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Exploring 'bishop of bling' and the wealth of the German church

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NCR Today

Most *NCR* readers have by now heard of the so-called "bishop of bling," the name much of the media have given to Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst of Limburg, Germany. Pope Francis authorized a leave of absence for him for high living: spending \$42 million to renovate his official residence.

As we all know by now, this level of luxury does not reflect either the style or the values of Pope Francis.

This week, on "Interfaith Voices," I interviewed two guests about this case: Kevin Eckstrom, the editor in chief of Religion News Service, and Christian Weisner, a leader of Wir Sind Kirche, or We Are Church -- Germany, the leading church reform movement in that country.

Both said this case caused general outrage in Germany and that this bishop will not return to lead any diocese.

But my conversation with Weisner was more extensive. We discussed the unique German method of funding churches through the tax system in that country. (Those who value separation of religion and government will be horrified.) This system includes the Catholic and Lutheran churches, both huge denominations in Germany, and other "registered" religious bodies. It's a system that started with Napoleon, and today, it helps make the German church quite wealthy.

Listen to the entire interview.

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