

TWO NEWSPAPERS TARGET BISHOPS

The *Boston Globe* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published a 5400-word article on November 4 discussing how the bishops have handled sexual abuse matters since the Dallas norms were published on this subject in 2002.

The front-page story in the *Globe* shows a photo of four bishops: Bishop Robert Finn, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop John Nienstedt, and Bishop Richard Malone. It says all of them “resisted calls for transparency.” This is factually inaccurate: only McCarrick has done so.

Regarding Kansas City-St. Joseph Bishop Finn, who resigned in 2015, the article says, “He never alerted authorities about photos of young girls’ genitals stashed on a pastor’s laptop. He kept parishioners in the dark, letting the priest mingle with children and families.” It notes that he was found guilty (of a misdemeanor, it should be noted) for failing to report the priest’s suspected child abuse.

Here is what the newspapers did not tell their readers.

- In 2010, a computer technician found disturbing crotch-shot photos of girls fully clothed on the computer of Father Shawn Ratigan; there was one naked photo of a non-sexual nature.
- Even though there was no complainant, a police officer and an attorney were contacted by diocesan officials. They both agreed that the single naked photo did not constitute pornography.
- After Ratigan attempted suicide, he was evaluated by a psychiatrist—at the request of Finn. Ratigan was diagnosed as depressed, but not a pedophile.
- Finn put restrictions on Ratigan, which he broke. The diocese then contacted the authorities, though it had no legal mandate to do so.
- When it was found that Ratigan was again using a computer,

an examination revealed hundreds of offensive photos.

- The Vicar General, Msgr. Robert Murphy, then called the cops (Finn was out of town).
- A week later Ratigan was arrested.

On what basis do these two newspapers claim that Bishop Finn “resisted calls for transparency”? Had it not been for the diocese calling a police officer and an attorney, this case would not have gone forward. And had it not been for the diocese calling the cops when Ratigan failed to abide by the restrictions placed on him, no one would have known about him. The priest never touched or abused a child, though it is clear that he is a disturbed person.

The newspapers say that Minneapolis-St. Paul Archbishop John Nienstedt was warned in 2009 by canon lawyer Jennifer Haselberger not to promote Father Curtis Wehmeyer. In 2010, the priest abused two brothers, 12 and 14, during a camping trip. Haselberger quit in protest in 2013 and contacted the authorities. The archdiocese was subsequently charged with ignoring Wehmeyer’s sexual misconduct and Nienstedt stepped down.

Here is what the newspapers did not tell their readers.

- In 2004, three years after being ordained, Wehmeyer made sexually suggestive remarks to two men, 19 and 20, but they never complained. The archdiocese found out and sent the priest for counseling. Two years later he was found cruising in an area known for gay sex. Though neither of these instances involved breaking the law, they were the kind of red flags that concerned Haselberger.
- Regarding the abuse of the two boys in 2010, the mother of the boys told a priest about it in early June 2012. He urged her to call the cops. On June 14, she provided the details and was told to report it to the archdiocese. On June 19, she met with church officials and one of the boys was questioned. On June 20, the police were contacted. On June 21, the priest was

relieved of his duties. In September, the Ramsey County Attorney commended the archdiocese saying, "They did the right thing."

On what basis do these two newspapers claim that Archbishop Nienstedt "resisted calls for transparency"? Furthermore, there is no report of Nienstedt voluntarily stepping down in 2014 when he was accused of touching a young man's buttocks in 2009 while posing for a Confirmation picture. He was exonerated by the Ramsey County Attorney's Office on March 11, 2014.

The newspapers say that Buffalo Bishop Malone covered up cases of abuse. They cite no examples, relying on allegations made against him by his former executive assistant, a person who has quickly turned into an activist.

"I'm a man who can make a mistake," Malone is quoted as saying in the November 5 edition of the *Buffalo News*, "and that is what I did in two cases where we had allegations of misconduct by a priest with adults." When asked about a New York State Attorney General probe, he said, "I'm glad that is happening. Absolutely, bring it on." That doesn't sound like someone who is "resisting calls for transparency."

There are many other parts of the story as reported by the *Boston Globe* and *Philadelphia Inquirer* that deserve rebuttal, but for now let it be said that their account is incomplete, misleading, and in some cases, downright irresponsible.