

Tough calls ahead for **judge** in priest abuse case

Author(s): Tona Kunz Daily Herald Staff Writer

Date: November 18, 2005

Page: 7

Section: News

Noting the controversial and potentially precedent-setting nature of the lawsuit against a former Geneva priest, a Kane County **judge** held off Thursday on deciding which other abuse allegations can play into the trial.

An attorney for two girls abused as teens by former Geneva priest Mark Campobello said he needs the Rockford Catholic Diocese files about sex abuse allegations between 1991 and 2002. Those files, he said, could point to a pattern of transferring, ignoring or poorly investigating allegations of abuse.

The two girls are suing the diocese for ignoring their sexual abuse by Campobello between 1999 and 2000 in Geneva and Aurora.

Judge F. Keith Brown said the request for records puts him in a difficult position of weighing victims' privacy rights against the information needed to prepare for a trial.

Brown said he is leaning toward releasing the dates of abuse and how the diocese responded, but not the victims' names. But **Keith Aeschliman**, the Shorewood attorney for the girls, said that makes it nearly impossible to verify that the records the diocese kept are accurate, especially in regards to how fast they responded to complaints.

Also, because of the emotionally charged nature of priest abuse cases, **Brown** said he's worried people will interpret the release of files for use in the trial as a sign of wrongdoing on the diocese's part or the prohibition of files as a sign the diocese acted aboveboard. Neither may be accurate.

Brown said he hopes to make a decision by Jan. 5.

If any priest files and victims' names are released, attorneys likely will be prohibited from sharing the information with the public or media.

But **Aeschliman** will not be the attorney who will review the files and prepare for trial. The lawyer, who has worked with the two girls for three years on their lawsuits, is retiring.

Aeschliman said he has pushed back his retirement plan for a year now, but without a quick end in sight for the lawsuits, he can't see continuing to do that.

A nearly two-year battle in criminal court, where Campobello eventually pleaded guilty, delayed the start of the civil lawsuit.

Aeschliman expects to have a replacement set by Dec. 15. He said the switch would benefit the girls because it would bring fresh ideas and energy to the trial preparation.

Parishioners from St. Peter Church in Geneva and the Catholic watchdog group Voice of the Faithful thanked **Aeschliman** for getting the lawsuit going and said he would be missed.