

Polish leaders express praise for new head of Archdiocese

VATICAN CITY – Two months after Pope Benedict XVI's first choice as archbishop of Warsaw, Poland, resigned amid accusations of collaborating with communists, the pope named a 57-year-old bishop to take the post.

Archbishop Kazimierz Nycz, who had been bishop of Koszalin-Kolobrzeg, was named archbishop of Warsaw March 3.

Newspapers have published quotations from the file that communist Poland's secret police kept on the cleric, saying that he repeatedly had refused to cooperate. A Polish priest's new book describes how the secret police attempted over the course of 12 years to recruit Archbishop Nycz as an informer but gave up in the face of his refusals.

Archbishop Stanislaw Wielgus was named archbishop of Warsaw in December, but resigned during his installation Mass Jan. 7 after two separate commissions said they had seen signed documents indicating he had "deliberately and secretly collaborated" with Poland's secret police.

In an interview with Vatican Radio March 4, Archbishop Nycz said that from the time he was named bishop of Koszalin-Kolobrzeg in 2004 he "was convinced that the entire past – mine, that of the priests and of the entire church – had to be faced, because the past of the Polish church is heroic."

"You cannot erase this truth even if, during the times of the communist terror, police control, the destruction of men in various ways by the regime, there were a certain number of priests who did not meet the challenge, which required heroism," he told Vatican Radio.

Archbishop Nycz said the Polish church must face the past, ask for forgiveness and promote healing.

"I fear that some think that the most important problem facing the church is that of

purifying itself of the past," he said. "Instead, we must overcome the situation with serenity and continue our work, which is the mission of the church: to preach the Gospel, call the faithful to holiness through the sacraments and concretely witness to love. Nothing more."

Archbishop Nycz was born the son of a builder close to the former Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz Feb. 1, 1950. He was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Krakow in 1973 by the future Pope John Paul II.

After completing his doctorate at the Catholic University of Lublin, he began working in the archdiocesan office for religious education. In 1987 he was named vice-rector of the Krakow seminary.

In 1988 Pope John Paul named him an auxiliary bishop of Krakow.

Archbishop Nycz has served as president of the Polish bishops' conference commission for Catholic education since 1999 and has been a member of the conference's permanent council since 2004.

Meanwhile, Polish church leaders have welcomed the appointment and have expressed praise for Archbishop Nycz.

Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz of Krakow told Poland's Catholic information agency, KAI, March 3 that the new archbishop is "a pastor who will heal the wounds of the Warsaw church." Archbishop Nycz enjoys working with laypeople and is not "identified with any political option," said Cardinal Dziwisz.

Cardinal Jozef Glemp, the outgoing archbishop of Warsaw, described Archbishop Nycz as a "wise pastor, hugely interested in catechetical work, and very shrewd." Cardinal Glemp added that he believed the nomination would be "accepted with great hope by clergy and laity."

"We are delighted the installation will actually happen this time," Cardinal Glemp told journalists in Warsaw March 4.

Archbishop Henryk Muszynski of Gniezno described Archbishop Nycz March 5 as "the right person for the times." Archbishop Nycz is "open to dialogue, sensitive and consistent," he said.

KAI said in a March 4 commentary that Archbishop Nycz had strongly backed Poland's May 2004 accession to the European Union and was known as "a person excellently understanding the needs of the unemployed and poor, who places great trust in laypeople and does not avoid media contacts."

The new archbishop had avoided "all signs of superiority" but had also proved to be tough with Polish politicians, said KAI. The archbishop had warned politicians in 2000 against seeking to build "unity out of seedy compromises, half-truths and concessions," KAI said.

Father Adam Boniecki, editor of Poland's Tygodnik Powszechny Catholic weekly, said Archbishop Nycz's style had been "formed in the school of Cardinal Wojtyla," the future Pope John Paul II.

"A simplicity free of church nuances, insinuations and pretense behavior, and facing up to difficult issues - that's how Bishop Nycz was known in Krakow," Father Boniecki told KAI March 4.

Contributing to this story was Jonathan Luxmoore in Oxford, England.