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Diocese fires teacher in priest abuse Woman didn't speak up about abuse immediately

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The Rockford Diocese fired a veteran teacher Wednesday for not reporting allegations of sexual abuse against Mark **Campobello** - two weeks after a published report in which she described her struggle to come to terms with not going to authorities.

"I have always been an advocate for the kids," said the teacher, Alison Ward. "I made one grievous error."

Though many said they understood the diocese's decision, they also questioned whether Ward was being treated unfairly and whether consequences from the handling of the allegations would move further up the ladder.

"It seems somewhat scapegoating to remove the teacher and not the principal, and not the pastor, and not the bishop himself," said Barbara Blaine, president of the Chicago-based Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests.

Ward of St. Charles agreed to an interview for a June 23 Daily Herald story on the condition that she remain anonymous because she feared retribution from the diocese and others for talking publicly about the abuse of a 14-year-old student at St. Peter Catholic Church in Geneva. She had taught at the school for 24 years and had recently signed a contract to return next year as a fifth- to eighth-grade math teacher.

Late last week, the head of schools for the diocese, Sister Patricia Downey, requested a meeting with Ward, which took place at 1 p.m. Wednesday at the St. Charles library. The meeting was between Ward, her daughter, Downey and the diocese's lawyer, Ellen Lynch.

Downey and Lynch first asked Ward to resign her position because the diocese had received calls from concerned parents about her failure to report the abuse allegations as mandated by state law, Ward said. When she refused to resign, they gave her a letter terminating her contract, Ward said.

Lynch said the diocese would not discuss Ward's specific situation but that "every single teacher knows full well their obligations under that law."

Campobello pleaded guilty in May to sexually abusing the 14- year-old Geneva girl and an Aurora Central Catholic High School student in 1999 and 2000 while he was a resident priest at St. Peter and vice principal of Aurora Central. He is serving an eight- year prison sentence.

Ward said she learned of the allegations in 1999 from a 14-year- old student at St. Peter whom she had tutored for years and who considered her a trusted confidant. Ward told another teacher of the allegations in fall 1999, but said she felt conflicted about going to authorities.

"I spent a lot of time trying to decide what I should do," she said in an earlier interview. "I would never dream of going to the police without (the victim's) knowledge of that, or without her going with me. She was still trying to deal with the fact that she had done something wrong, and no matter what I said, took the blame."

The other teacher, Barbara Houston, brought the allegations to the school principal in fall 1999, but that did not lead to an official diocese interview of Ward until October 2002, according to numerous

sources.

In that interview, Lynch and two high-ranking diocese officials asked questions about the allegations and listened as Ward described them in detail.

Campobello continued serving as a priest until December 2002, when he was arrested at St. James parish center in Belvidere, months after the victim had approached police.

"Why didn't they do this when they spoke to me in October (2002)," Ward said. "Why didn't they say you've violated a mandated reporting order, we have to let you go. That certainly was never brought up at the meeting."

Ward said she also told a close family member of the girl's of the allegations in 1999.

Though a state law mandating that teachers report suspected abuse to authorities has been on the books for more than a decade, Ward said it was not explained to her until fall 2002.

Lynch said the diocese has educated both teachers and volunteers about the law since it was passed and required them to sign an acknowledgment that they were aware of it, which Ward does not dispute.

"All of our personnel undergo extensive orientation program when hired, and that includes education on mandated reporting," Lynch said.

Houston, who also knew of the allegations, said she was aware of the mandated reporting law, but has compassion for Ward because she has talked openly about the case.

"I can see where the diocese feels they have to do this, but I hope that Alison is not the scapegoat," Houston said.

Though the criminal proceedings against **Campobello** himself ended in May, the legal fight over diocese documents about him continue into its second year, and the ramifications from his actions continue to have repercussions throughout the community.

Though the 2nd Appellate Court recently ruled the diocese needed to hand over files concerning **Campobello** to police and prosecutors, the diocese is now arguing that because he has been sentenced it does not need to.

"What Doran needs to do is to come clean, and if he's going to fire people who are not turning information over to police, he should resign himself or start turning the information over to the police and prosecutors in this case and any other information he has about child molesters," said Blaine of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests.

Silence from St. Peter officials also has been wearing on parishioners still searching for answers.

"It appears that evidence is mounting that the leadership at St. Peter's not only knew of the allegations but ignored them," said Geneva Mayor Kevin Burns, a graduate of the school and longtime parishioner. "If the parish community is sincere about beginning the healing process then we must confront the uncomfortable truth that the current leadership must go."