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Local News: Belvidere

Priest enters plea of not guilty

▪ Former Belvidere clergyman Mark Campobello faces 15 counts of sexual assault and abuse of a minor.

By GERI NIKOLAI, *Rockford Register Star*

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ST. CHARLES □ A Catholic priest who served in a Belvidere parish most of last year pleaded not guilty Thursday to 15 counts of sexual assault and abuse of a minor.

Mark A. Campobello, 37, who was relieved of duties at St. James Church in Belvidere in December, could face from three to more than 15 years in prison if found guilty.

Campobello is accused of assaulting a 14-year-old girl in 1999 when he lived in Geneva.

Kane County Judge Philip L. DiMarzio began reading the indictment of charges in court as Campobello, dressed in a plain black business suit, stood with attorneys Paul Gaziano of Rockford and Van Richards of Elgin.

When the judge detailed the first count □ accusing the priest of inappropriately touching the girl □ lawyers waived the complete reading. The charges also allege Campobello fondled the teen in several incidents from January to May 1999.

Another hearing was set for Jan. 30, when lawyers will update the judge on the case.

The case came to light in October when an attorney for the woman, now 18, contacted Geneva police.

A grand jury indictment Dec. 31 charges Campobello with five counts of a Class 1 felony, criminal sexual assault, and 10 counts of a Class 2 felony, aggravated criminal sexual abuse.

At the time the crimes allegedly occurred, Campobello lived at St. Peter Parish in Geneva and worked as assistant principal and spiritual director at Aurora Central High School.

Prosecutor Jody Gleason of the Kane County State's Attorney's Office said that if Campobello is found guilty and receives more than one prison sentence, she will ask that the sentences be served consecutively.

Campobello was arrested Dec. 3 and posted bail the same day. The Catholic Diocese of Rockford immediately took away all of Campobello's priestly duties.

On Thursday, Gaziano would not say where the priest is living or what he's doing.

Campobello became parochial administrator of St. James in Belvidere in June 2001. He was ordained in 1991 and served at Holy Family in Rockford from June 1991 to June 1994 and at the Cathedral of St. Peter in Rockford from September 1995 to June 1996.

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