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Daily Herald
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Church ends push to keep priest's records secret

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Date: June 16, 2004
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Section: News

The Rockford Diocese has stopped fighting to keep records of a former Catholic priest in Geneva secret.

The diocese has waived its right to appeal a ruling made last month by the 2nd District Appellate Court that ordered diocese records on former priest Mark **Campobello** turned over to a Kane County judge.

Whether those records ever will be looked at by criminal prosecutors or whether they can be used in a potential civil lawsuit remain undecided.

The records of church transfers, mental health referral and internal church investigations into allegations of abuse were initially asked for when **Campobello** was being investigated for the sexual abuse of two girls in Geneva and Aurora.

Campobello pleaded guilty last month to sexually abusing a 14- and a 16-year-old girl and is serving eight years in the Illinois River Correctional Center, a medium-security prison in Canton. He can seek parole May 13, 2008.

Without a trial pending, diocese lawyers had said no one needs to look at the church records.

Ellen Lynch, the Rockford attorney representing the diocese, said the decision to forgo an appeal was made in the church's new spirit of openness and out of respect for the appellate court.

Lynch, however, said she still disagrees with the ruling to turn over all internal documents related to **Campobello**.

What happens with those records will first be decided in the Kane County court system.

When **Campobello** turned himself in, Kane County Assistant State's Attorney Jody Gleason expressed interest in seeing the records to ensure there were no other victims or other crimes.

Gleason said she won't decide whether to go forward until June 20, the last day she says diocese officials can legally change their mind about appealing.

If she decides she wants to peruse the church records, she would first need the OK of Kane County Judge Timothy Sheldon, who would review the records and decide if any information falls under legal privilege and can be withheld from prosecutors.

If so, unless new charges are filed that bring the records back into open court, their contents might never be made public, officials said.

Attorneys doubted the appellate court order to turn over the church records would apply to any future civil lawsuits in which the standards of privacy are different. However, the diocese could decide to hand over the records without a court order.

Diocese spokesman Owen Phelps declined to speculate on what the church would do if it is pulled into a lawsuit.