

Consultant: Clergy abuse is a 'violation of the community'

By Rita Hoover
Staff writer

According to an attorney who also is a national consultant on clerical ethics, church communities in crisis need to take responsibility for their dilemma and acknowledge their members' concerns and pain.

Kimberly Day Lewis works with the Seattle-based Faith Trust Institute, a national organization that provides training and educational resources for clergy, lay leaders, seminary faculty, chaplains and policy makers of religious institutions. The institute, established in 1978, also serves as a community advocate on the faith aspects of sexual and domestic violence.

The Faith Trust Institute often works with faith communities

attempting to cope with the effects of clergy sexual abuse. St. Peter Catholic Church in Geneva is one parish rocked by such a crisis when a former priest was arrested on criminal sexual abuse charges in December 2002.

Mark Campobello, 39, of Belvidere began an eight-year prison term May 28 after he pled guilty to sexually abusing two teenage girls between 1999 and 2000. The first girl, who was an eighth-grader at St. Peter Catholic School at the time of the abuse, filed a civil suit June 16 against Campobello and the Diocese of Rockford seeking in excess of \$50,000. The second lawsuit against the former priest and the diocese was filed July 7 by a former Aurora Central Catholic High School student. Campobello pled guilty to abusing the Aurora student when she

was 16. Campobello was the assistant principal and spiritual director at the high school when the abuse occurred. She also is seeking in excess of \$50,000. Both victims are being represented by Joliet-based attorney Keith Aeschliman.

The Geneva parish has been criticized for its silence about the abuse and its alliance with the diocese, which refused to turn over documents in Campobello's criminal trial. In May the Illinois 2nd District Appellate Court ruled that the diocese must turn over the requested documents.

Geneva resident John O'Halloran is one of a handful of local Catholics who has publicly asked for answers from the church.

"Many of us believe once the whole truth is revealed, all those involved in (St. Peter) can finally heal and move forward," said O'Halloran.

While church officials are claiming they did everything in accordance with civil and church laws, they may be inadvertently causing more tension among their followers, Lewis said.

"It offends people to say that you did everything correctly," she said.

"Churches need to realize that they didn't do everything correctly or they wouldn't be in litigation."

In a recent press release, diocese officials stated they have "always acted promptly and in accord with the law when dealing with the allegations of sexual abuse by any of the diocese's clergy," and will not comment further while in litigation. The Rev. Joe Jarmoluk, St. Peter's current pastor who has not been named in the lawsuits, has hired St. Louis-based attorney Canice Timothy Rice to handle his inquires.

Rice has claimed that a review of Jarmoluk's administration over the past three years confirms that at all times Jarmoluk "abided by all of the laws" of the state and church.

When sexual abuse occurs within any organization, it is common to believe that only the victims have been harmed, Lewis said. However, she said there is always "collateral damage" that extends beyond the immediate victims.

"It's not just a violation of the individual person, it's a violation of the community. Nobody feels safe now and that is a hurt that needs to be acknowledged," said Lewis.