

Polish archbishop, officials ignored child sex abuse

OXFORD, England - A Polish newspaper has reported that diocesan officials and an archbishop ignored cases of pedophilia and sex abuse of minors by priests in the Diocese of Plock, Poland.

The Rzeczpospolita daily reported March 6 that Archbishop Stanislaw Wielgus and other officials of the diocese had been kept informed for at least six years by pastors of victims' parishes about priest sex abuse of minors. Archbishop Wielgus was the head of the Plock Diocese from 1999 until he was appointed to head the Archdiocese of Warsaw in January. He quickly resigned after admitting he had collaborated with the communist secret police.

The newspaper said other priests had confirmed the claims and that it had received testimonies from several abuse victims since Rzeczpospolita published its first report March 3.

"Several priests exploited the trust of children in their care to get close to boys and have sexual contacts with them," the newspaper said. "The names of the same diocesan clergy recur in the accounts we've heard.

"Although church leaders were informed, however, they took no effective steps to prevent suspect priests from contacting young people," it said.

Auxiliary Bishop Roman Marcinkowski of Plock, who said the diocese had received no official complaints of molestation, called the claims "fragmentary and based on gossip."

"It's hard to accuse someone when there's no unambiguous proof against them,"

Bishop Marcinkowski told Poland's Catholic information agency, KAI, March 6.

Rzeczpospolita said a local priest, Father Jaroslaw Nawatkowski, had been cautioned by police when child pornography images were found on his computer in July 2006. It said another priest, identified as Father K, had given up lecturing at the Plock seminary after accusations of abuse but that he was still in touch with former victims and teaching in the same building.

Meanwhile, Father Adam Boniecki, editor of Poland's Catholic Tygodnik Powszechny weekly, said his newspaper had proposed guidelines for handling abuse cases but had not received a response from church leaders.

"What has happened in Plock Diocese results from the fact that the bishops' conference in Poland has not worked out any clear procedure for dealing with cases when priests are accused of pedophilia and homosexuality, despite the church's experiences in Ireland and the U.S.," Father Boniecki told Rzeczpospolita March 6.

"This indifference by church institutions is now taking its revenge. Local bishops have neither the tools nor the courage to deal with such problems," he said. "Yet this isn't a new issue which no one knew about."