. It creates a perception that the clergy did not grasp the seriousness of these crimes or, worse, ignored them or hoped they would go away on their own.