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## Diocese Faulted For Handling Of Accused Priest

Posted by [The Catholic Key](#) on 11:50 am in [Catholic Key](#), [News](#)

**By Jack Smith**  
*Catholic Key Editor*

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KANSAS CITY — Diocese of Kansas City – St. Joseph officials are being faulted by parishioners and media for failing to more vigorously pursue allegations of suspicious and improper behavior made against a priest now charged with possession of child pornography.

In a number of forums over the last two weeks, Bishop Robert Finn expressed regret for the way the diocese handled information it received about the activities of Father Shawn Ratigan. “Things must change,” Bishop Finn said at a press conference May 22. “I also have to change.”

In response to listening throughout the community, Bishop Finn initially has determined to expand the role of the Independent Review Board to include receiving and evaluating reports of misconduct which fall outside the scope set by the U.S. Bishops for such boards in their 2002 Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

In addition, Bishop Finn said he will consult with others to determine how best to change the internal structure and procedures of the diocesan curia in order to more effectively respond to reports of improper conduct by diocesan clergy and employees.

In mid-December, 2010, a laptop belonging to then St. Patrick Pastor Father Shawn Ratigan was turned into diocesan officials after a computer technician had found disturbing photos on the hard drive.

The photos included pictures of female children at parish events, some shot, apparently surreptitiously, up-skirt. In addition, there was a very disturbing photo of a naked female child. The child was not identifiable because her face did not appear in the picture.

Diocesan Vicar General Monsignor Robert Murphy then called a ranking Kansas City police officer and described this photo. In addition, the photos were provided to diocesan legal counsel. Both the police officer and legal counsel opined that the photos did not constitute child pornography as they did not contain sexual conduct or contact as defined by Missouri law.

On the same day, Fr. Ratigan was called. He was told to appear the next day at the chancery. Fr.

[Translate](#)

Ratigan did not arrive at the chancery. Instead, the next morning he was found unconscious in his garage with his motorcycle running.

When Fr. Ratigan regained consciousness several days after this suicide attempt, he was placed in a psychiatric unit to minimize the chances of a further suicide attempt. According to a May 20 statement by Bishop Finn, Ratigan was then sent for further psychiatric evaluation out of state.

Although physically recovered, Fr. Ratigan was not allowed to return to St. Patrick and he was removed from pastoral duties there. After various evaluations and a stay at his mother's house, in mid-February Fr. Ratigan was allowed live and pay rent at a Vincentian priest residence. According to Bishop Finn, Fr. Ratigan was allowed to say Mass at the adjacent Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Eucharist community, but was otherwise restricted in his activities. He was not allowed a camera or computer and he was not allowed to attend events where children were present.

On May 12, after repeated reports that Fr. Ratigan had violated these restrictions, Msgr. Murphy again contacted the police officer he had originally contacted in December. When Msgr. Murphy relayed ongoing concerns about Fr. Ratigan's violation of the restrictions placed upon him, the officer facilitated a report to the Cyber Crimes Against Children Unit.

According to a "Probable Cause Statement" prepared by Detective Maggie McGuire of the Cyber Crimes unit, Fr. Ratigan was taken into custody on May 18 and kept on an investigative hold.

The next day, detectives obtained a search warrant for items belonging to Fr. Ratigan which had been held at his family's home following Ratigan's suicide attempt. In those items, detectives found an optical disk with 14 different images of child pornography and a Rocketfish hard drive with four images of child pornography. That same day, Ratigan was charged with three counts of possession of child pornography in Clay County.

On May 20, at a forum with St. Patrick parishioners and in a public statement, Bishop Finn said, "I deeply regret that we didn't ask the police earlier to conduct a full investigation."

At the forum at St. Patrick, it became apparent that numerous parents and school administrators had long harbored suspicions about Fr. Ratigan's conduct around children.

On May 26, Kansas City blogger Tony Botello obtained and posted a memo written by St. Patrick School Principal Julie Hess. The contents of the May 19, 2010 memo were quickly picked up by other news organizations.

The memo described parents' and teachers' many concerns about Fr. Ratigan's conduct around children and his refusal to abide by the personal boundaries taught to and expected by all church employees.

Principal Hess presented the memo to Msgr. Murphy on May 19, 2010. At a press conference last Friday, Bishop Finn said that he read the memo for the first time when it was released by the press on May 26.

Asked what he felt after reading the memo, Bishop Finn said, "from a human standpoint, I felt great shame. I was ashamed at the fact we had not done enough to respond to that."

Bishop Finn said that in the days after receiving the report in May, 2010, "Msgr. Murphy gave me a brief verbal summary of the report and his meeting with Shawn Ratigan, which had occurred immediately after the report was received."

“Hindsight makes it clear that I should have requested from Msgr. Murphy an actual copy of the report,” Bishop Finn said. He explained that “at the time of the May 2010 report, we had no knowledge of any inappropriate photographs or images in Shawn Ratigan’s possession.”

Until this case, all of the accusations against priests described offenses from decades ago, Bishop Finn told the Catholic Key. “When we made the 2008 settlement on 47 complaints of child abuse, they were all against priests who were no longer serving.”

“I believe that the study and the adjustments that we are going to have to make as a diocese may be comparable to the changes our country had to make after 9-11,” Bishop Finn said. “Our desire, our determination, our attitude, all these things have to change.”

Bishop Finn said he has already discussed an expanded role for the Independent Review Board with its chairman, Jim Caccamo. The Review Board is scheduled to meet June 1 to begin discussions about needed changes.

Bishop Finn also said that the diocese has had some initial discussions about forming a panel of outside experts “who would help us review procedures and reporting methods.”

Tags: [Father Shawn Ratigan](#)

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**rockchalkwombat** · 5 years ago

I feel for Bishop Finn but his actions show that his default mode is concern for the institutional church rather than concern for children. We will never move beyond these painful incidents until every such bishop has either been replaced or undergone authentic conversion.

I hope, for his sake and for the children's, that Bishop Finn is capable of such conversion. But I fear it may come too late for him to remain as the ordinary of this diocese. He has already lost the confidence of many of his priests as well as many of the faithful.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Nancy Riccardi** · 5 years ago

I am disheartened by Bishop Finn's response to this latest problem. There have been problem priests forever and in the past the Church has swept the problem under the rug by just paying off the victims. I had hoped that this was changing but see now that in light of the way Bishop Finn handled the situation that it is status quo. He should be removed as should any Church official who obstructs justice the way he has done. The Church should not be who metes out punishment. That is up to law enforcement. I am tired of paying for the cover ups. I am not objecting to the payment for past victims but the handling of errant

priests by the Church.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Former Catholic** • 5 years ago

I am very glad to see that the Catholic church is still primarily concerned with protected itself, not the children. I am thankful that I developed the wisdom to reject this hypocrisy long ago.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Former Catholic** → Former Catholic • 5 years ago

\*protecting itself\*

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Hydepark1906** • 5 years ago

Sad decision making on the part of the church. I have fallen away from the church and have wrestled with coming back but I am not sure now. There are not any good reasons to have not been more judicious in this process to determine if there was a problem or not.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Ken Jones** → Hydepark1906 • 5 years ago

"...have wrestled with coming back but I am not sure now." HP, please don't fall victim to believing that the Church is led by men like these, like me. The Church is led by Christ. Remember, He didn't come to heal the healthy, he came to heal the sick...like me...and Fr R. ...and all of us. Arguably, the Catholic Church is made up of a cross-section of humanity. In terms of religions, you could do worse; you can't do better.

Don't abandon Peter because of Judas.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Victim** • 5 years ago

Bishop Finn should resign. I am a victim. It happened at St Johns Minor seminary. We are not swept under the rug~~ we are swept OUT the door and its locked behind us. The priests now under investigation along with the Bishop are the flavor of the month so to say. They again get all the attention. VICTIMS LOOSE AGAIN!! No pastoral help~~ just here a few bucks GO AWAY NOW!! A victims intervention program is needed. The first thing victims ask for is pastoral help. Yes there are a few who are only interested in how much money they can get.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Divinemeracy** • 4 years ago

Bishop Finn is a good man, but this business of forming committees, and reassessing strategy for future occurrences, etc., is baloney. If a priest is suspected of committing a crime, and it

is brought to your attention, AND he tries to commit suicide (hint hint), then take it to the police RIGHT away. No need to form a subcommittee, or reassess the Dallas guidelines, or whatever other bureaucratic thing he said. Bishop Finn - You are a man, and a leader of the people - YOU take action, and take it right away. If the priest is innocent, then the police will find out. If he's guilty, then you don't want him in your diocese anyway. Why would you want to not call the police after all of the stuff that's transpired over the last 10 years?

HELLO!

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Tony de New York** • 5 years ago

Hydepark1906 the church is made up of good and bad just as any other family.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Hydepark1906** → Tony de New York • 5 years ago

Yes, Tony, the church is made up of good and bad just like any family or church family. I am sure this problem of abuse of children has always been part of any religious institution and perhaps, always will be. My concern is that Bishop Finn and those in the know did nothing for a long time. This lack of response is what I have deep sorrow over. Fr. Ratigan is at the core of the problem for sure, but it seems now that others have become complacent with him. That is why there is now a lawsuit against the Bishop, and the diocese. I predict that the lawsuit will be won and Bishop Finn will be asked to step down due to his misstep be it intentional or unintentional.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**RcNkc** → HydePark1906 • 5 years ago

Hydepark1906 wrote:

".....Bishop Finn will be asked to step down....."

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howz about some jail time for tampering with evidence- i think that will be the only

thing to put some fear into the church. Also, we are so glad we stopped giving any \$ to our

diocese after they extracted a problem priest out of state and county jurisdiction about 10 yrs ago.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Guest** → Tony de New York • 5 years ago

In any other family, other than the Mafia "family", criminals are brought to justice. It is the clear disregard for the law and for the safety and well-being of the most vulnerable on the part of the hierarchy of the Church that is the problem. Your statement does not excuse either the criminal behavior of the priest in question or the criminally negligent behavior of the bishop in question. If this wishy-washy, unmanly shrugging off of responsibility and accountability is the sort of response non-Catholics

and ex-Catholics see in the face of these kinds of charges, then you can't blame them for wanting nothing to do with the Church. Of course, blaming the victim is what the Church does best...

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**jpogbr831** • 5 years ago

As a Catholic of the KC-SJ diocese, I'm saddened by the recent events that have taken place. However, I also stand by Bishop Finn. Unfortunately, there were things that went wrong in the handling of these matters - Bishop Finn knows this, has expressed his regret, and is taking steps to make the necessary improvements.

There are some who want Bishop Finn to resign; but I must humbly ask you, especially the Catholics of this diocese, is this the way God wants us to react? By attacking our bishop, and calling for him to resign? Our bishop, who for six years has been our shepherd, and has done so much good for our diocese! This course of action would not solve anything. I appeal to you: as good Catholics, we must pray for our bishop! We must pray for the victims of this case. We must also pray for Fr. Ratigan. We must pray for all our priests. God bless you, Bishop Finn!

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Guest** → jpogbr831 • 4 years ago

Yes this is the way God expects and requires us to act. Crimes against children by priests should be handed over to the police and the priests should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law with the full cooperation of the Church officials.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**rw** • 5 years ago

Wow, the devil is alive and well in a lot of these posts. Bishop Finn is a human, and he is doing his best. Would it have been better to accuse a man they did not have sufficient evidence to accuse, and deprive him of his "innocent until proven guilty" rights just because there "might" be a problem? In hindsight, YES, that would have been appropriate. But unfortunately none of us can see into the future, including all of you below who are more than willing to throw Bishop Finn under the bus. What about forgiveness? You call yourselves Catholic and yet refuse to give? There are evil people EVERYWHERE, including the Catholic Church, and I think Bishop Finn and Msgr Murphy took steps to investigate this without pushing it under the rug (calling a police officer to address concerns was a HUGE step, and nothing that would have kept this secret or hush-hush). Hindsight is 20/20, and it's so great that all of you are so much smarter than everyone else...Monday morning quarterbacks always are. I respect Bishop Finn, I admire the hard work he's done to revitalize the Catholic Churches in KC (perhaps that's where all your snobby criticism originates), and I will stand firmly behind him in this case. God bless him.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Guest** → rw • 4 years ago



Guest 1w • 4 years ago

We do not need to have 100 percent knowlege of the future to act with the information that we have at hand. Bishop Finn may or may not be doing his best but it is not good enough. Why would one call oneself a good Catholic that does not protect children from the evil deeds of priests and bishops.

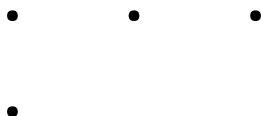
1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Joy21942 • 5 years ago

Sending prayers from here in Jeff City dio, for the good Bishop Finn.

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February 10, 2016

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