



In response to the newspaper reports on the involvement of bishops in sexual abuse

A report was published in the NRC of 14 September 2018 which dealt with the involvement of Dutch (auxiliary) bishops in the sexual abuse of minors. The information came from various sources including the independent investigation carried out by Mr Deetman at the request of the RC Church and about which he published a report in 2011. Information was also taken from the independent Contact Point for Sexual Abuse in the RC Church.

The Contact Point's communication was transparent but it did not provide any names due to the confidential nature of the proceedings, particularly in the interest of the complainants. It had for the most part to do with issues of lapsed cases and of accused who had died since the alleged events. Moreover, it was never the intention of the RC Church that survivors were not be given a chance to speak about what had happened to them, as Cardinal Eijk emphasised in a round table discussion with the House of Representatives (29 June 2016).

As became apparent through the Deetman committee investigation into the involvement of bishops in cases of abuse, it appears, where it relates to the manner in which bishops dealt with abuse files, that in certain past cases, priests were given new appointments while having previously committed abuse. In certain cases, the abuse was known and it has to be noted that in these cases insufficient care was taken by the bishops when giving new appointments to the priests. In certain cases, the bishop making the appointment was unaware of the abuse and inadequate care was taken in the exchange of information between bishops and superiors general.

At the recommendation of the Deetman committee in its 2011 report, the RC Church undertook measures with the objective of taking steps to ensure that these kinds of situations never arise again in the future. These arrangements are an integral part of the prevention policy of the Dutch diocese, orders and congregations.

Prevention Policy

Since 2005, the Dutch Ecclesiastical province has included a mandatory background check of priests, deacons, (male and female) pastoral workers and religious when they take up work in another diocese or religious institute (protocol updated 1 November 2012).

As of 1 January 2014, for appointments of priests, deacons, (male and female) pastoral workers, religious and certain volunteers and officers, a regulation was brought in that dealt with the obligation to discuss a Declaration Regarding Conduct (VOG: *Verklaring Omtrent het Gedrag*). This requirement also applies to the acceptance of priest, deacon and pastoral worker candidates.

The Pastoral Code of Conduct has been in force since 2014. Codes of conduct used in other sectors of Dutch society were consulted when drafting the Pastoral Code of Conduct. Following an assessment, in particular by the pastoral teams in the diocese and by religious within the CDR (Conference of Dutch Religious), the Code of Conduct was updated. The updated Pastoral Code of Conduct came into effect on 13 April 2018. Changes to the Pastoral Code of Conduct as regards the previous edition included: 1) extending the scope of application (not only do practitioners who work with minors fall within the remit of the Pastoral Code of Conduct, but also volunteers who work with minors; also, the Pastoral Code of Conduct applies to practitioners and volunteers who work with people with intellectual disabilities, or are vulnerable in other ways); 2) the existing provision regarding the obligation to report suspected cases of sexual abuse of a minor was further strengthened (when

there is a complaint of sexual abuse of a minor that appears to be founded in truth, the responsible canonical person shall immediately report the complaint to the public prosecution service or to the police; 3) a clarification was made that the treatment of complaints about the behaviour of persons to whom the Pastoral Code of Conduct applies is set down in the RC Contact Point for Transgressive Behaviour Regulation.

In November 2017, parish priests and the boards of Catholic religious communities of migrants (not being parishes) were informed of the requirements that were imposed on foreign priests or (priest) religious from abroad who, without a mission and/or appointment, would like to work in a parish. The information is also sent via the CDR to the superiors general of the orders and congregations. Foreign priests who would like to work temporarily in a parish without a mission or appointment must in every case have a valid celebret (Canon 903/CIC/1983). If they are briefly active (to a maximum of seven days) in pastoral work in a parish or a religious community of migrants, they must have a written declaration from the priest or the board of the religious community. If they are active in pastoral work for a longer period of time, they must also have a fully completed 'Testimonial of Suitability for Priestly Ministry'.

Since 2010-2011, the RC Church has been very aware of the most serious forms of transgressive behaviour and sexual abuse and greater attention has been given to preventing these. Sexual abuse should never take place anywhere, but it should certainly not take place within the Church, which has the mission of upholding the Gospel of Christ.