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

Church studies bishop's adoption of 26-year-old woman

UCA News | Oct. 19, 2008

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, India
Church officials are inquiring into the controversial adoption of a 26-year-old woman as the daughter of a southern Indian Catholic bishop.

Bishop John Thattumkal of Cochin, a 58-year old canon law expert, registered the adoption with a government office on Sept. 9, giving her the right to inherit his personal assets.

Controversy erupted when some priests in the Kerala state diocese opposed the adoption. The diocese is based in Kochi, formerly Cochin, the state's business capital, 2,595 kilometers south of New Delhi.

Velayudhan Sudhakaran, a sub-registrar who records such deeds on behalf of the government, told UCA News on Oct. 16 that Bishop Thattumkal came to his office in Mattanchery, a Kochi suburb, and signed the adoption deed. "Two priests from the diocese signed as witnesses. The bishop stated in the deed that the woman is being adopted as his daughter. I've registered the deed."

Father Antony Thambi, Cochin diocese's public relations officer, told UCA News that after the adoption, the woman stayed at the guesthouse in the Cochin bishop's house compound for some time.

Bishop Thattumkal was not available for comments when contacted by UCA News. Diocesan officials told UCA News the bishop decided not to speak to the press after Mathrubhumi, a local newspaper, carried the story on Oct. 13.

The newspaper said the woman was a daughter of Reverend P.K. Joseph, a Syrian Orthodox priest. His family met the bishop during a group pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The newspaper quoted Bishop Thattumkal as saying he was impressed by the woman's spirituality and prayer life, and that he only had fatherly affections for her.

Reverend Joseph told UCA News by telephone on Oct. 14 that his daughter sees visions while praying. After one such a vision, she told Bishop Thattumkal about multi-billion-rupee corruption involving some clergy in his diocese. This helped the bishop unearth the financial irregularity, after which he transferred some priests from key posts on Sept. 28, the pastor said.

Priests upset by the transfers issued a press statement condemning the adoption. Later, seven senior priests representing clergy in the diocese met Archbishop Daniel Acharuparambil of Verapoly and complained to him, some Cochin diocesan priests told UCA News on conditions of anonymity.

Cochin is a suffragan of Verapoly archdiocese, giving Archbishop Acharuparambil the authority to see Church discipline is observed in Cochin. Sources confirmed that the archbishop sought an explanation from Bishop Thattumkal about the adoption.

Later, Apostolic Nuncio to India Archbishop Pedro Lopez Quintana also summoned Bishop Thattumkal to his office in New Delhi on Oct. 11 and sought an explanation. On Oct. 13, Archbishop Acharuparambil visited Cochin diocese and held discussions with Bishop Thattumkal and priests.

"The issue before us is of a bishop adopting a young woman for so-called spiritual nourishment. The future course of the issue would depend on his explanation," a senior Cochin diocesan priest told UCA News.

Father Stephen Alathara, secretary of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council, told media the Church has initiated inquiries on the issue. "Action, if any, would be taken by the Vatican based on the nuncio's report," he stated.

A. Jayasakar, a civil law expert and lawyer practicing at the Kerala High Court, told UCA News that Bishop Thattumkal's adoption deed is not legally tenable because Indian law allows adoption only of children, not of adults.

He explained that any contract can be registered under the Indian legal system and remain valid unless successfully challenged in a court of law. When challenged by either of the parties or by an affected third party, the court decides the legal validity in accordance with existing laws.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/22/2014 - 04:01*): http://ncronline.org/news/church-studies-bishops-adoption-26-year-old-woman