

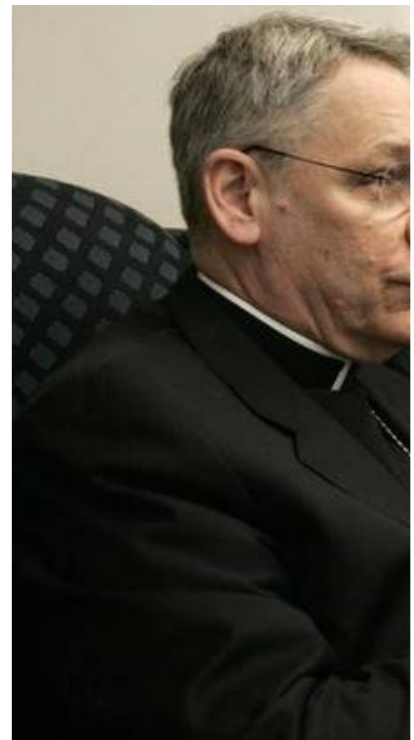
LOCAL

APRIL 21, 2015 7:14 AM

# Pope OKs resignation of Bishop Robert Finn, who failed to report sex abuse

## HIGHLIGHTS

Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Bishop Robert W. Finn from his leadership role with the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of the Kansas City in Kansas Archdiocese will serve as the diocese's interim leader.



1 of 5



BY JUDY L. THOMAS  
*jthomas@kcstar.com*  
and MARK MORRIS

Bishop Robert W. Finn stepped down as spiritual shepherd of the Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocese on Tuesday, nearly three years after he became the most senior U.S. Roman Catholic prelate convicted of criminal charges related to the church's child sexual abuse scandal.

Some supporters expressed sadness, while critics hoped the departure could spur healing.

Neither Finn nor the Vatican provided a specific reason. But Finn cited the code of canon law that allows bishops to resign early for illness or some “grave” reason that makes them unfit for office, the Vatican said without elaborating.

Pope Francis accepted the resignation Tuesday, about a week after Finn made a short visit to Rome.

ADVERTISING



Finn is 62, some 13 years shy of the normal retirement age of 75.

“It has been an honor and joy for me to serve here among so many good people of faith,” Finn said in a statement released by the diocese. “Please begin already to pray for whomever God may call to be the next bishop of Kansas City-St. Joseph.”

Supporters thanked Finn for his good works during a nearly 10-year tenure as the diocese’s leader.

“Bishop Finn, we love you, your pastoral heart, your love for Our Lady and ability to proclaim the gospel with a humble heart,” supporters posted on the website Justice for Bishop Finn, which appeared following the most recent sex abuse scandal. “We will miss you and be praying for you.”

Critics complained that Finn should have resigned much sooner from the 133,406-member diocese.

“Bishop Finn came to symbolize the elevation of a privileged clergy over the safety of children,” said Rebecca Randles, the attorney who filed dozens of lawsuits going back more than a decade involving sex abuse allegations against the diocese. “His resignation is needed by survivors of

abuse and the Catholic faithful alike to begin a healing process. However, his resignation does not insure the protection of children in the future. Only continued vigilance can do that.”

Though the vice of someone else — a priest who liked to take pornographic pictures of little girls — brought Finn down, he failed to protect the public by failing to inform police for months, others pointed out.

It was time for Finn to step down, said Jim Caccamo, former chairman of the diocese’s Independent Review Board, which evaluated cases of suspected abuse and made recommendations to the bishop.

“When I heard the news, I said a prayer for Bishop Finn,” Caccamo said. “I don’t like what he did; I think he is culpable, but he’s still a human being, and he’s still a nice person. So I hope God helps him through this transition to a new life. Let the healing begin.

“I think just the fact that the pope has done what the pope has done will help a lot of people.”

Kansas City in Kansas Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann will serve as apostolic administrator of the western Missouri diocese until a new bishop arrives.

Naumann, who spent Tuesday with staff at the Kansas City diocesan offices, will retain his Kansas duties. He released a letter Tuesday in which he talked of a desire for this period between bishops to be a “time of grace and healing.”

“This will not be a time for innovation or change, but a time to sustain the ordinary and essential activities of the Church and where possible to advance the initiatives that already are under way,” it said. “I pray that your new bishop, when he arrives, will find a community united both in their love for Jesus and His Bride — the Church — as well as eager to proclaim the truth and beauty of His Gospel to the world.”

In September 2012, a Jackson County circuit judge convicted Finn of failing to report suspected child abuse, a misdemeanor, after church employees and leaders learned of child pornography on a priest’s computer. Finn received two years of probation with the agreement that the charges would be expunged from his record if he completed probation without incident, which he did.

The priest, Shawn Ratigan, pleaded guilty to producing child pornography. He is serving a 50-year prison sentence and has been expelled from the priesthood.

In Clay County, authorities also considered prosecuting Finn in the Ratigan case. Finn avoided a misdemeanor charge there by entering a diversion program that called for him to meet monthly for five years with Clay County Prosecutor Daniel White to discuss any allegations of child sex

abuse against clergy or diocesan staff within the diocese's Clay County facilities. They last met last week.

Finn's resignation means the diversion agreement ends 11/2 years early, White's office said.

"During the past 3 1/2 years, Bishop Finn has always shown up for these meetings," White said in a written statement. "It was a learning experience and injecting an outsider in the mix — me, someone who can trigger investigations and file charges — helped develop mechanisms that kept and will continue to keep children and vulnerable adults in the diocese safe."

Finn's handling of the Ratigan case prompted persistent calls for his resignation, including through billboards, a social media effort, an online petition and a letter-writing campaign to church leaders — even Pope Francis.

Finn had defenders as well, perhaps none more vocal than the Catholic League's Bill Donohue, who has written that Finn came under fire because his orthodoxy offended "anti-Catholic zealots" and was out of fashion in a diocese that had strayed too far from traditional church teachings.

"Bishop Robert Finn of Kansas City-St. Joseph inherited a mess made by dissidents and cleaned it up," a Catholic League dispatch noted in September. "That made him a target."

Yet that month, the Vatican's Congregation of Bishops, which advises the pope on bishop appointments, ordered a Canadian archbishop to investigate Finn's leadership. Over three days that month, Archbishop Terrence Prendergast of Ottawa, Ontario, quizzed church leaders about how their parishes had responded to Finn's criminal conviction and his leadership, a participant told The Star.

Prendergast represented the Vatican in a similar investigation of the Irish church in 2010 and 2011. Such examinations, called "apostolic visitations" in church parlance, usually mean that church leaders in Rome believe something needs correction, experts said.

Finn, a St. Louis native, was ordained a priest in 1979. He served as an associate pastor of two St. Louis area parishes, then taught at St. Francis Borgia Regional High School in Washington, Mo., from 1983 to 1989. In 1989, he received a master's degree in education administration from St. Louis University and became administrator of St. Dominic High School in O'Fallon, Mo.

In 1996, he was appointed director of continuing formation for priests in the St. Louis Archdiocese. Three years later, he was named editor of the St. Louis Review, the weekly diocesan newspaper.

In 2004, Pope John Paul II named Finn as coadjutor bishop of the Kansas City-St. Joseph diocese. He assisted Bishop Raymond J. Boland and learned about the church here as he prepared to succeed him as the diocese's sixth bishop in May 2005.

In an interview with The Star at the time, Finn described himself as a "a strict constructionist" who wanted his flock to be faithful followers of Vatican teachings.

Finn also acknowledged that he was one of a handful of U.S. bishops who belonged to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, the organization for diocesan priest "associates" of Opus Dei, a conservative group that encourages Catholics to practice their Christian principles in their workplaces.

Within months of becoming bishop, Finn slashed the budget of a center that had trained Catholic laypersons to help in their parishes, banished from the diocesan newspaper the column of a popular University of Notre Dame theologian who often was at odds with the Vatican, and replaced most of his predecessor's leadership team.

Finn also said that he would make it a priority to encourage more young men to join the priesthood. Nine are scheduled to be ordained this spring.

Church members who described themselves as traditional Catholics applauded Finn's changes. Others said Finn had brushed aside a long history of consultation, collaboration and cooperation between priests and laypeople.

In response to a rising tide of sexual abuse lawsuits against the diocese, Finn in 2008 approved a \$10 million settlement with 47 plaintiffs, raising hope among many that the church had found a way to conclude years of costly litigation and settle any questions about its sincerity in working on the problem.

But any goodwill the diocese accrued crumbled with Ratigan's arrest in May 2011. An independent report, commissioned by the diocese, soon revealed that an array of senior church officials had known or suspected that Ratigan's computer had brimmed with child pornography, some of which the priest had produced. Even so, they held off making a substantive report to law enforcement for five months.

A senior federal prosecutor later blistered Finn and the diocese for their handling of the case.

Diocesan legal bills mounted as state and federal authorities investigated church officials and employees when a new wave of sexual abuse litigation, this time filed by Ratigan's victims, washed over the diocese.

Since 2012, the diocese has spent \$16 million settling new lawsuits and millions more defending itself against sex abuse allegations. The most recent, a \$10 million settlement in October, covered 32 lawsuits filed from September 2010 through February 2014 and involved 14 current and former priests in allegations of sexual abuse over three decades.

And an arbitrator in July 2014 ordered the diocese to pay \$1.1 million for violating the terms of the 2008 settlement.

Still, defenders noted that the diocese has made progress on child protection issues since 2011. Finn instituted a child protection and training program for diocesan clergy, volunteers and employees that even his critics have applauded. The program instructs anyone who suspects abuse first to contact the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline or police, and only then to call the diocese's abuse ombudsman.

In February, a group of Catholics based in Kansas City took the rare step of petitioning Pope Francis to discipline Finn.

The request, initiated by a Milwaukee priest and Kansas City area parishioners, included an online petition signed by more than 113,000 people worldwide asking for the bishop's removal. That petition now has more than 263,000 signatures.

"The priest's crime that Bishop Finn concealed from civil authorities was of great magnitude," the Rev. James Connell, a priest and canon lawyer from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, wrote in a letter to the pope. "Thus, the harm done by Bishop Finn also was of great magnitude. Yet Catholic Church authorities have taken no action against Bishop Finn that would provide justice and repair scandal, and this lack of action adds to the ongoing scandal of the clergy sexual abuse crisis."

A spokesman for Finn's office said at the time that the diocese had received a copy of the materials.

"Bishop Finn has his supporters and his detractors, and people are free to have their own opinion..., " said the diocese's communication director, Jack Smith. "The diocese and Bishop Finn remain focused and committed to the strengthened reporting and training programs which are creating safer environments in our schools and parishes."

Jeff Weis, one of the Kansas City area parishioners who pushed the petition, called Finn's resignation a step toward restoring faith and credibility in diocesan leadership. But healing will take a long time, he said in a written statement.

"The prayers of this hurt community have been answered," Weis said. "With that comes the responsibility of all to work towards the restoration and inclusiveness that is our church."

It's rare for a bishop to resign. In 2002, Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston, whose name became symbolic with the priest sex abuse scandal, resigned over his repeated failure to remove abusive priests from ministry. Pope John Paul II accepted Law's resignation, and Law was moved to Rome, where he was put in charge of the Basilica of St. Mary Major. He has retired.

Although a few other bishops have resigned, those resignations were because of allegations of sexual impropriety against them, not because of how they handled cases involving their priests.

Only the pope can remove a bishop, the Rev. Thomas Reese, author of "Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church," told The Star in 2011.

"The Vatican has to be convinced that what the guy did was egregious," he said.



**Letter to the People of the Diocese of Kansas City – St. Joseph  
on the Occasion of my Appointment as Apostolic Administrator  
By Archbishop Joseph F Naumann  
April 21, 2015**

I am grateful to the Holy Father for his Appointment to serve as Apostolic Administrator for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri, while continuing to serve as the Archbishop of Kansas City in Kansas.

I have been part of the Kansas City Community for more than 11 years, so I have an awareness of the vitality and beauty of the Catholic community in Northwest Missouri. Living in the same media market, I am also keenly conscious of some of the challenges and difficulties this Diocese has suffered in recent years.

I pray that the coming weeks and months will be a time of grace and healing for the Diocese. All of us, who are privileged to serve in leadership for the Church, do so for only a season. It is not our Church, but Christ's Church. We are mere stewards of His Church for a time.

By definition, the role of an Administrator is for a very short season. This will not be a time for innovation or change, but a time to sustain the ordinary and essential activities of the Church and where possible to advance the initiatives that already are under way.

It is my desire to do all that I can to prepare this Diocese to welcome well its new bishop. I pray that your new bishop, when he arrives, will find a community united both in their love for Jesus and His Bride – the Church – as well as eager to proclaim the truth and beauty of His Gospel to the world.

For this to happen, I will need the prayers and support of the Priests, Deacons, Religious, Diocesan and Parish lay staffs, and most importantly the people of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri. I want to be as available as I can, while still fulfilling my responsibilities as the Archbishop of Kansas City in Kansas. I am confident that I can count on the prayerful support of the Priests, Deacons, Religious and Laity of Northeast Kansas to assist me in fulfilling these dual roles to the best of my ability.

One of the great signs of the New Springtime in the Church that we give thanks for on both sides of the Kansas River is the increase in recent years of priestly vocations. Archbishop Naumann Letter

## Archbishop Naumann Letter

*The Star's Glenn E. Rice contributed to this report.*

*To reach Judy L. Thomas, call 816-234-4334 or send email to [jthomas@kcstar.com](mailto:jthomas@kcstar.com).*

## RELATED CONTENT

- Resignation of Bishop Robert Finn leaves many questions unanswered
- Reaction to Bishop Robert Finn's resignation ranges from relief to regret
- The Star's editorial: Bishop Finn finally pays price for misusing power
- Mary Sanchez: After the resignation of Bishop Robert Finn, the Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocese needs a humble leader
- Archbishop Naumann Letter.pdf



## MORE LOCAL



## COMMENTS

6 Comments

Sort by **Newest**

Add a comment...

**Steve Macy** · Lenexa, Kansas

I have never met Bishop Finn, but from what I have heard he is a good man, who committed an egregious error. I wish him well, as I wish all that were affected by the priests actions when Bishop Finn failed to report it in a timely manner.

I have met the man who will be administering the diocese until a replacement has been found. He is a good, good man. I hope whoever is named the new Bishop can be as good as Archbishop Naumann.

Like · Reply · Apr 21, 2015 6:21pm

**Greg Hoppe** · Works at State of Missouri

Men like this make Catholics ( and other Christians ) look bad.....good riddance.

Like · Reply · 1 · Apr 21, 2015 5:53pm

**Kenny Landes** · San Francisco, California

Ding! Dong! The witch is dead. I formally defected (their word) from the church last month because Finn was still bishop 2 years after the elevation of Francis to the throne of St. Peter. No need to change that at this point. As one of the survivors who settled in 2008, I took Finn at his word when he promised to report future cases, and sent me a hand-signed letter of apology. His failure to act promptly when faced with the Ratigan case is a massive moral failure that should have led to his immediate resignation when he was convicted in court. I can only hope Pope Francis will elevate a more honorable man as the new bishop. Kansas City Catholics deserve better. Let the healing begin.

Like · Reply · 7 · Apr 21, 2015 1:30pm

**Kenny Landes** · San Francisco, California

I'm sorry you are so blind.

Like · Reply · 5 · Apr 21, 2015 3:36pm

**Dianne L Young** · Artist at Self

Kenny Landes ; I am sorry you were one of those harmed..and for the cover-up that went on too long.

take care

Like · Reply · 2 · Apr 21, 2015 4:25pm

**Kenny Landes** · San Francisco, California

Thanks, Dianne, I have come a long way. It was the intention in the 2008 settlement to prevent what happened to us from happening again in the KC Diocese. Bishop Finn was the new bishop at the time, and I trusted him. We all trusted him. I hope the new bishop will prove more trustworthy so that Catholic parents in the diocese won't have to wonder, as mine do to this day, how they

could have missed it, and blame themselves. Bishop Finn has nobody to blame for today's "resignation" except himself.

Jack, I hope your heart will one day open and you will see that those of us who came forward did it with the best of intentions and love for the church.

Like · Reply ·  1 · Apr 21, 2015 9:30pm

[Show 4 more replies in this thread](#)



**Elaine Hines**

About time.

Like · Reply ·  5 · Apr 21, 2015 10:34am



**Elaine Hines**

Jack Lawrence Puh-leeze. All religions suck, but at least Protestants and Jews don't shuffle baby rapers around their congregations.

Like · Reply ·  1 · Apr 21, 2015 4:14pm



**Dianne L Young** · Artist at Self

AT LAST. Way overdue. Had Finn truly been a caring man, most interested in his parish, and the good of the church, he would have resigned many years back.

Instead, this "pullar of strength"..allowed his people, and the church, to be drug through the mud, "sacrificed" at the altar...and honor destroyed.

Yes, he should also be in prison..he's actually very very lucky.

Like · Reply ·  3 · Apr 21, 2015 10:33am



**Curt A. Hodapp** · Works at Self-Employed

Evil won yesterday. A pullar of strength is no more.

Like · Reply · Apr 21, 2015 9:22am



**Joshua Hamm** · Kansas City, Missouri

Really, Mr. Hodapp? A man culpable in knowingly sacrificing the innocence of children to protect the priesthood has resigned, with not only the blessing of many in the local diocesan hierarchy but the Pope as well. By all rights, Bishop Finn should be in prison and is extremely fortunate that he is not.

Like · Reply ·  7 · Apr 21, 2015 9:50am



**Joshua Hamm** · Kansas City, Missouri

Mr. Lawrence, I will be generous and parse your syntactically challenged statement to read "I have heard many stupid things said about this situation" rather than "I have said many stupid things about this situation." Furthermore, I will assign you your opinion as you have done to me; you (and, I feel, Mr. Hodapp) seem to think it palatable for men like Bishop Finn to sacrifice the most innocent members of the laity as long as the inviolable and sacrosanct will of the Church and its clergy remain intact. I am not Catholic; I hold no particular ill will against the Church nor care one way or the other about its existence. Wrongdoing is wrongdoing. I should hope even you can see that the

least thing Bishop Finn could do was to step down. Even the Pope could see that; do you purport to contradict his opinion in this?

Like · Reply ·  1 · Apr 21, 2015 3:57pm



**Joshua Hamm** · Kansas City, Missouri

Mr Lawrence, you again mistake my disinterest for antipathy. I take no joy in this; this whole situation is regrettable and could easily have been avoided had Bishop Finn simply done what was required of him. I indeed hope that whoever replaces Bishop Finn better understands what he himself apparently could not: that the Church is entrusted with a great (perhaps divinely given?) responsibility towards all of its members, clergy and laity alike. The Church and its near-byzantine hierarchy seem to have forgotten that over the past few decades; what I understand of the new Pope is that it seems to be his intention that the Church be reminded again of what it truly was meant to be ... but I could be wrong in that. I do not purport to speak for the Pope; I see only the face of his action in accepting Finn's resignation. The Pope could as easily have refused to accept it and given explicit countenance to Bishop Finn and the whole status quo. But he did not.

Like · Reply ·  2 · Apr 21, 2015 5:17pm

[Show 9 more replies in this thread](#)

---

 Facebook Comments Plugin

SPONSORED CONTENT

## **Like father, like sons. Meet the brains behind YETI coolers.**

Brothers and co-founders of YETI discuss the invaluable lessons taught by their father over the years.

By YETI Coolers

---



