

Citing scandals, KC diocese delays fundraising campaign

Joshua J. McElwee | Aug. 1, 2011 NCR Today

The diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, which has been in controversy over its response to several allegations of sexual misconduct by priests, has decided to delay a capital campaign "in light of the current challenge."

Announcement of the delay of the campaign came this afternoon in a letter from the diocesan vice-chancellor, which was obtained by *NCR*.

According to the letter, written by vice-chancellor Paula Moss to the priests of the diocese, the diocese asked its priests if it should continue with the fundraising drive, which was hoped would raise enough for the construction of a new school in the area, since "the challenge with Shawn Ratigan came to the forefront of our attention."

"When we asked our priests for advice and guidance, 75 percent of the priests recommended that we delay our consideration of a capital campaign at this time," writes Moss. "We are following that recommendation."

News of the suspension of the campaign comes as the diocese is facing criticism regarding its response to several allegations of sexual misconduct.

Fr. Shawn Ratigan, a local pastor whose computer was found to contain child pornography in December, was moved to a religious sisters' community in January. He lived there for five months before his May 19 arrest.

Another local pastor, Fr. Michael Tierney, was removed from active ministry June 2. Tierney had been accused of misconduct earlier, and a lawsuit alleging abuse was filed against him in 2010. The diocese review board had found the earlier allegation not credible. But in May the board met with one person whose allegations they did find credible and also received information from two other individuals making accusations against Tierney.

"Fr. Tierney continues to deny these allegations," the diocese said in a statement June 2.

Kansas City-St. Joseph bishop Robert Finn received a letter accusing Msgr. Robert Murphy, the vicar general, of sexual misconduct four years ago, *The Kansas City Star* reported June 9. As vicar general, Murphy received cases of allegations of sex abuse by church workers and made recommendations about how to handle the cases, including which cases to send to the review board.

Ratigan, 45, who is being held on \$200,000 bond, has pleaded not guilty.

In response to the revelations, the diocese announced June 9 that former U.S. attorney Todd Graves is conducting an investigation into diocesan sexual misconduct reporting procedures. It also announced June 30 appointment of an ombudsman and public liaison officer tasked with receiving and investigating cases of sexual misconduct.

In response to the ombudsman's hiring, the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests said the Kansas City diocese needed "independent" viewpoints on how to reform its procedures.

"Kids, parents, and families need independent professionals in law enforcement to step up here. They don't need the bishop to bolster his staff and call that 'reform,'" wrote SNAP in a June 30 press release.

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