

Questions raised over Kansas City bishop's 'boys will be boys' comment

Joshua J. McElwee | Aug. 31, 2012
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When the computer systems manager of the Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo., diocese told her bishop, Robert Finn, that she had found lewd images of children on a priest's laptop, he replied, "Sometimes boys will be boys," according to sworn testimony that appears in court documents filed Thursday.

Diocesan employee Julie Creech's statement was taken as part of a deposition included in a court filing for a lawsuit brought by two alleged victims of Fr. Shawn Ratigan, a Kansas City priest who pleaded guilty earlier this month to federal charges of producing and attempting to produce sexually graphic material of minor girls.

However, after Creech's quote was reported in local media, her lawyer said Creech refuted the statement. After the deposition, Creech realized she had "misspoken" and hoped to correct her mistake when she received a copy of the deposition to verify her testimony, said John Gromowsky*, Creech's attorney.

Gromowsky said the deposition was made public before Creech had a chance to review and correct it.

Ratigan's May 2011 arrest on pornography charges raised questions about when his diocese and Finn first became aware of concerns against him. County prosecutors say both Finn and the diocese should have reported Ratigan to police as early as December 2010, when they acknowledge becoming aware of lewd images of children on his laptop.

On Sept. 24, Finn and his diocese are scheduled to stand trial for separate charges in Jackson County, Mo., of failing to report suspected child abuse, a criminal misdemeanor, stemming from the Ratigan case.

Although a study commissioned by the diocese on its response to the Ratigan matter stated Creech raised concerns about Ratigan in December 2010, the new filings are the first to detail a meeting between her and Finn about Ratigan.

The diocesan study, which was prepared by former U.S. Attorney Todd Graves, states Creech examined Ratigan's laptop on Dec. 16, 2010, and saw hundreds of disturbing photographs of young children, primarily girls. That evening, Creech called then-Vicar General Msgr. Robert Murphy and advised him to call the police, the study says.

The diocese has acknowledged it did not officially report the suspected abuse to police until May 2011.

In the Aug. 17 testimony, made public Thursday, Creech says after speaking to Murphy, she told Finn about finding images on Ratigan's computer and that the bishop replied that "sometimes priests do things that they

shouldn't" and "sometimes boys will be boys."

Finn has said he hadn't seen the images found on the computer at the time, but had relied on Murphy's reports on what they contained.

In an emailed statement to the press, Gromowsky wrote that Creech wanted to "acknowledge and correct her mistaken testimony."

"Following the deposition, Julie realized she had misspoken," Gromowsky wrote. "She understood that pursuant to the rules of civil practice, she would receive a copy of the deposition transcript and have the opportunity to acknowledge and correct her mistaken testimony. Because the deposition was so recently completed, Julie has not yet had a chance to do that, so we were certainly surprised to learn that an unverified copy of her testimony was attached to a pleading in a civil case."

In his email, Gromowsky said neither he nor Creech would be available for further comment.

Jack Smith, the interim director of communications for the Kansas City-St. Joseph diocese, said the diocese was not commenting because "it's a pending motion in a pending case."

On Aug. 2, Ratigan pleaded guilty to five of 13 federal counts of producing and attempting to produce sexually graphic material of minor girls. While a sentencing date has not yet been set for the priest, each charge separately carries between 15 and 30 years in prison.

Ratigan still faces similar charges in an ongoing case in Clay County, Mo., where the parish he last served as pastor is located.

One of the victims in the civil case, who has chosen to remain anonymous, is one of the same for whom Ratigan was found guilty of producing child pornography in his federal case, according to the court filing filed by Rebecca Randles, the alleged victims' attorney.

**An earlier version of this story misspelled John Gromowsky's last name, for which NCR apologizes.*

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