



A high-profile former Roman Catholic priest in Italy has been charged with sexual abuse. Pierino Gelmini, 85, is alleged to have abused 12 young people at a drug rehabilitation centre he had founded.

He denies the charges. Mr Gelmini left the priesthood two years ago to defend himself. The Comunita Incontro, which runs drug rehabilitation centres worldwide, has enjoyed the support of powerful figures in Italian politics.

In 2005, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi gave \$6m (£4m) to his organisation. Mr Gelmini set up the Comunita Incontro in 1963 in the Umbrian town of Amelia. It has more than 200 centres in Italy - and others in France, Spain, the US, Brazil and Thailand.

The allegations against him surfaced in 2008 when nine young men said he had sexually abused them. Another three went to police later. The first hearing of his trial is due on 29 March 2011.

Mr Gelmini's lawyer says "there is no proof that can support the accusations".

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