

## The Bishop Robert Finn saga

Phyllis Zagano | Sep. 12, 2012 Just Catholic

One great mystery of Catholicism may be solved soon: how long does it take for something to get from Missouri to the pope's desk?

While the best way to boost a bishop's reputation is for [The New York Times to call for his removal](#) [1], the Bishop Robert Finn saga is clearly over the top. Only the most churchy of church types support his staying as bishop of Kansas City, -St. Joseph, Mo., where he was [judged guilty of a misdemeanor](#) [2] in not reporting the very strange priest he had sent to a convent.

The good news is Finn got a bench trial -- no testimony, no jury -- sparing us all the agony of hearing yet again about a bishop who does not (or at least did not) get it? about pederasty and its relatives. The bad news is despite detailed coverage in the *National Catholic Reporter*, some first-day-of-school articles in major media and that *Times* editorial, the story has faded. Finn remains in place.

So, how long will it take? Will anything happen?

Most folks cannot believe the pope did not fire Finn over a year ago, [when the story first broke](#) [3]. You know -- tacky photos of little girls on a priest's laptop, the school principal's report about panties in a rectory garden planter and complaining parents. Finn seems to have known about Fr. Shawn Ratigan and did little. But did he understand what he knew?

The story flew around the world well before Rome's 2011 summer break. Finn was before the pope last March for his *ad limina* meeting. So, did protecting children happen to come up in the conversation?

The two, Finn and Ratigan are polar opposites, and strangely alike. The priest has a sickness, severe enough to disqualify him from any ministry. The bishop has a blind spot, severe enough to disqualify him from being bishop. Each has a criminal record.

Don't blame either for his predicament. A priest living in a community of celibates, or with his wife, would be hard-pressed to pull some of Ratigan's stunts. But there are not enough priests to support the 1955 model of church Finn [seems to prefer](#) [4], and which might have saved Ratigan. And the church is a long way from a wider married priesthood. Left to his own devices, Ratigan's sickness deepened.

That is the heartbreak of the whole story. No one aspires to failure. But each man in his own way is being destroyed by the system that created him.

Finn entered the seminary at the age of 14. Finn's view of church is quite traditional: he is connected to Opus Dei, he supported a new foundation of very traditional nuns, and turned a parish Tridentine. Could he hear anything he was told about a priest?

Was Finn infected by the careerism virus that puts 'church' before God? Celibacy is not about the church as

?bride.? It is about the God-quest. Only that allows for proper formation. Only that supports celibacy.

How did Finn get to head Kansas City-St. Joseph? He certainly wasn't elected by the priests of the diocese. Although he was ordained bishop by Cardinal Raymond Burke, Finn was probably recommended by Cardinal Justin Rigali. After a year as heir, he became king. And there he stays, with no intention of leaving. Those are very powerful insider allies.

Meanwhile, on the outside looking in, Finn's story will be confused with those of other U.S. bishops whose malfeasances make Finn's situation look minor league. Finn will be ranked alongside the other more serious problems out there still running dioceses, still causing heartache. Did their stories get to Rome yet? Will any of them turn in his crosier?

You can be sure not one will get fired. You have to wonder whether Finn will, either.

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