

Forthcoming documentary defends Illinois priest

Matt C. Abbott
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A New York-based production company has asked me to participate as a commentator in a forthcoming documentary titled *Forsaken*.

The still-in-progress documentary, which already has a [trailer](#) and [Web site](#), focuses on relatively recent events involving St. Peter Catholic Church in Geneva, Ill., whose pastor is Monsignor Joseph Jarmoluk.



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First, some background on the "story behind the story" (from a 2004 *Daily Herald* article, found on [BishopAccountability.org](#)):

'The 'destructive culture of silence' that enabled widespread sexual abuse in the church continues today at the Rockford Diocese, as evidenced by its failure to respond when a priest publicly scolded a parishioner who criticized a Geneva church and the diocese, a victim's advocacy group said.



Msgr. Joseph Jarmoluk

'The Chicago-based Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests has called on Bishop Thomas Doran to discipline the priest involved and commend the courage of the parishioner.

'But the man involved, Geneva resident Frank Bochte, said rather than an apology or commendation, he would prefer the diocese heed his original request to release documents related to sexual abuse allegations against former priest Mark Campobello.

'Bochte echoed the sentiments in the survivor group's letter that Doran, the head of the diocese, 'correct the situation at St. Peter's quickly and affirm your commitment to the moral integrity of your priesthood and that of the church.'

'The spat between Bochte and the parish started on Nov. 16, when he wrote a letter to the *Daily Herald* in response to an appeal from St. Peter Catholic Church for increased donations. The church said donations for the first quarter of the year were 21 percent, or \$91,000, below its budget because of a shaky economy.

'Bochte said the diocese's refusal to release documents from an internal investigation into Campobello was a large reason donations had dropped off, and only one thing could be done about it.

'Refusing to financially support a diocese that seems to value the reputation of an alleged sexual abuser over his victim appears to be the only way to get the diocese's attention,' Bochte wrote.

'Since May 2003, the diocese has been in contempt of court for refusing to turn over its documents on Campobello, who faces numerous charges of criminal sexual abuse and assault after being accused of abusing two girls during 1999 and 2000 while he was living at St. Peter and working as an assistant principal at Aurora Central Catholic High School.

'In response to the letter, Msgr. Joseph Jarmoluk called a private meeting during which Bochte said he asked him to recant his statements and accused him of bearing false witness.

'After a heated argument centering on the diocese's refusal to release its notes on the internal investigation, Bochte said the two cordially agreed to disagree.

'Ten days later, Jarmoluk publicly responded to the letter and the letter-writer during Sunday Mass but did not

mention Bochte by name.

'He tried to explain why donations to the parish had fallen and why it had nothing to do with the charges against Campobello.

'Jarmoluk went on to restate the diocese's position on why its files shouldn't be released and his contention that the letter-writer had borne false witness.

'At one point he pointed to a random parishioner and asked how he would feel if someone released his personnel files, several parishioners said.

'After details of the incident became public, Bochte also said he's seen an 'overwhelming amount of support from parishioners'.....

'Although neither St. Peter nor diocese officials would comment Thursday, a May 16 letter from Msgr. Eric Barr, recently reprinted in the St. Peter church bulletin, offered a response to the diocese's refusal.

"Some may conclude that we are hiding things. But we are not,' Barr wrote. 'We are protecting the right of the church to have independence from the state, as guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution'.....'

Forsaken (also discussed in [this 2006 article](#)) clearly is a defense of Msgr. Jarmoluk — and an unflattering portrayal of SNAP and Voice of the Faithful.

Yet it's not clear who exactly is financing the project. A representative of the production company, David Graham, spoke to me at length over the phone a few weeks ago, but would say only that the company is "very closely held."

Responding to my e-mail inquiry, Msgr. Jarmoluk stated that he is not involved in the production of the documentary (aside from the interview he granted to the filmmakers), nor has he been informed about who's financing it.

In the interest of full disclosure, the production company has not offered me money, I have not asked for money, and no interview has taken place as of yet. Also, as I've mentioned before, I'm not paid for any of my columns.

So there.

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