

ASSESSING BISHOP FINN'S GUILT

A judge recently found Kansas City-St. Joseph Bishop Robert Finn guilty in a case involving Father Shawn Ratigan. Though the media focused on the guilty verdict, we immediately dispelled the myths surrounding the case.

Bishop Finn was not found guilty of a felony: he was found guilty of one misdemeanor, and innocent of another. The case did not involve child sexual abuse—no child was ever abused, or touched, by Ratigan. Nor did Finn's guilt involve child pornography. Here's what happened.

In December 2010, a computer technician found crotch-shot pictures of children, fully clothed, on Ratigan's computer; there was one that showed a girl's genitals exposed. The next day Ratigan attempted suicide. Msgr. Robert Murphy, the Vicar General, without seeing the photos, contacted a police officer about this matter. The officer said a single photo of a non-sexual nature would not constitute pornography; a diocesan attorney concurred.

Finn then asked a psychiatrist to evaluate Ratigan and was told the priest was not a risk to children (he was diagnosed with depression). Finn then placed restrictions on Ratigan, which he broke. After the restrictions were violated, Ratigan's computer was examined and more disturbing photos were found. Murphy then called the cops (Finn was out of town) and a week later Ratigan was arrested. In September, Finn was found guilty of one misdemeanor of failing to report suspected child sexual abuse.

We support harsh penalties for sex abusers and those who cover it up. But we also support equal justice for all, and given what we know of what is going on in many other communities, religious as well as secular, the chorus of condemnations targeting Bishop Finn was unfair as it was contrived.

As a side note, only two newspapers in the nation put this story on the front page: the *Kansas City Star*, understandably, and the *New York Times*.