

Published: July 9, 2004

Local News: Belvidere

Ex-priest, diocese face new lawsuit

▪ A 21-year-old woman is the second in two months to seek damages against Mark Campobello for sexual abuse.

By GERI NIKOLAI, *Rockford Register Star*

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The Rockford Catholic Diocese is facing another lawsuit over sexual abuse by Mark Campobello, a priest who admitted previous abuse and is serving an eight-year prison sentence.

The suit, filed Thursday in Kane County, is from a 21-year-old woman who says Campobello assaulted her over the period of a year from April 1999 to March 2000.

At the time, she was a student at Aurora Catholic High, where Campobello was assistant principal and spiritual director.

The lawsuit claims the victim met Campobello in September 1998, when she enrolled at Aurora Catholic and was one of five students in the priest's Latin class. Her parents had divorced in 1990, and she had not seen her father since 1993.

According to the suit, Campobello encouraged her to share her anxieties and hopes with him, and she came to look upon him as a surrogate for her father. The priest taught her Catholic doctrine and urged her to join the church, which she did when she was baptized as a 16-year-old in April 1999.

The sexual abuse started that month, the complaint states, and occurred at a youth center, in Campobello's car, in the high school and at a rectory in Crystal Lake.

The lawsuit contends Campobello knew what he was doing was against church and state law, and was harmful to the girl. It also states the diocese should have known about Campobello's sexual tendencies and that he should not have been around children.

The woman is asking for more than \$50,000 for emotional and psychological damages.

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The first suit, filed June 16 in Kane County, is from the other woman Campobello assaulted from 1999 to 2000. She was 14 at the time. She's also seeking in excess of \$50,000.


Both suits name the diocese and Campobello as defendants.


The diocese has not received papers of either suit, said lawyer Ellen Lynch of Hinshaw and Culbertson.

Once the papers are served, the diocese will have 30 days to respond.

Campobello, who is at Illinois River state prison in Canton, will be eligible to seek parole in four years. He became a priest in 1991 and served at Holy Family and St. Peter parishes in Rockford. He was at St. James in Belvidere when he was arrested in December 2002 and relieved of his priestly duties by the diocese.

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