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Things to consider in the case of Bishop Finn

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NCR Today

A few points might be considered in the case of the recent conviction of Bishop Robert W. Finn of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo., diocese for failing to alert authorities to one of his priests taking hundreds of lewd photographs of children in Catholic schools and parishes.

Finn is the first U.S. Catholic bishop convicted in the sex abuse crisis. He is saying he wants to stay on the job and carry out his responsibilities. The question is, Should he be forced to resign or should he be removed from office if necessary?

Finn has said he did nothing wrong. He blames policy failures for his failure to notify authorities. Yet this was not the first complaint against him. He reached a deal with authorities in an earlier case to avoid a trial.

Some have called for his resignation. Nicholas Cafardi, a canon lawyer from Duquesne and occasional *NCR* contributor, says Finn can be removed under canon law, but it should not be necessary. Cafardi said he believes Finn should resign for the good of the church and his diocese.

Is Finn counting on the fact that only the pope can force him to step down? Is he pinning his hopes on his ideological closeness to Benedict XVI to keep him in office? Cafardi points out that the pope has removed bishops. One was removed for financial improprieties and another for suggesting the church debate women priests and married priests. Maybe we are about to learn if matters related to the sex-abuse crisis rise to such a high level.

Apart from outright dismissal, what is keeping Finn in office? Are there to be no consequences for his actions? Does Finn believe he is answerable only to God and the pope? Is it therefore acceptable to disregard civil laws and dissemble when questioned? Is he above and beyond the reach of civil authorities?

The case now boils down to the clergy and laity in the diocese. As Cafardi notes, "Rome is not immune to public pressure." Finn hired high-priced lawyers to defend him and has left the diocese with a bill of more than \$1 million. Several civil suits are still pending. It would seem to be time for the clergy and faithful to speak up. Beyond that, I wonder what it would take for Finn to simply say, "I'm sorry," and step down?

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