

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

April 23, 2010 at 2:33pm

NCR obtains correspondence: retired vicar general denies pressure in Munich pedophile case

by Thomas C. Fox



Munich cathedral, left

Msgr. Gerhard Gruber, the former vicar general of the Munich archdiocese, has denied a published report he was pressured to assume responsibility for assigning a pedophile priest to do local parish work during the tenure of then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as archbishop.

His denial appeared in the April 21 edition of the German publication, *Suddeutsche Zeitung*. NCR has obtained a copy of his letter of denial.

Gruber was responding to an earlier report that appeared in another German publication, *Der Spiegel*, in which he said he took sole responsibility for the assignment after coming under great pressure from unnamed church sources "take the pope out of the firing line." The report said Gruber expressed unhappiness to friends at being given the sole blame in public.

According to *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, the *Der Spiegel* story was apparently triggered by a circular letter sent by a Gruber friend after he spoke to him on the telephone about the matter. In the report, Gruber said that

after his telephone conversation his friend, "with the best intentions but infelicitously," passed on some contents. That communication, Gruber said, contained "inaccuracies and serious misreporting."

From sources in Germany, *NCR* has also obtained a copy of an email sent by the Gruber friend to his colleagues. Both the Gruber denial letter and the circular email were written in German and translated into English by *NCR*.

Der Spiegel on April 19 in its weekly English edition wrote: "Gruber, who felt put under pressure, later confided in theologian friends. He told them that he had been emphatically 'asked' to assume full responsibility for the affair, and that church officials had promptly faxed him a copy of the statement and instructed him to make any changes he deemed necessary."

The 81-year-old Gruber had been out of the church spotlight since his retirement. However, he found himself in the spotlight after news reports last month that he reassigned a pedophile priest to do parish work while vicar general in Munich during the time Ratzinger was archbishop.

German and U.S. press accounts last month reported that Pope Benedict, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in 1980 allowed a known pedophile priest, Fr. Peter Hullermann, to enter the Munich archdiocese for treatment. Hullermann had sexually assaulted three boys in the German diocese of Essen in 1979 before coming to Munich.

However, just weeks after arriving in Munich, Hullermann was allowed to begin parish work, reportedly against the advice of his treating psychiatrist. Gruber told the Associated Press in a telephone interview last month that he took sole responsibility for that decision.

Citing archdiocesan documents, *The New York Times* reported the decision to accept Hullermann into the archdiocese required the approval of Munich's diocesan council, which consisted of Ratzinger and his senior officials.

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