NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Bishop in Norway retired after abuse allegation

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | Apr. 7, 2010

VATICAN CITY -- A German-born bishop who headed a prelature in Norway admitted that his resignation last year was linked to the sexual abuse of a minor.

(**Editor's Note:** Some information in this story was corrected April 8.)

Bishop Georg Muller, 58, submitted a request to step down as prelate of Trondheim, Norway, in May 2009 and Pope Benedict XVI "quickly accepted" the request June 8, according to a Vatican press release.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, head of the Vatican press office, released a written statement April 7 confirming that in January 2009 church authorities had become aware that Bishop Muller, a member of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, was accused of sexually abusing a minor in the early 1990s.

"The issue was rapidly taken up and examined through the nunciature of Stockholm (Sweden) by mandate of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith," wrote Father Lombardi.

After the pope accepted Bishop Muller's resignation, the bishop "underwent a period of therapy and no longer carries out pastoral activity," he wrote.

The statute of limitations had expired under Norwegian law and the victim, who is now in his 30s, has asked to remain anonymous, Father Lombardi added.

Bishop Muller, who headed the prelature from 1997 to 2009, recently admitted to sexually abusing a minor 20 years ago while he was a priest in Trondheim, according to a statement April 6 from by Bishop Bernt Eidsvig of Oslo, who has served as apostolic administrator of Trondheim since Bishop Muller's retirement.

Bishop Eidsvig said that on April 6 U.S. Cardinal William Levada -- prefect of the Vatican's doctrinal congregation -- authorized him to make public the accusations against Bishop Muller. The doctrinal congregation said the victim had requested that details of the case and his identity not be disclosed.

In an April 6 press release, Bishop Eidsvig wrote that the Vatican learned in January 2009 that Bishop Muller was accused of sexually abusing a minor.

The nunciature in Stockholm was appointed by the Vatican to investigate the case, and when Bishop Muller was informed of the charges, he admitted to the abuse, wrote Bishop Eidsvig. Bishop Muller said that he did not abuse any other children and, so far, no one else has contacted either church or civil authorities to report any abuse, Bishop Eidsvig said.

Even though the statute of limitations for criminal charges had expired under Norwegian law, church law still applied, he added.

The church in Norway has been "shaken to its foundations" by the revelation of Bishop Muller's abuse of a minor, Bishop Eidsvig said.

He wrote that the sexual abuse of minors represents a betrayal of children, which in turn represents a betrayal of the church.

In March, Bishop Eidsvig made his "ad limina" visit to Rome with other bishops from Scandinavia and met with Pope Benedict and Vatican officials. While in Rome, Bishop Eidsvig wrote a letter to Norwegian Catholics concerning the abuse of minors by clergy. The letter, dated March 25, was a response to Pope Benedict's March 20 pastoral letter to Irish Catholics.

Bishop Eidsvig expressed his shock over the "monstrous violations" and "serious crimes" of sex abuse of minors by clergy and the mishandling of the cases by bishops.

"The culture of silence that has prevailed among certain bishops is a betrayal," he wrote, and protecting the reputation of the church at the expense of victims is a "false loyalty."

"True loyalty to the church is to protect the small and weak," he wrote.

The pope's letter to the Irish, he wrote, was also a call to all bishops around the world to do everything in their power to encourage victims to come forward and offer them redress, to punish those who are guilty of abuse in accordance with civil and church laws, and to work to prevent abuse from happening in the church and in society.

The diocese of Oslo published comprehensive guidelines in February 2003 on how to handle accusations of the sexual abuse of minors by religious and church employees. The same guidelines were extended to apply to the prelature of Trondheim as of March 29, 2010, according to the Web site of the Catholic Bishops of Norway.

The Oslo diocese also set up a special council in 2003 to deal with claims of suspected sexual abuse by religious and church employees.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/13/2013 - 04:49*): http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/bishop-norway-retired-after-abuse-allegation