



ERZDIOZESE MÜNCHEN  
UND FREISING

ERZBISCHÖFLICHES ORDINARIAT MÜNCHEN : PRESSESTELLE

## — PRESSEMITTEILUNG —

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### **Cardinal Marx makes a statement on the report**

Declaration of the Archbishop of Munich and Freising on the new report on sexual abuse  
in the Archdiocese

**Munich, 27 January 2022.** At a press conference at the Catholic Academy of Bavaria on Thursday, 27 January, the Archbishop of Munich and Freising, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, issued the following statement on the external report, "Sexual abuse of minors and adult wards by clergy and Church personnel in the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising in the period 1945 to 2019":

"The report now presented on sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising in the period from 1945 to 2019 is a decisive break for the Church, here in the Archdiocese and beyond. It is a decisive break for those affected by sexual abuse, for church personnel and for the faithful, many of whom will ask themselves how they can trust the Church and those responsible in it. Having read the report, I am once again appalled and shocked by the cases of sexual abuse, especially by the suffering of those who experienced it, but also by the perpetrators and the accused and by the behaviour of those responsible.

Abuse and violence in all their variants, which are made clear once again in the report, are a dark side that from today will be visible as part of our Archdiocese's history. Those who now still deny systemic causes and who, in their attitudes and structures, continue to oppose a necessary reform of the Church have not understood the challenges posed. I wrote this in a letter to the faithful in the Archdiocese after my resignation from office, which the Pope rejected: for many people the Church has clearly been a place of misery and not of salvation, a place of fear and not of solace. Despite the great commitment of priests, of employees, of lay staff and volunteers and of many of the faithful, there was the dark side, which has been increasingly brought to light in recent years. That dark side needs to be acknowledged as part of an honest, realistic view of the Church today and of what happened in the past. The report by the law firm WSW, which the Archdiocese itself commissioned, is a mirror that we, as the persons responsible in the Archdiocese, have decided to hold up to ourselves and we stand by what we see and do not play it down.

This also applies to me personally: the report ascribes responsibility to me, and I am willing to accept it. Last year I wrote to Pope Francis, and had already declared previously at another instance, that for me the greatest failure was to have overlooked the persons who suffered the abuse. This is unforgivable. No-one amongst us was really interested in their fate, in their suffering. In my opinion, this is also due to systemic reasons, and at the same time I bear moral responsibility for this as the acting archbishop.

I therefore sincerely apologise once again, personally and also on behalf of the Archdiocese, to you the victims and survivors for what you suffered within the Church. I also apologise to all the faithful who are part of this Archdiocese and who now doubt the Church, who can no longer trust those responsible and whose faith has been damaged. We also failed to adequately address the parishes to which perpetrators had been assigned and to consult them. I apologise to all of you, too.

We only started focussing more on those affected in the year 2010 – gradually and step by step, forging a path for change, not only by taking individual measures but by fundamentally changing our way of thinking, adopting the perspective of those who suffered. Has this been happening consistently since then? Clearly not. Not here, either. Yes, efforts have been made, and I thank those in our Archdiocese



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who have been working in this area in recent years and contributing as independent contact persons, intervention officers, prevention officers, on advisory boards, in the Center for Child Protection (CCP), which we helped initiate and support, and which has also reinforced the issue at Universal Church level.

I am grateful for the developments that have taken place in the Archdiocese in the past year, including the foundation of the Victims' Advisory board and the Independent Inquiry commission, which have already given us significant input on their perspectives. Speaking for myself, however, I can openly say that this was a path that has not yet ended for us or for me. The MHG study provided another strong impetus to proceed, including myself, more strongly in alignment with those affected, including in direct contact with them. It has become even clearer to me that the focus needs to be on the questions and needs of those affected and that there is also a need for spiritual support and that personal encounters and reaching out more proactively to those affected are required.

The report presented now is not the end of the line for the Archdiocese, but an important milestone for further investigations. The inquiry is not over yet but needs to continue in various fields. In this regard, I am counting above all on the cooperation of the Victims' Advisory board and the Independent Inquiry commission. Both bodies are independent, and I hope to be able to discuss the report and the consequences for our Archdiocese with them and also with the Diocesan Council and other advisory bodies in the near future.

I would like to take up a point that was mentioned by the expert panel at last week's press conference: Whatever new reports and studies are to come, they will probably not differ from the main findings of the studies already available. This already applies to the first abuse report of 2010 and the conclusions drawn from it, it applies to the MHG study and to other studies also. We already know enough now to address the issue, and act, differently.

That is why it is absurd to speak of an "abuse of abuse", meaning the prevention of a reform of the Church. I also made this clear in my letter to Pope Francis, offering to resign from office: for me, the investigation into sexual abuse is part of a comprehensive renewal and reform, as adopted by the Synodal Path. There, too, we are still on the way. In the Church we are proceeding on a long and arduous path, but we are doing it for the sake of the truth and for the sake of our mission to proclaim and witness the Gospel in this time and place. Christianity has no future without a renewed Church!

The report presented now is an important basis for further discourse, as the expert panel said. Everyone who reads it can form their own opinion. Having read it for the first time, I believe that this report has brought us closer to the truth and to a comprehensive perspective of the Church. What we see is a disaster. The report helps us to not look the other way but to pay close attention. That is what counts now: paying attention and listening! I feel that this is what we owe to those affected and to all of the faithful.

The report notably addresses personal and institutional responsibility, especially at the top levels of the Archdiocese. There will naturally be opposing points of view, and also criticism, regarding the evaluation of the assessments. It will then of course be necessary to provide reasons why certain assessments cannot be accepted in that way. However – to make that clear once again: I do not wish to enter into individual debates or even defend certain arguments because I feel that that would be inappropriate for those affected.



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With the help of specialists, I will work through the specific cases that I too was confronted with by the experts and I will examine them thoroughly. Not to defend myself, but to learn from them and to tackle change. I also and primarily see administrative and communication failures here. But in one case, I reproach myself for not really having actively approached those affected.

Dealing with abuse in the Church was and is an issue I feel I personally need to address at top level and is not contrary to our function to teach the Gospel. I was never and am not indifferent to this. Could I have done more and acted with more resolve? Yes, absolutely!

The issue of abuse was the subject of repeated discussions between the previous Vicar General and myself. On the question of how to deal with the issue, the then Vicar General Beer and I undertook joint efforts, discussing new ideas and also setting them in motion together, be it in the Archdiocese and beyond. The Vicar General undoubtedly played an important role here. The shared goal was to move forward on prevention, inquiry into, and a reform of the Church.

The Vicar General Klingan, the Head of Office Ms Dr. Herrmann, and I will critically examine which further changes we can set in motion. In this we are proceeding together. For me, this also means communicating more and regularly with the advisory bodies in the area of abuse, with the intervention and prevention officers and especially with the Victims' Advisory board and the Independent Inquiry commission. I want to be more present here. Because what I reproach myself for is still not sufficiently adopting the perspective of those who suffered. This was one of the reasons for setting up my foundation "Spes et Salus", the objective of which is to strengthen precisely that perspective.

Many people will of course ask themselves: What are the specific consequences of the report? We will examine that carefully and discuss it intensely. We are taking the proposals of the report very seriously. We have already started implementing some of them. Will there be any personal consequences? Every person in a position of responsibility should look at the findings and consider: What am I personally responsible for? Where did I fail? What am I guilty of? What are the consequences I must draw and where and how can I improve myself? This also applies to those responsible who are not directly named in the report.

As concerns myself, I say once again clearly: As Archbishop, and based on my moral beliefs and my understanding of my office, I bear responsibility for the actions of the Archdiocese. I do not cling to my office. The offer of resignation last year was meant very seriously. Pope Francis decided otherwise and asked me to remain in office with full responsibility. I am willing to do so if it is helpful for the further steps that need to be taken for a more reliable inquiry, to pay more attention to those affected, and to reform the Church. Should I get the impression that I am more of an obstacle than of help, I will consult with the relevant advisory bodies and ask them to scrutinise me and my role. In a synodal Church, I will no longer make such a decision on my own.

Where other responsible individuals still alive and named in the report are concerned, my predecessors in the episcopate and the former Vicars General can comment themselves and have already done so. I have written to Prelate Wolf, who – in his role as the judicial vicar – is strongly criticised in the report. He has informed me that he wants to suspend all his offices and duties. I agree to that. He intends to comment in due course.



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To conclude, I want to emphasise: We are taking the report very seriously! Some people have asked why I did not attend the presentation of the report by WSW. That had nothing to do with a lack of respect for those affected! I had already informed WSW beforehand – after careful consideration – that the Vicar General and the Head of Office would represent the Archdiocese. In the period under investigation, neither of them held their current offices yet. I wanted to give the report the space it deserved and therefore decided not to attend; but I watched the presentation. I am very sorry if my decision hurt the feelings of any of the victims and survivors.

The many questions currently arising from the report are justified but we cannot answer them all today. That is why we need to conduct further discussions and consistently move forward with the inquiry. In a year's time at the latest, I would like to report on the concrete changes that will have been set in motion and then present them together with the Vicar General and the Head of Office.

Experience so far shows that we are well advised to call in external expertise and also to work together with the State and other interlocutors. I am firmly convinced that we as a Church must see ourselves as an organization in a process of learning that also draws on external expertise.

What is necessary now is to structurally ensure that we align our actions more clearly with those affected, but also – as the report emphasises – examine more closely the parishes and institutions in which abuse took place. In addition, it is important now to push ahead with the reform steps discussed in the Synodal Path, which will also be part of the agenda in the synodal process of the Universal Church. I will continue to dedicate myself to this. Without a truly profound reform, such an inquiry will ultimately not succeed.

We are looking ahead in the Archdiocese, but we cannot do it without looking back. That is why we will also think about developing an appropriate form of commemoration and remembrance for those who suffered sexual abuse in the Church. I hope to consult with the Victims' Advisory board and others on this. Both should be expressed: The willingness to acknowledge the dark side, the signal given to us that we have to learn from it and – in a renewed way – be a Church that is there for the people, not for itself."