
Clerical Misconduct in the Church of Sweden 2000–2004

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The Church of Sweden, being the national Lutheran Church, was disestablished in 2000 and former state obligations were transferred to the church. Major changes were effected in the oversight of the clergy and all complaints were thereafter to be handled by the church itself. This article considers empirical data concerning those complaints and makes an evaluative comparison with the previous system.

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade ongoing international attention has been paid to clerical misconduct, and especially to cases of child abuse by Roman Catholic priests. However, clergy misconduct is not an exclusively Roman Catholic or twentieth-century phenomenon.¹ The discussion has often focused on sexual misbehaviour² and the blind-eye of Church leaders.³ Garland reports a study from 1984 where 38.5% of 1,100 Protestant clergy ‘admitted to inappropriate sexual contact and 12.7% had engaged in sexual intercourse with a church member’.⁴ Sexual abuse by clergy has been reported by researchers (mainly from the United States) for several decades. However, research reported by the Hartford Institute indicates that other types of misconduct, such as power abuse, failure to manage money, failure to protect confidentiality and incompetence outnumber sexual misconduct.⁵ About half (45%) of the reported cases were sex-related: ‘the vast majority

- 1 Samuel 2:11–25, D Farrell, ‘An historical viewpoint of sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy and religious’, *Journal of Religion & Abuse: Advocacy, Pastoral Care and Prevention* 6/2 (2004) 41–80, S Lindgård, *Ämbetsbrott av präst. En kyrkorättslig studie från medeltid till nutid* [Clerical malpractice. A study in Swedish canon law from the middle ages to the present day] (Lund, 1999).
- 2 DR Garland, ‘When wolves wear shepherds’ clothing: helping women survive clergy sexual abuse’, *Social Work and Christianity*, 33/1 (2006) 1–35, A Shupe (ed), *Wolves within the Fold: religious leadership and abuses of power* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1998), A Shupe, WA Stacey and SE Darnell (eds) *Bad Pastors: clergy misconduct in modern America* (New York, 2000).
- 3 JS Evinger, “... Nothing bad happened...”: A 19th century letter from the archbishop of Manila to the cardinal of Toledo, concerning the sexual abuse of an indian student’, *Journal of Religion & Abuse: Advocacy, Pastoral Care and Prevention*, 8/2 (2006), 23–36; N Nason-Clark, ‘Has the silence been shattered or does a holy hush still prevail? Defining violence against women within christian churches’ in Shupe, Stacey and Darnell (eds) *Bad Pastors*, 69–89.
- 4 Garland, ‘When wolves wear shepherds’ clothing’.
- 5 NT Ammerman and T Schmitt, ‘How common is clergy sexual misconduct?’, <www.hartfordinstitute.org/research/quick_question8.html>, accessed 26 November 2009.

involved affairs between consenting – but not married – adults'.⁶ However, we seem to know little of clerical misconduct in the wider sense identified by Ammerman and Schmitt.⁷ No comprehensive studies employing this wider definition of misconduct have been found. This study on clergy misconduct in this wider sense therefore fills a gap in the literature.

Earlier research carried out in four of the thirteen dioceses of the Church of Sweden indicates that complaints about clerical misconduct were rather rare in the mid- and late twentieth century.⁸ Taking into account the international discussion on clerical malpractice and the new oversight system, an overview of current clerical malpractice in the Church of Sweden is of interest.

THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN IN TRANSITION

The Church of Sweden (a national, Lutheran church) was disestablished in 2000, and obligations formerly held by the state were transferred to the church itself. The church tax was transferred to a church fee, collected along with taxes. All denominations in Sweden can have their fees collected in this way. Church Law,⁹ formerly decided by Parliament was changed into a canon law known as 'Church Ordinance',¹⁰ adopted by the General Assembly. Parliament passed a Church of Sweden Act, declaring the church to be Lutheran, territorial (with parishes all over the country), democratic and episcopal.¹¹ The appointment of bishops and cathedral deans was transferred from the government to the church itself. The employment of priests was transferred from dioceses to parishes. Major changes were effected in the system of oversight of the clergy and all complaints were to be handled by the church itself, that is, by bishops and diocesan chapters.

CLERICAL MISCONDUCT

Clerical misconduct (malpractice) is understood broadly in this article: it includes any malfeasance by clergy. As clergy can be considered to be professionals¹² it is based on the notion that 'the trusting client ought not to expect a conflict of interest between his/her best interests and the professional's

6 However, this description can probably be used for many cases of clergy sexual abuse, cf Garland, 'When wolves wear shepherds' clothing'.

7 Ammerman and Schmitt, 'How common is clergy sexual misconduct?'

8 G Ohlsson, *För domkapitlets kännedom. Anmälningar mot präster under tre brytningstider* [To the chapter for your information. Complaints about priests during three transition periods] (Lund, 2002).

9 Sfs 1992:300. Kyrkolag [Canon Law] (Stockholm, 1992).

10 Kyrkoordning med angränsande lagstiftning för Svenska kyrkan [Canon Law for the Church of Sweden], (Stockholm, 1999).

11 Sfs 1998:1591. Lag om Svenska kyrkan [Church of Sweden Act] (1998).

12 A Russell, *The Clerical Profession* (London, 1980); I Karle, *Der Pfarrerberuf als Profession. Eine Berufstheorie im Kontext der modernen Gesellschaft*, (Gütersloh, 2001).

personal advantage'.¹³ This means that clerical misconduct is 'not limited to illegal acts but also including unethical acts (unethical in terms of the profession and context in which they are performed)';¹⁴ alternatively styled 'elite deviance'.¹⁵ Clerical misconduct in this sense includes any case of sexual abuse, but is defined much more broadly, to include any 'breach of trust'.¹⁶ However, the focus in this study is much broader – on any complaint about misconduct by priests as professionals or in personal life.

SWEDISH CANON LAW AND CLERICAL MISCONDUCT

In medieval times the (then) Roman Catholic Church in Sweden tried to gain the *privilegium fori* (i.e. that the Church has the right to judge the priest in all cases). This was never fully realised, and after the Reformation the system was changed: ordinary courts judged priests in almost all cases. However, the clergy tried to regain the *privilegium fori* during the 17th century. This struggle was lost: the Canon Law of 1686 states that in cases where criminal law was not appropriate complaints could be submitted to the bishop and chapter of the diocese. Ordinary courts dealt with all other complaints, and the bishops and diocesan chapters enacted any canonical penalty (unfrocking or dismissal) after the verdict of the court.¹⁷ In the late 20th century ordinary courts handled all criminal cases of clerical misconduct. Complaints about the priest's work, lifestyle etc, were submitted to the bishop or the chapter. The chapter did not have the authorisation to unfrock the priest¹⁸ – only to warn or to issue a disciplinary punishment. However, if a priest was sentenced in a criminal case the chapter could withdraw his or her licence (prohibition). The same applied to a priest who had abandoned the doctrine of the church. In that case the priest was obliged to resign from the priesthood.

The system for oversight of priests was radically changed at the disestablishment of the church in 2000 and is now regulated in the Canon Law of the Church of Sweden 1999.¹⁹ Priests were previously state officials employed both by the diocesan chapter and the local parish. Since disestablishment priests have been employed by the local parishes, albeit under the oversight of the chapter and the bishop when it comes to their obedience to their priestly ordination vows. The chapter consists of the bishop, the dean of the cathedral,

13 A Shupe and P Iadicola, 'Issues in conceptualizing clergy malfeasance', in Shupe, Stacey and Darnell (eds) *Bad Pastors*, 13–38. p 14.

14 *Ibid*, p 15.

15 DR Simon and DS Eitzen, *Elite Deviance* (3rd edition, Boston, 1990).

16 cf Ammerman and Schmitt, 'How common is clergy sexual misconduct?'

17 Lindegård, *Ämbetsbrott av präst*.

18 According to the Church of Sweden the priesthood can never be withdrawn, only the permission to act as a priest. The priest is not reordained if the permission is regained.

19 Kyrkoordning [Canon Law for the Church of Sweden].

a priest or deacon elected by the priests and deacons in the diocese, laypersons elected by the diocesan synod and a judge.²⁰ The chapter can decide on the following actions: prohibition to officiate as a priest, (generally leading to dismissal), and from 2004 also admonition (rebuke) or a period of probation. A priest who has been prohibited can resume ministry after a decision by the chapter and with the consent of the bishop. The priest can appeal to the Church Appeal Commission and in some cases to the Swedish Labour Court.

Any action against a priest must be founded on Canon Law Chapter 12 para 31 stating that the diocesan chapter can act against a priest under the following conditions:

- i. He/she has broken his/her ordination vows;
- ii. He/she has broken his/her professional secrecy;
- iii. He/she has lost his/her ability to fulfil his/her duties due to illness;
- iv. He/she has damaged the esteem of ordained ministry to a great extent (by criminal acts, lifestyle or in other ways).²¹

Priests are responsible to the local parish council in all other aspects of their employment. They are thus under a dual structure of oversight. If the parish council has any complaints about the priest and wishes to take action (such as admonition, notice to resign or dismissal) it has to be authorised by the diocesan chapter: authorisation is given if the complaints do not pertain to the priestly vows. It is a complex system but it ensures that all official complaints pass through the diocesan office (see Figure 1). Any person (not necessarily a church member) can lodge a complaint against a priest.

Although the system is similar in many respects to the clergy discipline procedures in the Church of England there are some major differences:²² the role of the bishop is not emphasised;²³ the regulations are not as precise and codified;²⁴ no support is given to the priest under investigation and the penalties are generally less severe.²⁵

20 The chapters in Uppsala Archdiocese and Visby are composed differently, with more members.

21 Cf Church of England Code of Practice: 'ensure the clergy continue to be worthy of the great trust that is put in them as ordained ministers'; R Bursell, 'More turbulence? Clerical misconduct under the clergy discipline measure 2003' (2009) 11 *Ecc LJ* 154–168, at p 157.

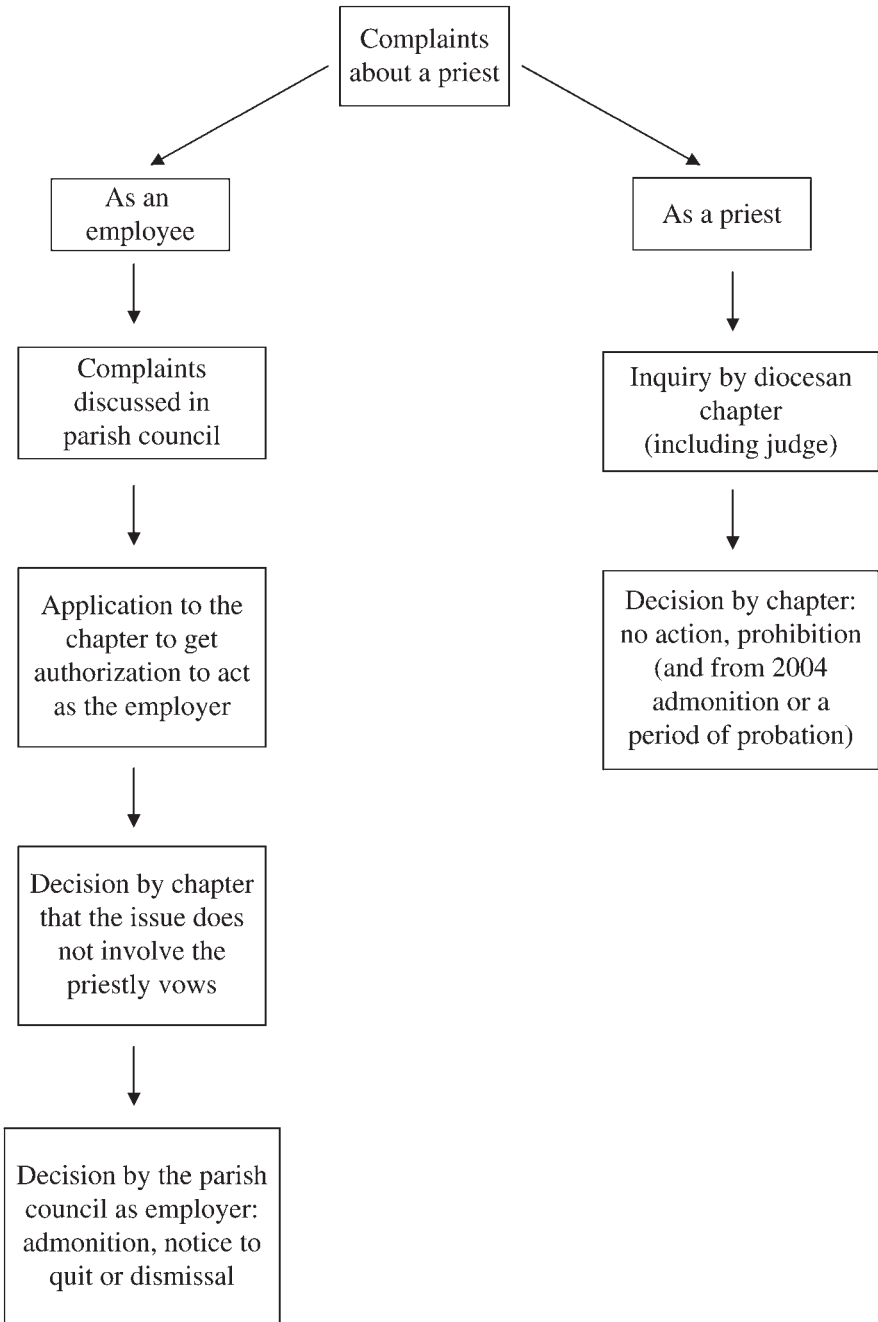
22 Cf R Bursell, 'Turbulent priests: clerical misconduct under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003' (2007) 9 *Ecc LJ* 250–263; M Hill, *Ecclesiastical Law* (third edition, Oxford, 2007), chapter 6.

23 The bishops in the Church of Sweden have a low-key role and are less powerful compared to Church of England bishops, more like ECUSA bishops. Cf C Podmore 'A tale of two churches: the ecclesiologicals of the Episcopal Church and the Church of England compared', (2008) 20 *Ecc LJ* 34–70.

24 See A Iles 'The Clergy Discipline Measure 2003: a canter through its provisions and procedures' (2007) 9 *Ecc LJ* 10–23.

25 Cf the cases decided under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 available on <<http://www.ecllaw.co.uk/clergydiscipline.php>>. The penalty for adultery is generally criticism (not prohibition to act as a priest, admonition (rebuke) or a period of probation) compared to Church of England penalties of several years of prohibition.

Figure 1
The dual structure since 2000 for handling complaints against Church of Sweden priests



PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The research on clerical malpractice in the Church of Sweden is rudimentary. Lindegård analysed changes in Canon Law from medieval times to the 1990s. His report is full of examples of actions against priests. However, the focus of Lindegård is on the legal system, not on complaints or on frequency or other aspects of malpractice.

Ohlsson investigated complaints about priests in three dioceses during three five-year periods in the 20th century: 1936–1940, 1961–1965, 1986–1990. Ohlsson reported complaints about 6% of priests for each period of five years, omitting complaints about the national registry.²⁶ There are minor differences between the dioceses (5–7%). Table 1 shows the distribution of complaints by years and area of ministry. As societal tasks decreased, complaints in this area decreased. Complaints about pastoral care increased during the periods as did complaints about other priestly tasks. At that time the courts informed the chapter when a priest was sentenced. Ohlsson reports crimes such as traffic offences, unlawful hunting, economic irregularities and assaulting a civil servant.

Ohlsson reports that the most common decision by the diocesan chapter is to take no action at all (37%). Next to this comes further investigation, with cases often being referred to the bishop for further action, probably resulting in a letter or a personal meeting. In approximately one quarter of the cases a response is sent to the complainant. Very few cases led to admonition, warning or suspension (see Table 2).

Sahlin (1999) reported on decisions by chapters and ordinary courts in four legal cases against priests during the late 20th century. The issues were theological: rebaptism; being employed by a Pentecostal parish; theologically arguing a Baptist standpoint; using modern prophecies in sermons; using crystals and asking a shaman to purify the priest's home.²⁷ In those cases the bishop and chapters decided to unfrock the priests, arguing that they had abandoned the doctrine of the church. When decisions were appealed, both the ordinary courts (in three cases) and the Church Appeal Commission (in one case) overruled the decision by the chapter. In those cases no false doctrine was found to be so manifest that it led to suspension from the priesthood. The author of the report rhetorically titled it: 'Where do we draw the line?'

AIM AND RESEARCH METHODS

As there is no up-to-date research on clerical misconduct in the Church of Sweden this article aims to provide an overview and to map the frequency and types of misconduct. In order to understand the frequency and seriousness

²⁶ National registry was an obligation for the priests from the early 17th century to 1991.

²⁷ H Sahlin, *Var går gränsen? Om prästs övergivande av läran* [Where do we draw the line? A study of priests abandoning the doctrine of the church], (Uppsala, 1999).

Table 1

Complaints about priests in three dioceses during three periods (according to Ohlsson, 2002)

	1936–1940	1961–1965	1986–1990	Total
Societal tasks ¹	25	18	2	45
Pastoral care ²	6	18	16	40
Other priestly tasks ³	14	19	18	51
Personal life, lifestyle ⁴	7	6	7	20
Total	52	61	43	156

¹ Such as school board, municipal poor relief, national registry.² Such as preaching, regular services, occasional offices.³ Such as administration, relations to parish council, churchmanship.⁴ Such as alcohol problems, divorce, court order.

of the problems we will compare complaints about priests over time. Another objective is to map the actions taken by the Church authorities.

Thus the aims and objectives may be described as follows:

- i. To get an overview of clerical misconduct in the Church of Sweden today, especially of the frequency and types of misconduct;
- ii. To map any gender differences;
- iii. To map actions taken by church authorities;
- iv. To compare clerical misconduct over time.

METHODS

The Church of Sweden authority responsible for taking actions on clerical misconduct is, as mentioned above, the diocesan chapter and the bishop. As a new oversight system was introduced in 2000 this year was chosen as a starting point for the research. It was assumed that a five-year period would give enough material to fulfil the aims of the research. Data was thus collected for

Table 2

Decisions by diocesan chapters (according to Ohlsson, 2002)

Decision ¹	1936–1940	1961–1965	1986–1990	Total	%
No action	22	23	13	58	37.4
Further analysis	8	14	22	44	28.4
Reply and explanation	11	18	6	35	22.6
Admonition	7	4	–	11	7.1
Warning, suspension	3	2	2	7	4.5
Total	51	61	43	155	100

¹ Ohlsson does not provide the breakdown of these figures (cf Table 1).

the period 2000–2004. The investigation is limited to priests. There are approximately 3,400 active priests and 1,500 permanent deacons in the church (and 25,000 employees altogether). As permanent deacons were not subordinated to the bishop and the chapter before 2000, this group was omitted. In order to cover all complaints on priestly behaviour during the period, all diocesan chapters were asked to send photocopies of all documents concerning complaints submitted during this period.

However, one can assume that the bishops handle a large number of sensitive cases in an informal manner (personal meetings, telephone calls etc). This means that this investigation only covers complaints in writing to the chapter and cases officially opened by the bishop him or herself. It is also probable that many cases are handled entirely at the local level, contrary to the spirit of the canon law of the Church. The *Church of Sweden Times* (*Kyrkans Tidning*) reports that at least 78 priests have been bought out by their congregations since 2000. Such local agreements will not necessarily be reported to the chapter. This means that there is an unknown number of unrecorded cases. However, those cases do not necessarily involve issues of misconduct: it is reported that general dissatisfaction or some misunderstandings sometimes is enough to start a procedure of buying out the priest. Although these informal ways of handling clerical misconduct seem rather frequent, it is still of interest to investigate the formal procedure of complaints about priests.

There are some other cases which will never be reported (probably very few): some priests have resigned before an inquiry is instituted thus preventing the chapter from inquiring into the case.

In October 2007 all the diocesan chapters were asked to send photocopies of all cases of complaints about clergy (misconduct). In March 2008 the 13 chapters had submitted 3,587 pages altogether. Only three cases were classified as partly secret as they included sensitive personal information. In two of the cases large proportions of the documents were classified as open and especially sensitive parts as secret. Some cases included decisions by the Church Appeal Commission and the Swedish Labour Court.

RESULTS

There were a total of 159 complaints about 135 priests between 2000 and 2004 Table 2. The frequency of complaints in the dioceses can be found in Table 3. Some priests received several complaints. Two complaints were about two and three priests respectively. Nine priests have between two and four complaints, often providing a different angle on the first complaint.

In ten cases the complaints are registered twice: both as a case involving permission to function as a priest and as a request for authorisation for action against the priest from the parish council. In three cases identical complaints

Table 3

Number of priests and complaints in the dioceses

Diocese ¹	Active priests 2005 ²	Number of complaints 2000–2004	Complaints as a percentage of active priests	Number of complaints against male priests	Proportion of male priests (%)	Proportion of complaints against male priests (%)
Uppsala (Archdiocese)	270	14	5.2	10	58	71
Linköping	246	25	10.2	20	54	80
Skara	219	3	1.4	3	65	100
Strängnäs	193	7	3.6	7	65	100
Västerås	224	2	0.9	1	61	50
Växjö	285	11	3.9	11	75	100
Lund	483	20	4.1	14	56	70
Göteborg	405	27	6.7	25	83	93
Karlstad	147	11	7.5	6	58	55
Härnösand	180	4	2.2	2	62	50
Luleå	227	14	6.2	12	66	86
Visby with Church of Sweden abroad ³	62	2	3.2	2	76	100
Stockholm	461	19	4.1	11	47	58
Total	3,402	159	4.7	124	62	78

¹ The dioceses are listed ordered according to church tradition.

² Statistics for 2005 are used, as no gender statistics are available for 2000–2004. The number of priests is relatively stable over the years.

³ Church of Sweden abroad was subordinated to the diocese of Uppsala until November 2002. No complaints have been registered regarding priests serving abroad.

have been submitted regarding two or three priests. Compared to Ohlsson's results the number of complaints is approximately the same or slightly lower.

Differences between the dioceses

Table 3 shows the differences between the dioceses. Two dioceses have a complaint rate under 2% (Skara 1.4% and Västerås 0.9%) and two dioceses have more than 7% (Linköping 10.2% and Karlstad 7.5%). The reasons behind those differences are unclear. One explanation might be that the bishops in Skara and Västerås have been working more informally than bishops in other dioceses. This might be considered an advantage, but it can also mean that there is a 'Holy Hush' in those dioceses. Dioceses with high figures, on the other hand, might be assumed to take complaints seriously, or even 'hunt' for complaints. One might also consider the possibility of different levels of clergy competence, although this does not seem very likely as quite a few priests move between dioceses. One might also consider the existence of different strategies for registering complaints in the dioceses.

The respondents

It may be seen in Table 3 that male priests are overrepresented as 78% of the cases concerned male priests, who constitute 62% of all priests. Table 4 shows the posts held by respondents. Deans and rectors made up 47% and are therefore also overrepresented in the material as only approximately 30% of posts were at this level. This can be explained by the fact that being a dean or rector is a more public and exposed position. There are no significant gender differences.

The complainants

There is a wide variety in who takes the initiative to complain to the chapter about a priest (see Table 5). In most cases the parish council takes the initiative. It is quite common that the rector or a colleague reports a priest to the chapter. In some cases the bishop, or the chapter itself, starts an inquiry about something

Table 4
Posts held by respondents

Position	All	Male	Female
Dean, area dean, rector, vicar	75	58	16
Senior curate	76	59	17
Others	8	7	2
Total	159	124	35

Table 5
Complainants and issues

Complainant	General complaints	Authorisation to take action	Permission to officiate	Other	All (%)
Parish Council	2	50	10	1	63 (39.6%)
Private person	30	0	6	0	36 (22.6%)
Rector, colleague	17	2	12	1	32 (20.1%)
Bishop, chapter	0	2	13	2	17 (10.7%)
Other	4	0	4	3	11 (6.9%)
Total	53 (33.3%)	54 (34.0%)	45 (28.3%)	7 (4.4%)	159

that has come to their attention. There are no significant gender differences regarding who takes the initiative.

The issues brought to the chapters can also be found in Table 5. Approximately one third are general complaints, authorisation to take action against a priest and issues surrounding permission to officiate. There are no significant gender differences.

The parish council employs priests, and in 50 of the 63 cases brought by the parish council the issue is to obtain authorisation to take action against the priest. Note that in some cases two charges in the same case have been sent to the diocese: one to obtain authorisation to take action and one to make the chapter discuss a withdrawal of permission to officiate as a priest.

Approximately 70% of the complaints thus come from within the church structure itself. Individuals who complain are often close to the church structure. They may be members of a parish council, but complain as private persons.

Complaints

All complaints have been categorised, and the distribution across the categories can be found in Table 6. Different complaints will be described in more detail below.

The most common complaint against priests is *breach of regulations* (19.5%). Here we find many different types of accusations: divergence from the set order of worship or Church Ordinance; charges in relation to breach of confidentiality; disobeying the orders of the rector; absenteeism. Most of those accusations are categorised as general complaints without any specific goal.

Accusations for *pastoral misconduct* make up almost 19%. Here we find issues such as having a mobile phone turned on during a funeral; complaints about sermons or statements in the media; complaints about occasional offices. Almost all of these complaints are categorised as general complaints: the complainant does not have any specific goal in mind.

Table 6
Complaints distributed over issues

Issue Complaint	General complaints	Authorisation to take action	Permission to officiate as a priest	Other	Total (%)
Breach of regulations	19	9	3	0	31 (19.5%)
Pastoral misconduct	22	3	4	1	30 (18.9%)
Sexual misbehaviour, addiction	0	7	20	0	27 (17.0%)
Lacking in co-operation	4	17	2	3	26 (16.3%)
Leadership	6	9	1	0	16 (10.0%)
Economic crime, greed	0	6	7	1	14 (8.8%)
Other	2	3	8	2	15 (9.4%)
Total	53 (33.3%)	54 (34.0%)	45 (28.3%)	7 (4.4%)	159 (100%)

Sexual misbehaviour and addiction (eg to alcohol or gambling) form more than one sixth of the accusations. Sexual misconduct consists of pornography on a work computer (7 cases); sexual harassment (sitting too close, complimenting on looks; unwelcome hugs, kissing etc) (5 cases); infidelity and sexual relations with parishioners or young persons (8 cases); alcoholism (3 cases); uncontrolled gambling for money (2 cases); both alcoholism and sexual misbehaviour (2 cases). All but one of these cases (the exception regarding infidelity) concern male priests. There is no case regarding same-sex relations. It is important to note that in seven cases the same behaviour is brought to the attention of the chapter twice: both as a means to obtain authorisation to take action and as a means to get the chapter to question the continued permission to officiate. It is the same incident in both cases. In one case the priest was sentenced in court to pay damages for sexual harassment.

Approximately 15% of the accusations are categorised as *Lacking in cooperation*. This percentage rises to 50% where the complaint is made by the parish. *Lacking in cooperation* is a wide category and frequently concerns conflicts within the parish council or among the staff. The aim in most of those cases is to get an authorisation to take action against the priest (eventually leading to warning or to dismissal).

In 10% of the cases the *leadership* of the priest is questioned. In most cases this is done in order to take actions against the priest. Inability to lead the staff, personality and bad temper are reasons that have been cited to the chapter.

Economic crime (or in some cases *greed*) is stated in fewer than 10% of the cases. Some priests are suspected of obtaining extra (irregular) money from their parishes or taking irregular fees for occasional services. One priest

accepted a large legacy from an old person. In one case the priest was accused of ordering food several times at the expense of the parish, stating it was for different parish groups which, according to the Swedish Labour Court, did not exist.

Decisions of chapters

The decisions of the chapters can be found in Table 7.

General complaints

General complaints amount to 33.3% of all complaints. More than half of these complaints were closed with no action by the chapter. In one quarter of cases the chapter made a general statement or criticised the priest. In about 10% of the cases the chapter commissioned somebody (often the bishop) to undertake further analysis or private pastoral oversight. In two cases the chapter decided on admonition or a period of probation.

Authorisation to take action

Almost all of these cases were submitted by a parish council in its role as employer. Two cases were submitted by the bishop (in cases where the priest was on the diocesan staff). Such cases constitute 34.0% of the total. In almost 90% of these cases the authorisation was approved. In two cases it was rejected, and in two cases it led to admonition or a period of probation.

Permission to officiate as a priest

Almost one third (28.8%) of the cases are classified as cases concerning permission to officiate as a priest. Cases were brought both by individual

Table 7
Decisions by chapters

Issue Decision	General complaints	Authorisation to take action	Permission to officiate as a priest	Other	Total (%)
Approval	1	47	0	1	49 (30.8%)
No action	29	2	7	2	40 (25.2%)
Criticism, statement	13	0	15	0	28 (17.6%)
Further analysis, commission to sb	6	1	3	2	12 (7.5%)
Admonition, period of probation	2	2	8	0	12 (7.5%)
Most severe sanction	0	0	10	0	10 (6.3%)
Rejection	0	2	1	2	5 (3.1%)
Other	2	0	1	0	3 (1.9%)
Total	53 (33.3%)	54 (34.0%)	45 (28.3%)	7 (4.4%)	159

complainants and by the chapter. In one third of these cases the chapter criticised the priest. In one fifth of the cases permission was withdrawn and the priest was prohibited from serving as a priest. In 18% of cases the chapter decided on admonition or a period of probation. A change in Canon Law in 2004 introduced admonition or a period of probation as a new tool for chapters. Before that, in less serious cases, chapters generally criticised a priest via a written statement. Some of those cases would probably have led to admonition or a period of probation after 2004. Priests who were prohibited were found guilty of different types of offences:

- i. Unacceptable theological standpoints (one case);
- ii. Sexual behaviour (adultery, sexual harassment) (five);
- iii. Accepting a large legacy (one);
- iv. Other (left church, 'way of living') (three).

However, this does not mean that all priests who commit adultery or sexual harassment are prohibited. Most cases of this kind can be assumed to never come to the attention of the chapter. Pornography on a work computer and extramarital sexual relations are generally criticised or lead to admonition but not to prohibition.

COMPARISON OVER TIME

As stated above, the number of cases is a little lower than the number identified by Ohlsson.²⁸ To compare the figures I have omitted the cases where the parishes asked for authorisation for action, as this procedure was introduced in 2000. The number of cases in the comparison is thus 105 (159–54). The results can be seen in Table 8.

When looking into decisions by chapters, Ohlsson reports that chapters took no action in 37% of cases. This corresponds rather well with my findings that about 36% of cases did not lead to any action. Ohlsson reports that the chapter decided on further analysis in 28% of cases. This corresponds to 10.5% in my investigation. Furthermore, Ohlsson reports a statement of criticism in 22.6% of the cases, which corresponds to 26.7% in my investigation. The proportion of cases leading to admonition or a period of probation is also rather similar (7.1% vs 9.5%). However, prohibition (unfrocking) was more than twice as common in 2000–2004 than in the previous periods (9.5% vs 4.5%). This is explained by the fact that the procedure leading to unfrocking has changed: before 2000 the priest had to be sentenced to jail before the chapter could make a decision.

28 Ohlsson, *För domkapitlets kännedom*.

Table 8
Comparison over time

	Ohlsson's report	General complaints	Permission to officiate as a priest	Other	Total (%)
No action	37.4%	29	7	2	38 (36.2%)
Criticism, statement	22.6%	13	15	0	28 (26.7%)
Further analysis	28.4%	6	3	2	11 (10.5%)
Admonition, period of probation	7.1%	2	8	0	10 (9.5%)
Most severe sanction ¹	4.5%	0	10	0	10 (9.5%)
Rejection	–	2	1	0	3 (2.9%)
Approval	–	1	0	1	2 (1.9%)
Other	–	0	1	2	3 (2.9%)
Total	100%	53	45	7	105 (100%)

¹ The most severe sanction in Ohlsson's report is warning/suspension and in my report withdrawal of licence (prohibition). The difference is explained by changes in the law concerning how to deal with clerical malpractice and the employment system of priests.

DISCUSSION

It is obvious that chapters take seriously their responsibility for oversight. As both employers (in some cases) and chapters (in other cases) have the right to take actions against a priest, there is a dual oversight structure. In some cases both structures work hand in hand, and the priest thus gets a double punishment.

The oversight system holds priests responsible as professionals. Any claim by priests that they were 'not on duty' is rejected by the chapters (and the Church Appeal Commission) as a priest is always a priest. This would apply also to a physician and in some cases to a lawyer. Male priests are overrepresented, especially in serious cases.

Comparing the numbers of complaints, it seems that the numbers over the last 70 years are rather similar. The pattern of complaints is in many respects the same during the period. However, there are no complaints about divorce after 2000. Divorce may be so common among clergy that nobody cares. There are no cases involving cohabitation without marriage or about same-sex relations (even if cohabitation without marriage and same-sex cohabitation and same-sex partnership exist among clergy and seem to be more overt and more common – no statistics are available).²⁹ Sexual misconduct and

29 Same-sex marriage has been adopted by the Swedish parliament, and the Church of Sweden has changed its practise regarding marriage to include same-sex marriages. The priests are expected (but not forced) to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies.

harassment is a new category – a sign of the times? Even if the total number of those cases is low, it is certainly a very serious situation for the believers, the church and the society when a priest is found guilty of sexual harassment. There are no cases of paedophilia.

It is obvious that the Church of Sweden is more permissive in many cases than other churches. Many of the cases in this investigation would have led to prohibition for many years or for life in the Church of England.³⁰ What it means ‘to be worthy of the great trust that is put in them as ordained ministers’³¹ seems to be different in those two Churches, linked together in the Porvoo Communion. Whether this is a problem or not I leave to others to decide.

30 Bursell, ‘Turbulent priests’.

31 *Clergy Discipline Measure 2003: Code of Practice* (London, 2006).