Polish bishop sues after paper says he was informer

WARSAW, Poland – A Polish bishop is suing a local newspaper after it accused him of informing for the communist-era secret police.

"Never, in any form, did I collaborate," Bishop Stanislaw Stefanek of Lomza told Catholics in a Nov. 18 pastoral letter.

"I ask your prayers for those of our poor brothers who are still in (the) service of the lie and the destruction of human consciences. I also ask prayers for myself, that I may not become a hostage to the media," he said.

Poland's Glos Wielkopolski daily named the 71-year-old bishop as a former collaborator Nov. 12; the report later was picked up by newspapers nationwide.

Communists ruled Poland 1947-89.

In his letter, Bishop Stefanek said he had been asked by a visiting Glos reporter to describe attempts by the communist-era secret police to infiltrate his order, the Society of Christ for Poles Abroad.

The bishop said the subsequent article had named him as a former agent; he said his lawyers were now pursuing a libel action against the paper.

Priests and religious from the diocese defended Bishop Stefanek and said the latest "wave of insinuations" formed part of a "planned action, intended to ridicule and compromise church representatives who hold unquestioned authority in Polish society."

"Knowing our bishop for more than 11 years, we can testify to his care for both the local and universal church," they said in a Nov. 16 statement. "This is why we are convinced of his innocence."

Most of Poland's 44 Catholic dioceses have set up commissions to investigate the communist-era role of clergy since the January resignation of Archbishop Stanislaw

Wielgus of Warsaw. Some Catholics have criticized the new bodies, which are staffed by clergy.

A separate central church commission said Oct. 11 it had completed investigations into Poland's 132 currently serving bishops, up to 20 of whom were registered as secret police informers, and had passed its findings to the bishops' conference, but would not be releasing names and dates.