

Report says Jarmoluk did what he could

Publication Kane County Chronicle
Date July 17, 2004
Section(s) Main
Page

By BRENDA SCHORY

Kane County Chronicle

GENEVA -- It was Friday, Sept. 27, 2002, when Monsignor Joe Jarmoluk of St. Peter parish and school first felt that he had enough information to suspect that a priest had sexually abused a student.

The next week, officials with the diocese allegedly contacted the victim's family. They told the family that they had received a report of the sexual abuse of their child, but the family allegedly declined the offer to speak about the abuse.

Instead, the family called a lawyer, who put them in contact with the Geneva Police Department. That interview led to Mark Campo-bello's 2004 conviction for abusing the eighth-grader in 1999.

The timeline, laid out in an independent report paid for by Jarmoluk, is being disputed by some who claim to have knowledge of the sexual abuse.

Further, key individuals have declined comment for various reasons, including pending civil lawsuits filed by two of Campobello's victims.

The report was put together by Canice Timothy Rice Jr., Jarmoluk's personal attorney, at Jarmoluk's request and personal expense. Rice is a St. Louis attorney who has practiced law in Illinois and Missouri for 28 years.

Rice concludes that Jarmoluk acted properly, according to the 12-page report that examines Jarmoluk's administration and decisions in connection with **Campobello's** abuse. The report, which was completed in June, has been distributed to the parish council.

Campobello pleaded guilty in May to aggravated criminal sexual abuse of a 14-year-old Geneva girl and a 15-year-old girl at Aurora Central Catholic High School. **Campobello**, 39, was sentenced to eight years in prison. He is eligible for release in May 2008. He no longer is a priest.

Jarmoluk's story differs

Former teacher Barbara Houston said she first learned of the abuse in 1999 from fellow teacher Alison Ward, with whom the victim allegedly confided, according to police records and interviews. Ward declined comment.

Houston said she immediately detailed the suspicions to a school official, but no action was taken. The Rice report indicates the opposite and maintains that Houston did not provide specifics until September 2002, at which point Jarmoluk immediately called the diocese.

On Oct. 2, three diocese investigators -- Monsignors David Kagen and Eric Barr, and diocese attorney Ellen Lynch -- met with Ward and Jarmoluk, according to the Rice report. It was then that for the first time that Ward allegedly told how the victim had confided in her three years earlier.

The diocese has instructed Jarmoluk and Principal Deborah Bray not to comment because two civil lawsuits stemming from the abuse have been filed. Rice also cited the lawsuit as the reason he advised Jarmoluk not to discuss the case with parishioners.

Houston's regrets

Houston said she regrets not reporting the abuse to the Department of Children and Family Services.

"Why I didn't just go to the Geneva police is a puzzle to me," she wrote in a letter to St. Peter's pastoral council. "I was a scared Catholic who didn't want to rock the boat."

Lynch would not address Houston's statements because of the lawsuits.

However, Lynch said all teachers in the diocese know they are

legally obligated to report suspected abuse to the state's child abuse hot line, (800) 252-2873. The last five numbers spell ABUSE.

Lynch would not say if Ward was disciplined for allegedly not reporting the abuse. Ward was separated from the school this year.

Boyfriend/girlfriend

According to police reports, **Campobello** became a friend of the Geneva victim's family in 1994. He was 29, and the girl was in fourth grade.

In January 1999, **Campobello** joined the family on a weekend trip, and that is when his friendship with the girl changed. It became physical and evolved into a "normal boyfriend/girlfriend relationship," according to the police report.

Campobello gave the girl gifts, including a gold ring with a black stone, gold earrings and a gold necklace with a cross.

Ward told the victim that the relationship was unhealthy and urged her to tell her parents, reports show. The girl did not do so until around Easter, 2000, according to the police report and the victim's lawyer.

School safety

The Rice report also considers the safety of children at St. Peter parish and school. Teachers and coaches each year must acknowledge state law and diocesan policy to report suspected abuse.

Jarmoluk also has hired the Oxford Document Management Co. to conduct additional employee screenings, and he plans to hire a firm to conduct a safety audit of school buildings, procedures and policies.

Further, faculty, parents and students whose parents consent will be asked to study "A Personal Safety Program for Children," recommended by the state's Child Advocacy Center.

"I was not happy with the way a lot of things were handled," said Mary Claire Harris of St. Peter's pastoral council. "If we don't ask the right questions and demand answers, I don't see how we can protect our children. It's that simple."