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Indonesian Catholics participate in an outdoor Palm Sunday procession April 9 in Semarang. (CNS/Antaea Foto, Reuters)

by Catholic News Service

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The Vatican has appointed an apostolic visitor to investigate claims by Indonesian priests that their bishop had a mistress and misappropriated church funds.

Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunyamin of Bandung, Indonesia, told ucanews.com Aug. 8 that the Vatican had asked him to look into the accusations against Bishop Hubertus Leteng of Ruteng, Indonesia.

Bunyamin, also general secretary of the Indonesian bishops' conference, was scheduled to visit the diocese on Catholic-majority Flores Island during the week of Aug. 14, ucanews.com reported.

The appointment followed social media postings that Catholics in the Ruteng Diocese living in Jakarta would gather at the apostolic nunciature for a vigil calling for a speedy resolution to the situation.

Bunyamin said the gathering would "worsen the situation." He said the dispute was "tarnishing the church's image."

The conflict erupted June 12 when 69 diocesan priests submitted letters of resignation, leaving their positions as episcopal vicars and parish priests and demanding that Leteng change how the diocese is run.

The move followed allegations last year that the bishop secretly borrowed $94,000 from the Indonesian bishops' conference and $30,000 from the diocese without providing accounting for how the money was spent.

Reports indicated that the disagreement among the priests and the bishop emerged during a meeting in which he explained that the money was used to finance the education of a youth from a poor family who was studying to be a pilot in the United States. When asked for details, he told them that it was none of their business.

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However, the priests said they suspected the money went to a woman with whom they alleged the bishop was having an affair. The alleged relationship between the bishop and the woman surfaced in 2014 after a priest who chose to leave the priesthood publicly discussed it.

Leteng denied the charge, calling it "slanderous."

Bunyamin asked people to be patient and let the church investigation unfold before drawing conclusions on their own.

"We continue to appreciate the principle of presumption of innocence," he said.