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Tensions at Geneva church reach boiling point

By Rita Hoover
Staff writer

Three victims of clergy sexual abuse sparked a variety of emotions among parishioners Feb. 8 when they attempted to hand out fliers after Mass at St. Peter Catholic Church in Geneva.

Two victims held posters bearing childhood photos of themselves at the age at which their abuse occurred. A Hickory Hills resident, identified as "Dennis," and Ken Kaczmarz, a LaGrange Park resident, stood silently as parishioners walked passed them after the 9 a.m. Mass. Barbara Blaine, who in 1989 founded the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests, handed out fliers.

Blaine, a Chicago resident, recently wrote a letter to Bishop Thomas Doran of the Catholic Diocese of Rockford, asking the diocese to cooperate with prosecutors in the case against Mark Campobello, 38, of Belvedere. Campobello was indicted last year on charges of aggravated criminal sexual abuse for allegedly abusing an eighth-grade student at St. Peter Catholic School between January and May 1999. He was a priest in residence at St. Peter Catholic Church at the time.

His trial begins Monday, May 24, at the Kane County Judicial Center in St. Charles. If found guilty, Campobello could serve three to seven years with probation for the sexual abuse charges, and between four and 15 years without probation for the sexual assault charges.

Campobello also is awaiting a second trial date on aggravated criminal sexual abuse charges for acts that allegedly occurred between Nov. 1, 1999 and March 31, 2000, with a student at Aurora Central Catholic High School. Campobello was employed as a teacher at the high school at the time of the alleged incidents.

Aggravated criminal sexual abuse is a Class Two felony, punishable by up to seven years in prison, if found guilty.

In May 2003, the Catholic Diocese of Rockford was charged with contempt of court and fined \$100 when it refused to turn over documents subpoenaed by the state pertaining to Campobello's personnel records.

Blaine said the group wanted to hand out the fliers asking that anyone with information about abuse contact authorities. The flier also asked that parishioners contact Doran "to let him know you expect him to support law enforcement."

Some parishioners quietly took the fliers, others refused and headed for the parking lot. But a handful were openly angry, shouting at the protesters.

"Don't you have anything better to do?" asked an elderly man who rolled up the flier and used it to swat Dennis on the arm as he passed.

Another man engaged in a nose-to-nose standoff with Dennis, who stood still after being asked to "go away and not come back."

Blaine said the angry reactions were "not typical."

"There is usually as many people thanking us and glad that we're there as would be frustrated. I've never had that kind of confrontation," she said. "Clearly there is a lot of woundedness in that parish."

Blaine accused the bishop of "hiding behind an argument of First Amendment protections," while publicly stating that he is "committed to a new area of transparency and openness."

See Tensions Page 5

Tension

Continued from Page 1

"(Doran) answers to a higher calling — to the spirit of God, the parishioner and his diocese. He's also an American citizen and Americans have certain duties and one of them is to follow the law. When a court subpoenas your records, you turn them over," she said.

The parish has not publicly commented on Campobello's case. But after Sunday's protest outside the church, St. Peter's communication coordinator Rama Kanney spoke to The Geneva Republican Feb. 10 on behalf of the

parish and its pastor, the Rev. Joseph Jarmoluk, as well as Bishop Doran. Kanney also has attempted to meet with Blaine, she said.

"I want to stress that (Campobello) was not employed here at the time the (alleged) abuse occurred," said Kanney. Although he lived at the parish rectory and did celebrate Mass at St. Peter's, Kanney said Campobello did not report to supervisors at the parish.

"People's hearts go out to the victims," she said, adding the entire sexual abuse scandal involving the church has been "shocking."

"Especially, when it comes so close to home," she said.

St. Peter's parishioner Frank Bochte,

who has spoken out publicly about the church's stance in Campobello's case, witnessed some of the confrontations after Mass.

"I found it to be extremely distasteful and not befitting of someone who calls themselves a Catholic. It's one thing to passively walk by, but these (protestors) were standing out in the cold, not being aggressive. These (angy parishioners) should be ashamed of themselves," he said.

Kanney said, "The diocese and (Jarmoluk) have tried to explain why (the diocese was held in contempt of court). Most parishioners understand that the church is not withholding the documents in an ornery manner — that this is in the

hands of the judicial system."

She added the parish is "working hard to make sure we protect our children."

MaryLu O'Halloran, a Geneva resident and a Catholic, expressed concern about the way the diocese has handled the case.

"Whatever mistakes were made, let's acknowledge them. We all make mistakes and that's how we all grow and learn. No matter what church we belong to we are all impacted by this. We're not going to stand by and enable inappropriate behavior," she said.

Kanney said the church wants healing.

"We should be building bridges, and continue to go about the work we're supposed to be doing," she said.