

## **Sexual abuse investigated in the Catholic Church in Denmark**

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In May 2010 the Catholic bishop of Copenhagen initiated an independent investigation into allegations of sexual abuse in the church and the way the diocesan leadership has handled such allegations. A highly respected law firm, Nyborg & Rørdam, was hired and solicitor Lars Kjeldsen ("the Investigator") was put in charge of the investigation.

Two years later the investigation has been terminated and a comprehensive report of 252 pages has been published on the internet. The investigation included all documents in the diocesan archive as well as interviews with the persons involved in the individual cases and the staff in the diocesan administration. A total of 39 cases since 1898 was identified including a total of 51 incidents of which 35 involved victims under the age of 18. The spectrum of allegations went from indecent suggestions or behavior to physical assaults of a sexual nature (8 cases). Of the 39 cases, 27 (69%) were homosexual and the perpetrator was a priest or other cleric in 36 cases while in three cases the perpetrator was a lay person working with youth in a Church context.

Prior to 2010 the leadership in the Catholic Church in Denmark had no knowledge of the majority of cases and only a few had involved the police. Comparing the abuse incidence in the Church with the incidence in other areas (sports, schools, scouts) and the increased awareness of sexual abuse of minors since around 2000, the Investigator concluded that the Catholic Church in Denmark acted in a timely fashion when an initiative was taken in 2002 to establish a preparedness plan for Church action in case of an allegation of sexual abuse. It took, however, until 2008 before this plan was finished in a first version which the Investigator found unreasonably slow. Subsequently the plan has been expanded to include, among other things, a Code of Conduct and a section on preventive procedures in connection with selection and training of candidates for the priesthood.

The report includes a 150 page section with a summary presentation of each individual case and incident including a description of the handling of the case by the diocesan authorities. All cases except one were old and beyond the statute of limitation concerning abuse of a minor which is when the victim turns 28 years. In many of the older cases the investigation was more or less rudimentary because people involved had died or lost precise recollection of what had occurred. In the less severe segment of allegations it seems at least to this reader, that a few incidents could perhaps have been the result of misunderstandings rather than criminal or immoral intent. This tendency was more pronounced for heterosexual incidents than for homosexual ones. Questions of culpability, however, was specifically excluded from the assessment of the Investigator. While this may have inflated the total number of incidents somewhat, other cases may still not have been reported to the diocesan authorities or to the Investigator, which was a criterion for inclusion.

The way diocesan authorities acted when notified of a case was assessed by the Investigator in each individual case. As a general conclusion the Investigator did not find any indications to suggest that diocesan authorities had actively tried to obstruct justice. The investigator does however express criticism of the previous bishop Hans Martensen, who is now deceased, for passivity when informed about severe

allegations against a priest and in particular for allowing intimidation of the victim's family. Likewise, the present bishop of Copenhagen, Czeslaw Kozon, is criticized for passivity in relation to a case concerning indecent exposure.

None of the cases brought to light by this investigation has resulted in charges being raised by the police. Disciplinary actions have been taken by the Church authorities against a handful of priests.