

Picking up the pieces

With regards to Mark Campobello pleading guilty to sexually abusing two teenage girls in the Diocese of Rockford, St. Peter's Church in Geneva, and the American Catholic Church's involvement in the sex abuse scandal, thank you for printing all the letters concerning these issues. Thank you, Mr. Bochte, for having the courage of your convictions and bearing witness for the sake of the victims, their families and the safety of all children.

There are those who feel writing about what is going on in the Catholic Church, whether it pertains to St. Peter's Parish and the Diocese of Rockford's handling of Mark Campobello's case and the victims of abuse, or the scandal in the American Catholic Church, is a big no-no. "It's hanging our dirty laundry up in public." There are those who feel it should be hushed up and we should look the other way. There are others who grew up in a church where they perceived it sinful to question a priest, bishop or cardinal.

Personally, I think it's imperative to be educated on the sexual abuse scandal within our American Catholic Church Family. It's important to reflect, write about, talk about and absolutely question every aspect of it. It does not mean if you do so that you are in partnership with Satan, have your priorities mixed up, or you are a bad Catholic. Perhaps what it really means is that these tragic events have greatly impacted you and you are not in a coma.

All Catholics I know, whether they are laity or clergy, feel the burden of our current abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. We feel wounded, humiliated, disgusted, disappointed, disillusioned and at times, powerless over this nightmare. It is a dilemma, and it conflicts us.

Many of us have been raised as Catholics since birth. We have been formed in the teachings, values and doctrines of the church based on Holy Scripture. Many of us have had very positive experiences with brothers, sisters, priests and bishops all throughout our lives. I know I have.



Mary Lu O'Halloran

I was privileged to grow up in Holy Cross Parish in Deerfield, and have the Sisters of Lorreto in elementary school, the Adrian Dominican Sisters at Regina Dominican High School in Wilmette, and the B.V.M Sisters at Clarke College in Dubuque, Iowa. My husband attended Quigley North High School in Chicago. Both of us grew up in the Archdiocese of Chicago. We have maintained close relationships with men and women who are priests and sisters throughout our lives. We are so grateful for their modeling, teachings and friendships.

What happened with regards to the sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and then covered up is horrific. Allegations from 1950 to 2003 — 4,392 priests accused of molesting children.

"The picture that emerges, sadly, is one of those who broke faith with their people, their priesthood, and their religious vows to use their sacred position to prey on the young and the vulnerable instead of safeguarding them with the tender love of Christ himself," said Bishop Wilton Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The American press did not cause this scandal. They reported it. We don't like our beloved Catholic Church out there in the media portrayed so disgracefully and negatively. The deep wounding came from within our church by some of our trusted shepherds. It is a shock and a harsh reality for us to accept.

We hurt for the victims of abuse. Their lives and the lives of their families have been altered forever. Some victims have committed suicide, and some never have been able to have a healthy relationship. Some have gotten caught up in drugs, and some have ongoing debilitating depression and physical issues. Many victims

have left their faith completely or became atheist. The list of harsh consequences goes on — consequences that last a lifetime.

We hurt for the many faithful clergy who are modeling lives of integrity and holiness, while serving in partnership with the laity. We are the church. We get that concept. Many of us are angry toward anyone, laity or hierarchy who have not been forthcoming with the truth concerning the handling, mandated reporting and investigation of sexual abuse within our churches and dioceses around the United States.

The Catholic Church has long advocated for the sanctity of life in the womb. Our laity and hierarchy must be aggressive and assertive that the same sanctity is applied to children outside the womb on earth.

I thank Bishop Wilton Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Illinois Appellate Justice Anne Burke, chairman of National Review Board, and all the members of this board for your excellent work. This board of prominent lay Catholics has been charged with supervising the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy toward clergy sex abuse of children in all the Catholic Dioceses in the United States. They have worked very hard the last two years to help all our children in the Catholic Church of America be safe.

To anyone who is intimidating, bullying, preempting or devaluing any clergy or laity who are encouraging this policy and process to go forward in the Catholic Church, we ask you to model humility and step aside from your positions of power. It is our moral responsibility to protect and keep the children safe.

This issue is not about persecuting the Catholic Church. It's about kids who were molested by clergy. It's not about "Satan made me do it" either. It's about human beings who are sick, it's about ignorance, defects of character, sins of pride-power, ego,

arrogance and lies stemming from fear, appearances and status.

We must not forget about the victims of abuse and their families. We need to extend our love, compassion, support and apologies. We also need to make sure all the resources for professional counseling and therapy are in place along with any other assistance they might need to heal.

I sincerely hope the Illinois Second District Appellate Court will rule on how much access prosecutors should have to church records. This is a new frontier in the law. A legal procedure needs to be put into place to protect the separation of church and state but at the same time does not allow the church to protect its priests and hierarchy in allegations of wrongdoing involving our children. This ruling also might help children in every Diocese in the Catholic Church of America.

"The truth will set you free but first it will make you miserable." Now we know, all of us in the U.S. Catholic Church family. We need to continue to pray, but let's add fasting to the list, followed by discerned action and involvement. We all need to monitor the new policy and process set forth by the National Review Board in our own churches and dioceses. We also need to make sure it is fine tuned so it does what it was designed to do — keep the children safe and protected now and for future generations.

"Children long for somebody to accept them, to love them, to praise them, to be proud of them. Let us bring the child back to the center or our care and concern. This is the only way the world can survive because our children are the only hope for the future. As older people are called to God, only their children can take their place," — Blessed Mother Teresa.

• *Mary Lu O'Halloran is a resident of Geneva.*

• *Do you have a Guest View? Mail to Guest View, Kane County Chronicle, 1000 Randall Road, Geneva, IL 60134, or e-mail to editorial@kcchronicle.com.*