

Geneva priest goes to prison for sex abuse

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Campobello begins eight-year sentence

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ST. CHARLES - With the metallic click of handcuffs closing around his wrists, Mark **Campobello** heard his freedom end Friday in a Kane County courtroom.

The Catholic priest surrendered to authorities to begin an eight-year prison term for molesting two teenage girls while he lived in the rectory at St. Peter Catholic Church in Geneva and worked at Aurora Central Catholic High School.

Campobello, 39, pleaded guilty May 13 to two counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse in an agreement that likely will require him to serve half his sentence.

Campobello was led into the Kane County Judicial Center by his attorneys, who clasped his arms and patted him on the shoulder.

The Crystal Lake native stared straight ahead in a crowded courtroom as he waited for Judge Timothy Q. Sheldon to call his

case.

Friday's hearing was similar to dozens of others **Campobello** has attended since a teenager told Geneva police in October 2002 that she had sexual contact with the priest in 1999 when she was 14 years old.

But instead of walking to his car, **Campobello** shook hands with his attorneys before being handcuffed and ushered through a side door to a holding area.

"I think he's doing fine," Elgin attorney Van Richards said afterward. Richards was one of **Campobello's** defense attorneys.

Campobello had been transferred to St. James Parish in Belvidere when the Rockford Diocese stripped him of his pastoral duties a month after he was charged with abusing the 14-year-old, a student at St. Peter Catholic School.

In October 2003, **Campobello** was indicted on additional sex-abuse charges after a former Aurora student accused him of similar offenses between November 1999 and March 2000, when she was 16.

Assistant State's Attorney Jody Gleason said the plea agreement allowed the teens to ensure that **Campobello** was punished without having to recount the sexual abuse on the witness stand.

"Is it enough? No, it probably was not enough," Gleason said of the sentence. "I don't know if you could put a number of years on what these girls have been through."

Although the criminal case is over, Catholic church leaders must weigh whether to fight an appellate court order that requires the diocese to disclose its personnel files on the priest's conduct.

The Illinois 2nd District Appellate Court in Elgin on May 21 ordered the surrender of records that explain **Campobello's** transfer from Geneva and the diocese's probe of the abuse before he faced criminal charges.

Disclosure of the records could affect investigations of future priest-abuse cases, especially in northern Illinois. Kane County prosecutors still want to review the documents, Gleason said.

Friday's sentencing was attended by two women, accompanied by Kane County victim's advocates, who were present when **Campobello** pleaded guilty. Prosecutors declined to confirm if they are the teens he acknowledged abusing.

Also seated in the courtroom were members of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, a national support and watchdog group, who praised the resolution of the criminal case.

"In reality, it's the courage of the victims that's really to be applauded here," SNAP spokeswoman Barbara Blaine said. "Kids in Illinois are safer now that Mark **Campobello** is going to jail."