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The facade of the Cathedral of Our Lady in Munich is pictured Jan. 22, 2021. (CNS photo/Diete

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by Catholic News Service

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A report on the handling of sexual abuse cases in the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising will not be presented this year as originally expected. The lawyers of the Munich law firm Westpfahl Spilker Wastl now plan to publish their findings in mid-January, reported the German church news agency KNA.

The lawyers said new information had only recently come to light and now had to be checked rigorously. They declined to reveal the new findings.

The archdiocese also declined to comment, saying it would not receive the report until it is published.

KNA said the report is being followed closely not only in Germany, but also internationally, because the lawyers are investigating the manner in which a large number of high-profile church officials handled sexual abuse cases in the church between 1949 and 2019. The most senior of them is Joseph Ratzinger, retired Pope Benedict XVI, who was archbishop of Munich and Freising from 1977 to 1982.

There have been recurring reports about the case of a priest during that time who was transferred to other parishes despite previous acts of abuse and who abused

again after his transfer.

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The actions of Cardinals Michael Faulhaber, Joseph Wendel, Julius Döpfner, Friedrich Wetter and most recently Reinhard Marx also are being investigated.

The lawyers said that, "if necessary and as far as legally possible," they also want to name high-ranking representatives of the archdiocese who "acted erroneously or inappropriately in connection with the handling of sexual abuse cases."

The Westpfahl Spilker Wastl law firm has already compiled legal reports covering two other German dioceses. While their investigation into the events in the Aachen Diocese was published, Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne withdrew the firm's report shortly ahead of its planned publication.

The reasons he gave were methodological deficiencies and libel issues. Interested parties were not allowed to view the Westpfahl Spilker Wastl study until after the publication of a second expert report by the law firm Gercke Wollschläger.

Westpfahl Spilker Wastl provided a first abuse report for the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising as early as 2010, but it was never published in full for reasons of data protection, KNA reported.