

Kansas City cases cost diocese \$1.39 million in legal fees

Joshua J. McElwee | Sep. 6, 2012

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Thursday's historic guilty verdict for Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo., Bishop Robert Finn comes as a new report commissioned by his diocese estimates the costs of its legal fees in its criminal cases to total about \$1.39 million.

That report, which appears in the latest issue of the Kansas City-St. Joseph diocesan newspaper that was printed Wednesday, also estimates that the costs paid by the diocesan insurance program on all issues dealing with sex abuse in the diocese in the past year totaled almost \$4 million.

On Aug. 2, former Kansas City priest Shawn Ratigan pleaded guilty to five of 13 federal counts of producing and attempting to produce sexually graphic material of minor girls. He has yet to be sentenced, but each charge separately carries between 15 and 30 years in prison.

Finn and the diocese stood trial Thursday on two charges each of failing to report suspected child abuse, misdemeanors, in the case. Finn was found guilty of one charge and given a suspended sentence of two years' probation.

After Jackson County, Mo., Circuit Court Judge John Torrence's verdict, prosecutors asked him to dismiss the charges against the diocese. While the prosecutors' motion effectively means the charges have been dropped, Torrence said he will not be able to enter a judgment on the matter until Friday morning.

The report on the diocese's insurance payouts appears in the Sept. 7 issue of *The Catholic Key*, which is expected to be distributed by mail and in local parishes this weekend.

According to the report, the diocese's insurance program incurred a total cost of about \$6.1 million in claims from July 1, 2011, through June 30, 2012, almost \$4 million of which went toward sex-abuse-related costs.

According to the report, that total includes:

- \$1,385,506 paid in legal fees in the criminal cases against the diocese and Finn;
- \$286,621 in legal fees associated with civil suits against the diocese regarding its handling of Ratigan;
- \$459,075 related to the costs of a report commissioned by the diocese to look into its handling of Ratigan;
- \$1,621,368 in "historical abuse claims" from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s;
- \$197,308 to establish a new diocesan ombudsman for abuse and a new office of child and youth protection, and to pay for counseling for victims and their families.

The report states, "No legal costs for the personal defense of Shawn Ratigan have been paid by the Diocesan Property and Casualty Insurance Program or by any other Diocesan Fund."

The money for the diocesan insurance program, the report states, comes from insurance premiums levied on "parishes, schools and other Diocesan institutions," as well as interest income from the program's reserves.

One local pastor said diocesan parishes had been told earlier this year to expect an 11 percent raise in their premiums for the insurance.

That pastor, who asked not to be named, also provided a March report from the diocesan finance office on the matter that does not mention the sex abuse cases but states that "effective July 1, we estimate for budgeting purposes an 11% increase in the current premium" for the program.

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