

Marcus Bensmann



Prot. Nr. 404/2025

Your Holiness,

Peace be with you. Our team at CORRECTIV already sent you two letters in August of last year and in January this year. We have not received any response to this to date, which is why we have now made our enquiry public. As we informed Your Holiness at the time, we have been researching sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and the responsibility of the relevant authorities of the Vatican for eight years now – in particular that of the then Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger.

Although you, Holy Father, were so kind as to forward our request to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (Tutela Minorum) (reply dated 25 September 2025; Prot. No. 404/2025), we respectfully ask for your consent to an interview.

Our research seeks to trace how reported cases of sexual abuse by clergy were handled; according to our information, the disciplinary section of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith is responsible for such cases.

In more than a dozen cases, we have evidence of reports to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning abuse in countries from various parts of the world. These cases show that information about sexual abuse was already being forwarded to this Dicastery prior to the changes of 2001 (*Motu Proprio Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela*; “*Ad Exsequendam Ecclesiasticam Legem*”). Our impression, based on the files, is that those responsible acted with delay or not at all, and usually only became active once a case became public.

Your Holiness, we have repeatedly attempted to address our questions to the responsible Dicastery, but have received no response. In all other inquiries, however, we are consistently referred back to that curial authority.

As our research has shown, the Prefect of the Dicastery speaks with the Pope each week about decisions taken there. In the past, Popes have changed the regulations on sexual abuse through Apostolic Letters. In your office, knowledge and the ability to act come together.

We therefore hope, Holy Father, that you can help us to understand how the Catholic Church has actually dealt with reports in the past, how and where these have been archived, and what concrete steps are being taken today to address the issue.

Background to our investigation:

As we already reported to you last times, our research began with the case of the German priest Peter H.*

An investigation by *The New York Times* in 2010 showed that Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, as Archbishop of Munich and Freising, had been involved in the decision to transfer the abusive priest Peter H.* to Munich. Our research, however, shows that he bore further responsibility in this case – as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith:

In 2023, we found a document that the German bishops had kept hidden for years despite promises of transparency. The background is as follows: In 1986, Peter H.* was convicted in Bavaria of multiple counts of child abuse. The officials of the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising asked the Vatican on 19 August 1986 for permission for Peter H.* to celebrate Mass using grape juice. The petition included a list of the crimes and a medical certificate diagnosing him with “pedophilia.” The response came on 3 October 1986 from Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, who granted the priest permission to celebrate Mass using grape juice.

A copy of this dispensation is enclosed with this letter.

Shortly thereafter, Peter H.* was assigned as a priest to the Upper Bavarian parish of Garching an der Alz, where he again abused boys.

The discovery of this letter expanded our investigation. Since then, we have been searching worldwide for correspondence to and from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning abuse cases and, as mentioned above, we have been successful. We found files

*The full name is included in the original enquiry, but has been omitted here for data protection reasons.

from the United States, Portugal, Australia, Colombia, Italy, and Germany. The letters bore protocol numbers, primarily dating from the period between 1979 and 2004. In addition, we have evidence that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and other Vatican curial authorities were informed about child abuse as early as the 1930s. Enclosed we are sending a list of the documents we have found or references to such documents.

The protocol numbers we found on the documents also reveal a peculiarity: the letter signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 1986 bears no protocol number. Our sources and experts confirm that this should not be possible. This would constitute an exceptional case.

We know that without protocol numbers, documents can no longer be found in the archives. Whether the letter is archived at all in the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, we do not know – or whether it may have been filed as private correspondence. In 2023, Archbishop Georg Gänswein told the German newspaper *BILD* that he had destroyed private correspondence of the late Pope Benedict XVI.

From all this information, many questions arise for us, including:

1. To what extent do the cases we have researched reveal a broader system of archived cases of abuse worldwide?
2. How many cases involving abusers are held in Vatican archives, and since when did this collection begin?
3. How many perpetrators of abuse are listed in the archives, what are their names and how many of them have been punished by the civil courts?
4. How many victims have been identified and how are they compensated?
5. Which archives within the Vatican collect information on sexual abuse by clergy or Church employees, apart from the archive of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith?
6. For what purpose did the Vatican collect information about perpetrators within its own ranks for decades without taking effective action?
7. According to our information, cases that reached the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith were sorted using protocol numbers. In at least one case, the protocol number was omitted. What reasons exist for such exceptions, and who decides on them?

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8. How often were documents transferred into private collections, and in how many cases were such collections destroyed?
9. Should the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith open its archives on clerical abuse to an independent investigation and deal transparently with these cases?

During our research, we were reminded at a morning Mass in Santa Maria della Pietà in the Campo Santo Teutonico of an important passage from the Gospel of Matthew: whoever causes harm to children would be better off with a millstone tied around their neck and thrown into the sea.

Such punishments are, of course, no longer appropriate today, but these words clearly show the importance Jesus placed on the protection of children. We therefore ask ourselves why the Church has not responded with openness, transparency, and courage to decades of tolerance of a global crime committed by its clergy. The faithful in particular suffer from the fact that words are so often not followed by deeds, and that representatives of the Catholic Church fail to tear down the walls of silence with all their strength. Even the Deputy Secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Monsignor Charles Scicluna, once pointed out that a “deadly culture of silence or omertà” prevails, “which is in itself wrong and unjust” – yet he did not answer any of our questions.

I am ready to return to Rom at any time. For the conclusion of our investigation, your thoughts, Holy Father, would be of immeasurable value to us. In the course of our research, we have put forward many demands, and we need an answer to the question: Are you, Holy Father, prepared to make the Vatican archives, containing records dating back over 100 years, available to an independent commission for investigation?

Yours sincerely,

Marcus Bensmann
Senior Reporter

Attachment: List of the documents

Germany, Münster 13.02.1986

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Protocol Number: 357/85s.

Priest: [REDACTED]

Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger to Bischof [REDACTED]
Sacra Congregatio Pro Doctrina Fidei to Bistum Münster

Germany, München Freising 03.10.1986

Protocol Number: nN

Priest: [REDACTED]

Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger to [REDACTED] (Bishop of München Freising)
Sacra Congregatio Pro Doctrina Fidei to München Freising

Germany, Münster 18.10.1988

Protocol Number: nN

Priest: [REDACTED]

Portugal, Lisbon 11.09.1991

Protocol Number: 174/72

Priest: [REDACTED]

Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger to [REDACTED] (Bishop of Lisbon)
Sacra Congregatio Pro Doctrina Fidei to Lisbon

USA, Oakland 06.11.1985

Protocol Number: 469/81s.

Priest: [REDACTED]

Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger to [REDACTED] (Bishop of Oakland)
Sacra Congregatio Pro Doctrina Fidei to Oakland

USA, Los Angeles 21.03.2005

Protocol Number: 657/2004; 657/2004 - 20630

Priest: [REDACTED]

Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger to [REDACTED] (Abuser Priest)
Sacra Congregatio Pro Doctrina Fidei to Los Angeles

*The full name is included in the original enquiry, but has been omitted here for data protection reasons.

USA, Illinois 03.06.1989

Protocol Number: 70/89s.

Priest: [REDACTED]

Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger to [REDACTED] (Bishop of Springfield in Illinois)

Sacra Congregatio Pro Doctrina Fidei to Illinois

USA, Milwaukee 17.07.1996

Protocol Number: 111/96-06252

Priest: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to [REDACTED] (Bishop of Superior)

Sacra Congregatio Pro Doctrina Fidei to Diocese of Superior

Italy, Savona, 08.09.2003

Letter of the Bishop Domencio Calcagno to the Prefect of the Congregation Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger

Priest: [REDACTED]

Italy, Savona 29.03.2010

Protocol Number: 305/2003-31697

Priest: [REDACTED]

Sacra Congregatio Pro Doctrina Fidei to Savona

Colombia, Pereira 26.01.2011

Protocol Number: 578/2004-34403

Protocol Number: 578/2004-32056

Protocol Number: 501/2004-22604

Priest: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to [REDACTED]

Australia, Wollongong 28.02.1998

[REDACTED] to [REDACTED]

Protocol Number: NR-05931

Protocol Number: 295/2008-27573

Protocol Number: 539/2008-27955

[REDACTED] to Bishop [REDACTED]

Protocol Number: 98000817 (Congregatio Pro Clericis), 15.07.1998

Protocol Number: 98002776 (Congregatio Pro Clericis), 12.12.1998

Protocol Number: 99000820 (Congregatio Pro Clericis), 12.08.1999

Protocol Number: 99002102 (Congregatio Pro Clericis), 09.10.1999

Protocol Number: 20001201 (Congregatio Pro Clericis), 21.10.2000

Protocol Number: 20010676 (Congregatio Pro Clericis), 19.05.2001

Priest: [REDACTED]