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Polish Archbishop Marek Jedraszewski of Kraków delivers the homily during Mass June 8, 2024, in the Marian Sanctuary in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Poland. Archbishop Jedraszewski turned 75 July 24, 2024, the age when bishops must submit their resignation to the pope. (OSV News/courtesy Archdiocese of Kraków)



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Krakow, Poland — July 25, 2024
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One of Poland's most influential prelates has been asked to stay on beyond retirement by Pope Francis, days after the Vatican suspended his orders dismissing a prominent pastor and naming an overseer of the finances of the prominent Wawel Cathedral chapter in a dispute with local Catholics.

"The Holy Father has accepted my resignation, while asking me to continue holding the office of diocesan bishop until he appoints my successor," said Archbishop Marek Jedraszewski of Kraków in a message read July 21 in churches.

"Trusting Divine Providence to allow us to enjoy the gift of unity in working to promote faith and mutual love, I encourage you to pray for Pope Francis and the Church of Kraków," the letter said.

The archbishop turned 75 on July 24, reaching the age when bishops must submit their resignation to the pope. In his July 21 letter, he recalled informing his "associates in pastoral mission" on June 19 that he submitted his resignation to Francis.

Meanwhile, a Kraków priest said postponement of Jedraszewski's departure could be intended to allow time for disputes to ease between his supporters and opponents.

"The archbishop is known for controversial statements and actions, and for supporting Poland's previous governing party — but he's also faced accusations of losing contact with his archdiocese," said Jesuit Father Jacek Prusak, director of the psychology institute at Kraków's Jesuit Ignatianum University and faith editor of the

Tygodnik Powszechny Catholic weekly.

"Perhaps it's hoped current disputes can be resolved this way, so he won't have to leave under cloud, passing a divided archdiocese on to his successor," Prusak said.

Born in Poznan, Jedraszewski served from 2012 as archbishop of Lódz, before being appointed archbishop in Kraków in December 2016, as the third metropolitan since St. John Paul II (1920-2005), who was archbishop for 14 years prior to his 1978 papal election.

Until March, he served two five-year terms as vice president of the Polish bishops' conference, and was a member of the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education.

Known for vigorously opposing abortion and contraception, the archbishop faced opposition for denouncing LGBTQ campaigners as a "rainbow plague" comparable to the "red plague" of communism in a televised August 2019 homily.

In a 2019 interview for Radio Maria, Jedraszewski explained that by his words he meant to criticize "gender ideology," not the people associated with it. "The church does not condemn people. It condemns evil. Also that which takes the shape of a particular ideology," he noted. He added that sin is the evil that man does, and the merciful Jesus leans over the sinner, showing him the way of conversion.

In the latest controversy, Jedraszewski told the archpriest of Krakow's 14th-century St. Mary's Church, Father Dariusz Ras, that a visitation of his Main Square prominent parish had revealed "numerous irregularities" and gave him 15 days to leave.

The November 2023 seven-page letter said Ras' conduct had caused "serious harm and confusion in the church community," demonstrating incompetence and a "poor management" of temporal goods to "the great detriment of the church."

However, the order was disputed by parish council members from the 14th-century Gothic landmark, popularly known as the Mariacki Church, who told the archbishop in a February letter Ras had allowed them insight into church matters during his 13 years as archpriest.

They added that the visitation ordered by Jedraszewski's envoy, totalling three hours, had been led by a former parish curate, Father Lukasz Michalczewski, with no technical expertise, and dubbed by the parish council as "biased."

Teresa Malecka, a Mariacki Church council member and a member of the closest lay family, or "Srodowisko," of St. John Paul II, said parishioners had been "completely shocked" by the "absolutely groundless" treatment of Ras.

She said that the archpriest's "diligence and hard work" had helped save the parish during the 2020-2021 coronavirus pandemic, and said claims of financial and management irregularities contradicted his reputation for "total transparency."

"Although we've sent other letters to the archbishop, we've received no response — though a simple conversation could have achieved something, there was total closure," Malecka, who is also a professor at Kraków's Music Academy, told OSV News.

Despite the complaints, Ras was removed from office on April 24, right before Jedraszewski named another priest, Father Stanislaw Czernik, to administer the parish in May.

However, Ras appealed to the Vatican in May, and resumed Masses as archpriest July 14, after the archbishop's order was suspended by the Dicastery for Clergy.

"It would be appropriate if you could remain open to the possibility of a personal meeting with the Archbishop," the dicastery said in a July 3 decree, which was relayed by the Vatican's Warsaw nunciature and shown to OSV News, "with the aim of clarifying this delicate situation in a favorable climate and thus overcoming possible tensions."

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A second recent controversial order by Jedraszewski was also suspended by the dicastery pending further investigations. In this order, the archbishop appointed an external curator to take over extensive estate and property assets belonging to Kraków's Wawel Cathedral chapter, after rejecting its financial reports.

Asked about the dicastery decrees, the former visitation leader, Michalczewski, who is now the Kraków Archdiocese's chief spokesman, economist as well as police chaplain, among other duties, told OSV News Jedraszewski had not been contacted by the Vatican, adding his orders had been "suspended" rather than repealed.

However, a church source in Kraków said it was widely believed Jedraszewski had sought to "maneuver" loyal church staffers into prominent positions prior to his retirement, while removing clergy associated with his predecessor, Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, who was personal secretary to St. John Paul II for 39 years.

The source added that Dziwisz, who previously employed Ras as his secretary, was believed to have argued the archpriest's case in Rome.

Meanwhile, the author of a recent biography of the archbishop, journalist Tomasz Terlikowski, told OSV News he also believed Jedraszewski's moves were aimed at ensuring "close collaborators" obtained "strong and influential positions" before a new archbishop was appointed, adding that the Vatican's rare intervention suggested Archbishop Jedraszewski had "violated canonical rules."

"The situation has been made worse by Jedraszewski's refusal to talk with local Catholics. This is a rich and interesting parish, full of professors and other distinguished people, who haven't even been given an opportunity to express their views," Terlikowski said.

Besides facing criticism from liberal Catholics and secular media, Jedraszewski was not named a cardinal by Pope Francis, who conferred the honor instead in September 2023 on Archbishop Grzegorz Rys of Lódz, a former Kraków auxiliary.

Among expressions of support for the archbishop, Poland's private TV channel Republika said July 18 that Jedraszewski had been subjected to an "unprecedented attack from leftist and liberal circles" for his "unwavering adherence to church teachings" and opposition to "forces preaching moral permissiveness," who would be disappointed by his failure "to fall silent."

However, Kraków priests who asked not to be named told OSV News the archbishop had "narrowed his trusted circle to very few people," while declining contact with others, "despite multiple requests and pressing needs."

In his OSV News interview, Terlikowski said that even conservative clergy who admired Jedraszewski's "orthodox stance against Western liberal influences" had grown disillusioned with his lack of communication with clergy and laypeople across the Archdiocese of Kraków.

He added that the archbishop had been widely considered too close to Poland's now-ousted Law and Justice party.

Prusak said he also believed Jedraszewski had tended to set himself too much apart from local Catholics, used to well-known regionally raised personalities such as Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (the future Pope John Paul II) or Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, dubbed the "poorman of Kraków" for his humble attitude.

Poland is facing some more important bishops' installations in the coming months, with Cardinal Kazimierz Nycz of Warsaw reaching retirement age from his metropolitan post in Warsaw Feb. 1, 2025, and Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki of Poznan reaching retirement age on Oct. 19. Both prelates were considered longtime leaders of the church in Poland, with Gadecki leading the bishops' conference for 10 years until March 2014.

Cardinal Nycz already submitted his resignation to Pope Francis in December 2023.