

Pope Accepts Resignation of German Bishop Charged With Luxurious Lifestyle

By Divya Avasthy

The Vatican has accepted the resignation of German Bishop Franz-Peter Terbartz-van Elst who was charged with leading a luxurious lifestyle.

He had reportedly spent about €31m (£25.7m) of Church funds on building his official residence which included a museum, conference halls, chapel and private apartments in Limburg town of Germany.

The project's initial estimated cost of €5.5m (£4.6m) escalated nearly six times, some of the money reportedly going into renovation of his personal residence.

The huge expense angered his congregation and was in stark contrast to the Pope's message of simplicity for the Roman Catholic Church.

Also nicknamed "bling bishop" by the international media, Elst was suspected of mishandling money sourced from German taxpayers.

Last October, the German media published reports of the bishop spending €15,000 on a bathtub and €783,000 on landscaping his garden.

The media also reported about the costly reopening of the roof of his personal chapel to allow for the suspension of an enormous cross.

The allegations against Elst surfaced last year prompting the bishop to offer his resignation to the Vatican in October. He was suspended by the Pope and was investigated by the conference of bishops in Germany.

Church reforms

The conference welcomed the Pope's decision and the bishops expressed their commitment to reform the church's financial policy-making processes to make them more transparent.

"It is very important for the Church in all of Germany to draw the necessary conclusions ... this applies especially to transparency in Church finances," Alois Glueck, president of the Central Committee of German Catholics, told Reuters.

Meanwhile, Elst apologised for "carelessness or misjudgement" on his part but denied any deliberate intention of misconduct.

The bishop will be assigned a new position in the church, but the Vatican has not provided further details.

Pope Francis has asked the faithful of the diocese of Limburg to accept the decision "with docility" and to work for restoration of a "climate of charity and reconciliation", according to a Vatican statement.

Pope Francis has been urging church officials around the world to be more austere and live simple lives in

order to be closer to the poor.

In Germany, a reformist Catholic group "Wir sind Kirche" (We are Church) called the resignation a "positive sign for the whole church", according to AFP.

A US-based Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (Snap) said: "When it comes to finances and governance, Francis moves quickly and boldly. When it comes to children and crimes, Francis [moves]> slowly and timidly."

Setting an example of the austerity he preaches, Pope Francis had refused to move to an opulent papal palace in the Vatican, preferring to stay at Casa Santa Marta, which is a residence for lay people and visiting clergy.

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/pope-accepts-resignation-german-bishop-charged-luxurious-lifestyle-1442074>

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