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Bishop
Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Community Response Concerning the Arrest of

Father Shawn Ratigan
May 20, 2011

In mid December of 2010, I was told that a personal computer belonging to Father Shawn Ratigan was found to have many images of female children. Most of these were images of children at public or parish events. I was told that there were also some small number of images that were much more disturbing, images of an unclothed child who was not identifiable because her face was not visible.

The very next day, we contacted a Kansas City, Missouri, police officer and described one of the more disturbing images. At the same time the diocese showed the images to legal counsel. In both instances we were told that, while very troubling, the photographs did not constitute child pornography as they did not depict sexual conduct or contact.

Immediately after the diocese became aware of these images, Shawn Ratigan attempted suicide. In the week or so after this, Shawn Ratigan survived his suicide attempt and became conscious. He went from the medical center to a psychiatric unit until it seemed that the risk of another suicide attempt was minimized.

I then sent him for a psychiatric evaluation out of state. The psychiatrist asked for and was provided with the images we had so he could evaluate Shawn's condition. When he returned, Shawn stayed at his mother's home for a while, until I could determine a place where he could reside, continue counseling, and not be around children. The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Eucharist kindly agreed to have him assist them by saying Mass for the Sisters. I restricted him from participating in or attending other events if there were children present. He lived at an adjoining property, the Vincentian Mission House, and paid rent. He did not have his computer or his camera in his possession during this period.

In early March, Shawn's family asked for Shawn's computer to be returned. It had been kept at the offices of the diocesan legal counsel and was given to them.

In late March, I received some reports that Shawn was violating some of the conditions of his stay. I was told that he attended a St. Patrick Day Parade and met with friends and families. He also attended a child's birthday party at the invitation of the child's parents. I confronted him about these things, and told him again that he was not permitted to have any contact with minors.

When Shawn continued to disregard these requirements, on May 12, Vicar General Monsignor Robert Murphy contacted the same police officer previously consulted to discuss his concerns. That officer facilitated our report to the Cyber Crimes Against Children Unit. Along with our report, we provided the electronic images that we had received in December. Detective Maggie McGuire began an investigation. In the past week, she conducted interviews and, pursuant to a search warrant, found additional materials, which had never been in our possession and which we did not know existed, and which are alleged to constitute child pornography. On May 19, Shawn Ratigan was arrested and charged in Clay County with three counts of a C felony possession of child pornography.

I deeply regret that we didn't ask the police earlier to conduct a full investigation.

Shawn Ratigan was a popular priest who had a large network of friends, and was media savvy. Many parents have called with deep concerns about their children who knew and trusted him. To any parents who have any questions or concerns about contact between their children and Shawn Ratigan, I recommend that they contact Detective McGuire at (816) 584-6633.

As a people of faith, in times of difficulty we rely on prayer and God's grace to fortify our human efforts. I pray that the strong anger, shame, disappointment and fear that so many are feeling will be helped by our trust in Him.