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Dear People of Christ the King,

As you all know, Bishop Finn has resigned as our bishop here in our diocese. This comes after a long, bitter, nasty campaign by many of our brothers and sisters, who, for whatever reason, were convinced that he needed to go. As you also are aware, Bishop Finn has been, and will always be, my friend of many years, going back to our time together as priests in the Archdiocese of Saint Louis. I know this man like no one else out here except his good friend, Archbishop Naumann, our new temporary administrator. It is now, therefore, time to say a few things in the open during this time of sorrow for him, and for our diocese.

First of all, for the instigators of this unfortunate event, the issue was never the Ratigan affair. There were definitely mistakes made in handling the situation by people who, it turned out, were in over their heads, but there was never any malice, or impulse to cover up anything. I will not recount the story here, but I will say this: If this had happened on another, more popular bishop's watch, the aftermath we have seen would not have occurred, because the motivation for the mob-scene that ensued was Bishop Finn's fidelity to a classical concept of the church, not the cover-up of any misconduct.

For years before the bishop's arrival, there had been in place a bleak outlook on the future shape of the church, a church without many priests, a church run "out of necessity" by laypeople, lay administrators, with priests as the sacramental suppliers, not leaders. It was said a lack of vocations was the reason for the new organizational principles adopted here, but, in fact, the lack of vocations was self-inflicted. Certain radicalized theologians and catechetical experts after the council had predicted a priest-less church, and some labored to bring this to fruition. In the '90's in our diocese we sometimes had less than 5 seminarians in any given year, and this reality was used to prop up the idea that the post-Vatican II church was meant to be a new church, with a new organizational chart.

Bishop Finn, as most modern, younger bishops after the council, decisively rejected this depressive scenario, put much less money into programs established for the bleak future, and, instead, put money and resources into the development of priestly vocations, and we have seen the result. We will have 10 new priests in all this fiscal year, and have many in the past several years. Though we will ordain so many, we have more men applying right now than the number we're ordaining.

People complain that these young priest candidates are conservative, and that we in the Vocations Office are recruiting only conservative seminarians. This is untrue. Fr. Rocha and I in the last four years of working together have never had an ideological litmus test for incoming students. What is true is that service in the church, dating back into the early '90's, when I first began my career as a seminary professor, was attractive to young men who loved the church, knew she was 2000 years old, loved her traditions and teachings, and hadn't grown up in the '60's time of turmoil. In other words, they were not, as a group, like their elders. And, as the men in my generation, they are allowed to be who they are. The vocations truly, were always there. The lack was in my generation's insistence that the young men hold the same ideologies as we did. I saw many a young man turned away from the seminary in the early days for not having the "correct" leanings and attitudes. May God have mercy on us for our hubris and over-weening pride.

Those who are celebrating now began their work long ago, not because of the Ratigan case, but because Bishop Finn rejected their view of church reality. He was an “arch-conservative,” “pre-Vatican II,” “trying to take us back to the medieval church,” all these bits of nonsense that covered up the real truth: Post-conciliar ego and pride, the belief that we finally knew more than those thousands of saints who had gone before us, had led to the destruction of much of our church, the loss of clergy and religious, compromise with the world, especially in moral matters, the endangering of our families and children, and our own spiritual bankruptcy. The “Springtime of the Church of Vatican II” has never come, because we, in our smug superiority, had severed our connection with our past and Catholic Tradition. The tree cannot flower without its roots intact.

One of the most disturbing things I have seen in my years as a priest is the glee and meanness of many of our brothers and sisters in the aftermath of Bishop Finn’s resignation. Champagne corks popped, celebrations begun, more mean and vicious things said by people whose Lord Jesus said to them, “Love one another.” There is no forbearance or forgiveness for this man who pled no contest to a politically motivated charge filed by an ambitious prosecutor with strong ties to the abortion industry, so that he might save his local church the pain and cost of a public trial. The statute used was not even applicable to what happened, but such is our legal and political society. He is a man who loves and cherishes children, and would never for one minute hazard them for any reason: I know this as I know the man himself. But the outrage of many was managed by the designs of a few, and here we are.

What has this whole thing done to us? Is our love and respect conditional? One of our former teachers here at CTK School put up a post on Facebook, “I hope Bishop Finn rots in Hell forever.” We have become mean, low and self-involved. The vicious attacks by Christians against Christians that we see day to day have become the norm. Whatever happened to praying for your enemy, blessing those who persecute you? Who are we and what have we become? No one has won anything here; we’ve all lost. An honorable man has been unjustly disgraced, and we have sacrificed his dignity and our own in a rush to punish and destroy, things antithetical to everything our common faith represents.

If any good is to come of this, it must come from the grace of God in the humble hearts of His faithful children. Let us learn the lessons again from Christ who is meek and humble of heart. His yoke is easy and His burden light. Let us not take upon ourselves the heavy yoke of hate and spite; they, in the end, are too much for us to bear without us losing everything the Lord wishes to give us. May God’s peace give us clean and humble hearts.

In the Sacred Heart of our Crucified Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gregory J. Lockwood', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Fr. Gregory J. Lockwood
Parochial Administrator, Christ the King Parish
Secretary for Seminarians, Vocations Office
Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph