

Missouri Diocese Agrees to \$600,000 Settlement in Child Pornography Case

A Catholic diocese in Missouri has agreed to a \$600,000 settlement of a civil lawsuit tied to the arrest of one of its priests for taking lewd photos of a young girl in 2006, a church official and a lawyer for the girl said on Wednesday.

The lawsuit filed by the girl's parents in 2011 in federal court accused the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph and Bishop Robert Finn, among other things, of improperly supervising the Rev. Shawn Ratigan and helping conceal his criminal conduct.

A federal judge dismissed the lawsuit's claim that the diocese and Finn aided and abetted Ratigan in possessing pornography.

Ratigan, who pled guilty last year to producing child pornography, also was named in the suit. Several other civil lawsuits are pending against him.

Diocese spokesman Jack Smith confirmed the settlement and said it also covered claims the girl's family planned to file in Missouri state court. The costs of the settlement will be covered by insurance, Smith said.

Gregg Meyers, a lawyer for the girl and her family, said she was about 2 years old when Ratigan took the first lewd pictures of her and that he remained in contact with the family for several years. Meyers described the settlement as a relief.

"It's much better to get the family past this," Meyers said. "This is a little girl, she is still very young and she has a lot of problems because of the trust that was violated by this priest."

Ratigan had images of naked children on his laptop computer, according to court documents, and was charged with taking explicit photographs of at least five girls, ages 2 to 12, from 2005 until his arrest in spring 2011. He is in custody awaiting sentencing.

Finn was convicted last year of a misdemeanor charge of failing to report suspected child abuse when he did not report that Ratigan had the pornographic images.

Barbara Dorris, outreach director for the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, said the settlement was gratifying.

“We hope this settlement comforts at least some of the many families who have suffered and are suffering because Bishop Robert Finn refused to call police, protect kids and monitor Fr. Shawn Ratigan,” Dorris said in a statement.

The Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph has been the target of dozens of lawsuits resulting from alleged child sexual abuses by priests over several decades. It paid \$10 million in 2008 to settle many of those cases.

Editing by David Bailey, Kevin Gray and Paul Simao

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