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Roman Catholic Church leaders in Rome authorized more investigation into claims that a northern Minnesota bishop interfered with past investigations into clerical sexual misconduct with children, the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis announced Feb.4.

The investigation into Crookston Bishop Michael Hoepfner began in [September](#) and was the first known of its kind under a new Vatican protocol designed to hold the Catholic hierarchy accountable for failing to protect their flocks. St. Paul-Minneapolis Archbishop Bernard Hebda has been leading the investigation into Hoepfner and said Tuesday that the Congregation for Bishops in Rome authorized him to continue.

The investigation centers on allegations that Hoepfner engaged in “acts or omissions intended to interfere with or avoid civil or canonical investigations of clerical sexual misconduct.”

Hoepfner is accused of stating that a priest was fit for ministry while he allegedly knew that the priest had abused a 16-year-old boy in the early 1970s. According to a lawsuit, Hoepfner wrote to the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis in 2012 that Monsignor Roger Grundhaus was a “person of good moral character and reputation” and that he was unaware of anything in Grundhaus' background that would make him unfit to work with children.

But Grundhaus' accuser, Ron Vasek, had told Hoepfner in 2011 that Grundhaus had abused him decades earlier. Vasek would later sue the diocese, alleging that the bishop blackmailed him into retracting his allegations. That lawsuit was settled for

an undisclosed sum in 2017.

When asked if Hoepner had any comment, the Diocese of Crookston said Tuesday that Hoepner was deferring to the archdiocese. Hoepner said earlier that Grundhaus, who is retired, continues to deny Vasek's allegations; and in sworn testimony released in November, Hoepner said that he was trying to protect the victim's confidentiality.

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