

July 5, 2004

Letters

Barrage accomplishes nothing positive

To the Editor:

What are my credentials for writing this letter? I am a lifelong member of St. Peter parish in Geneva. I have fully participated in my church and in active community building for my whole adult life. My reputation is honorable. Those who know me would have to acknowledge that what you see is what you get. Saying that, I fully support Msgr. Joseph Jarmoluk, Mrs. Bray and my parish.

At the time that Frank Bochte fired his first salvo at our pastor and parish, I exchanged letters with him. I do not know him other than the response I received from the letter I sent hoping to clarify for him what I felt was his misunderstanding of Msgr. Jarmoluk's position relative to Mark Campobello. Bochte's response to my letter was rude and demeaning. I gave him no answer because I felt he had a motive that was not clear to me — perhaps some sort of personal issue.

The issue he presented should have been directed to the local bishop in Rockford — certainly before it went to the public media. This is the only place he can get answers to his questions relating to clergy appointments and personnel matters. They are not handled at the parish level.

Without getting on the gossip bandwagon, I will never know what his real motive is for this public trashing of good people. It must be a deep-seated need since he and his cohorts have conducted a full scale witch hunt with blatant character assassination, slander and harassment. I cannot believe a professional law enforcement agent and attorney would knowingly put himself in this position. I pray he will see the gravity of his behavior and rectify it. His acting out against the wrong target should be cause for concern.

Any cool head reading the most recent letter in your paper can see that Bochte is losing control of common decency and a true sense of justice when he resorts to insult with the accusations of a "bunker mentality" and that the pastor was somehow complicit with Campobello's behavior and is hiding from his congregation.

I see the pastor at Mass on a daily basis. He does funerals, baptisms and visits the sick in the hospitals and nursing homes. He is present for reconciliation on a published schedule. He can be seen walking between the parish center and his home, greeting in the narthex of the church and readily makes appointments to meet with parishioners — that is pretty open if one really wants to talk to him. The pastor is always available to minister. He is great company at social gatherings. Most families are very comfortable with him. He will not participate in the gossip; he will not add to the divisiveness by responding to the press baiting and harassment. He does not suffer those who deliberately attack, harangue, disrupt and divide the parish by telling partial

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information and gossiping.

Bochte's attack on Mrs. Bray is a further evidence of his publicly spoken threat to bring down this administration and ruin careers. I have known Mrs. Bray for 22 years, and she is a person of impeccable integrity and gentle kindness. I have never heard her speak against a student, parent or teacher. When she shares information, it is strictly limited to what is essential to process a situation. Working closely with her over the years has given me real experience with her professionalism.

The school is safe for children. All of the staff members at St. Peters have been trained in child safety. The certificated staff members have signed contracts that indicate that they understand that they are mandated reporters. The court record shows there was no abuse of a child in school. There was never a complaint against the music director related to his tenure at St. Peters.

When the pastor is accused of refusing to address abuse and personnel issues, I wonder why I hear them addressed at weekend liturgies and the disruptive cadre and Frank Bochte do not. Why have I heard the prayers that the pastor leads for the victims of Campobello's crime and they do not? They apparently didn't hear Msgr. Jarmoluk's offer for counseling. Less than 10 people have availed themselves of that service. They seemingly did not hear the pastor address the issue with the music minister. They didn't hear him pray with the congregation that justice would be done in that man's regard. I hear him lead those prayers almost daily. The hearing problem is not with the ears, it is with hearts, or else people are simply not present for the communication. I have seen the material regarding these issues in the bulletin. I have attended the training sessions relative to child protection with the staff. Mr. Bochte will, I am sure, see my vision and hearing as the product of duping.

Mr. Bochte's accusation of a "hand picked" pastoral council demonstrates another facet of his communication problem. The local bishop ordered a council would be appointed in every parish in the diocese. Candidates are to come from a list of people who indicate an interest in serving — and submit qualifications and be interviewed. This is to avoid single issue candidates and to provide capable people for the offices.

The change in this process was explained in the bulletin and, I believe, in a newsletter when the new process started. To call the people serving in this capacity "yes-men" is insulting. That, however, is Bochte's modus operandi.

I would ask Mr. Bochte not to use the collective "we" when he spews his venom. I am the only one who can speak for me. I love, trust, and support my pastor, the school principal and parish. I want those parishioners who know me to understand that I have given my position much prayer and very serious thought. I belong to a lay organization that is working seriously on the handling of abuse problems. I have communicated with the bishop, the head of the National Bishops' Conference and with Pope John Paul II regarding my anger relating to the fact of abuse and the very poor handling of same. This has been done in thoughtful, deliberate letters. Since the media can not make the needed corrections, I believe that the appropriate means of communication must be by personal contact with those who can and must make changes. I am working on the problem in a positive and responsible manner. Holy scripture is my motivation and my guide.

I am terribly ashamed of what has happened to my parish. The shame is for the deliberate crime of Mark Campobello and for his young victims. My shame is for the accusation against the music director. I pray that he will not be found guilty, though some would truly enjoy his guilt. The shame is for the scandal to the community — of those who continue to gossip and work the media with the goal of humiliation and destruction. The shame is for the terrible pain inflicted on Msgr. Jarmoluk and Mrs. Bray. There is great goodness in St. Peter Parish. Believe me, it is to be found in the pastor, the principal, the staff, hundreds of volunteers, generosity to the community at large, and in the many individuals and families who are solidly Christian in their values and actions.

I believe that the media must inform, but honestly examine the content, motives and impact of their work. Be aware of the pattern of letters. Recognize that the silence from a large part of the parish has to do with the example of the pastor turning his cheek and the sure knowledge that any letters will be followed by a tirade from those involved in the witch hunt. I don't want this to continue. I got the message the first time I heard the news.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that the tremendous number of articles, repeated and pathetic pictures of Campobello and Pavone, to see any other motive than biased information. Our parish has to live with the ramifications of these events even though they were not our acts. The parish is now and will in the future examine any hire to the point of obsession. If you, like most of us, want healing to take place, move on. Give us a chance to let the healing happen. This continued barrage accomplishes nothing positive.

Mary Jaeger