

Republican

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Geneva's Catholic church needs real leadership

As a member of the Catholic faith community for more than 55 years, and a resident of the city of Geneva for over 25 years, I want to extend my sincere apologies to the Campobello victims and all other victims and their respective families for the abuses of our clergy and our church. I also extend my apologies to the office of the Kane County state's attorney, the Geneva Police Department, Mayor Kevin Burns, Frank Bochte, Kate Bochte, Barb Houston and Alison Ward, for the actions of Monsignor Joseph Jarmoluk and his attorney, Canice Timothy Rice. I will explain.

It is over a year since the dissemination of the "due diligence" report of Mr. Rice. The report was to exonerate Jarmoluk's actions or omissions with regard to the sexual abuse situation involving Mark Campobello. Rice states in the letter, "As a Catholic priest and pastor, Monsignor Jarmoluk is constrained by his need to set an example of Christian charity toward those who, however unjustly, libel and slander him." To the contrary, in the year since the "due diligence" report, there has been no such constraint. Since the letter was written, Jarmoluk individually or through his attorney, has done the following:

- * Made a complaint about Frank Bochte to his employer, the FBI, which resulted in Bochte's complete exoneration. Fired Kate Bochte as a volunteer religious education teacher and removed her from the Respect Life Committee. These actions were taken because they have questioned Jarmoluk and the diocese in their handling of the sexual abuse scandal.

- * Caused a complaint to be filed against Barb Houston with the Kane County Superintendent of Schools, attempting to suspend her teaching license.

- * Made a complaint to the Kane County state's attorney and the Geneva Police Department asking for an investigation of "leaked information" with regard to the subpoena of Jarmoluk for the Campobello trial.

- * Demanded a meeting with Geneva Mayor Kevin Burns and requested he make a public retraction for remarks he made last year.

- * Terminated the teaching contract of Alison Ward in June 2004 after he had already signed it in May 2004 for the next school year. To further put salt in the wounds, Jarmoluk and the diocese objected to Ward's application for unemployment benefits, stating her termination was for "cause." Ward, representing herself, was successful in obtaining the benefits.

The "due diligence" letter strongly criticized Ward and Houston for not mandate reporting the abuse of the Geneva victim of Campobello to the Child Abuse Hotline, but was silent as to Jarmoluk's and school principal Bray's failure

to mandate report the abuse which they were obligated to do under the law. In fact, in the summer of 2004, in the hearing for her claim for unemployment benefits when asked by Ward about his role as a mandated reporter, Jarmoluk stated he did not know whether he was a mandated reporter at the time. More alarming and disturbing is the pamphlet from the Diocese of Rockford Office of Diocesan Intervention titled "What To Do: Guidelines for Employees and Volunteers in the Diocese of Rockford for Use in Response to Cases of Sexual Abuse." This pamphlet, recently found in the narthex of St. Peter's Church, tells us to report any such abuse to the diocese. Nowhere in the pamphlet does it say to report it to the Child Abuse Hotline. This is in direct opposition to the law.

Instead of wasting his time and effort in defending himself, Jarmoluk should be educating himself and his parish on mandate reporting. Mr. Rice in his "due diligence" letter refers to actions and procedures that have been undertaken or would be undertaken to minimize the risk of abuse of children at St. Peter's. What has been done in this regard? Have all the mandated reporters in the parish been instructed on mandated reporting? Have the parish members who are not mandated reporters been provided with any information on reporting suspected abuse?

There is an obvious lack of leadership at St. Peter's and in our diocese. Jarmoluk answers to our bishop, who in turn answers to our pope. In other words, Jarmoluk can do whatever he wants as pastor with no one but the bishop to call him to task. Many who dare question our clergy or diocese are shunned, harassed and are called "intrinsically evil." There is a parish council at St. Peter's, but it has no authority over Jarmoluk. Ostensibly it is there to advise, and most pastors do listen to the advice. Jarmoluk has met with the parish council only once in over 18 months, and that one time was because the bishop ordered him to meet with them. Is this the leadership we expect in our church? Does this instill confidence in the leadership?

The sexual and other abuse of children is an evil and vile scandal in our church and in our society. Campobello has already pleaded guilty to the abuse of two victims and no one is accusing Jarmoluk in any way of participating in or condoning it. Rice, whose office is in St. Louis, has spent considerable time in our community on behalf of Jarmoluk. Who is paying his attorney's fees? Jarmoluk? St. Peter's? The Rockford Diocese?

From a very early age in our faith, we are taught to reflect upon ourselves, examine our consciences, confess our sins, seek forgiveness, do penance, make restitution and avoid sin in the future. Isn't it ironic that some of our clergy and our diocese do not practice what they preach? We are fortunate to have many talented clergy and laity in our diocese and abundant resources in our church. We need to utilize these resources. The parish community needs to be reunited and all those who have been disenfranchised or hurt should be invited and welcomed back with open and loving arms.

Again, I extend my sincere apologies to all who have been affected and I know that there are many others in our community who join me.

John O'Halloran

Geneva