



Father Richard Kirkham Drops Two Baseless Lawsuits

Late Monday night, Father Richard Kirkham dismissed the second of two lawsuits he filed against Bishop Michael Olson and the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth. This marks the conclusion of two civil lawsuits that Father Kirkham filed arising out of his June 4, 2018 resignation as the pastor of St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church in Prosper, Texas.

In the lawsuit dismissed late last night, filed by attorney Jack Walsh, Father Kirkham alleged that Bishop Olson and the Diocese defamed him in announcing Father Kirkham's resignation to the congregation at St. Martin de Porres and in responding to an inquiry by the Fort Worth Star Telegram—an inquiry initiated not by Bishop Olson but by a group of Father Kirkham's supporters known as the FRK (Father Richard Kirkham) Advocates. Father Kirkham sought \$1 million in damages in connection with his lawsuit. In defending against Father Kirkham's claims, Bishop Olson and the Diocese steadfastly maintained that they had done nothing wrong and had not defamed Father Kirkham in any way.

Michael D. Anderson and Caleb B. Bulls, attorneys at Kelly Hart & Hallman LLP, successfully defended Bishop Olson and the Diocese. "Father Kirkham's defamation lawsuit was completely baseless, and there was no merit to it whatsoever," Anderson said. "It is no surprise that Father Kirkham voluntarily dismissed his defamation lawsuit soon after his deposition and roughly a week before the court was set to hear arguments on why Father Kirkham's lawsuit should be dismissed.

"Father Kirkham's deposition testimony revealed, unequivocally, that there was no basis in law or in fact to his allegations against Bishop Olson and the Diocese. Dismissal was really the only option," Anderson added. Father Kirkham's actions in the defamation lawsuit were also marked by his abuse of the discovery process—acts for which the district court ultimately sanctioned Father Kirkham. Indeed, the court was set to hear arguments on February 4, 2020 about further abuse of the discovery process by Father Kirkham.

In his first lawsuit, filed by attorney Jeff Sprigg, Father Kirkham sought to remain at the rectory at St. Martin de Porres despite his resignation as the pastor at St. Martin de Porres. Father Kirkham disputed the validity of his resignation and refused to vacate the rectory so that it could be used by the current pastor.

A justice court ruled in favor of Bishop Olson and the Diocese in October 2019, regarding the propriety of Father Kirkham remaining at the rectory. Father Kirkham subsequently appealed the decision of the justice court; however, he voluntarily dismissed his lawsuit on January 9, 2020—the day before his appeal was to be tried in a Denton County Court at Law. "This lawsuit, like the defamation lawsuit, never should have been filed. There was absolutely no basis for Father Kirkham to remain at the rectory past his resignation," Anderson commented. "Moreover, Canonical authorities in Rome have twice rejected Father Kirkham's attempts to revoke his resignation as the pastor at St. Martin de Porres."

“I am pleased that both civil lawsuits are now behind us,” Bishop Olson said. “We have a wonderful pastor at St. Martin de Porres in Father Stephen Hauck and the congregation continues to thrive. It is my sincere prayer that any divisiveness caused by this matter and these lawsuits will end with their dismissals and that all of those affected will be healed and come together with their brothers and sisters in support of the mission of our faith.

“I also pray for Father Kirkham, as I continually do for all of our priests, and ask that he cooperate with the Catholic Diocese of Dallas by reporting whatever he knows about alleged misconduct toward a parishioner within the Dallas Diocese,” continued Bishop Olson.

“I pledge to you that I am doing everything possible to fulfill my duties to teach, sanctify, and govern the Diocese of Fort Worth which was entrusted to my care six years ago tomorrow on the day of my ordination as your Bishop,” Bishop Olson said. “I remain firm in my promises of obedience and celibate chastity relying upon the Grace of God. After consultation with the Cardinals and other officials who assist the Holy Father in guiding the Church, and having been affirmed by them in my ministry, I remain steadfast in my confidence that we are on the right road, which for disciples of the Lord Jesus is always the Way of the Cross.”