

Pope confirms resignation of German bishop, urges reconciliation

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI urged reconciliation within the German church leadership after meeting with Bishop Walter Mixa of Augsburg, who recently resigned amid accusations of financial irregularities and hitting children.

A statement from the Vatican press office July 1 after the private audience said that Bishop Mixa would “retreat for a period of silence, contemplation and prayer.”

In an unusual reference to tension within the ranks, the pope specifically asked bishops in his native country to put aside ill feelings and help their brother in trouble.

Bishop Mixa offered his resignation April 21 and it was accepted May 4 after accusations surfaced that he had hit children during his time as a priest in charge of a children’s home near Augsburg. He originally denied the claims, then admitted that he had perhaps “boxed the ears” of some of his wards.

Bishop Mixa also faced accusations of misappropriation of funds from the children’s home.

German prosecutors also investigated Bishop Mixa for alleged sexual abuse of a minor when he was bishop of Eichstatt from 1996 to 2005 but dropped the investigation in May for lack of evidence. Bishop Mixa’s lawyer denied the abuse accusations and said the bishop had cooperated with prosecutors in the investigation.

The Vatican statement said that after a period of “treatment and reconciliation,” he would be available for pastoral work authorized by his successor. Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, director of the Vatican press office, said he did not know what sort of treatment the bishop would undergo or for what condition.

In his meeting with Pope Benedict, the statement said, the bishop asked “in all sincerity and humility” for forgiveness for his errors, and expressed hope that “the good he did not be forgotten.”

The pope, the statement said, hoped the bishop’s request “finds open ears and hearts.” It said the pope wanted reconciliation in the spirit of the Lord’s mercy, following “a period of polemics that have often been out of proportion.”

“Above all, the Supreme Pontiff asks the brothers in episcopal ministry to offer Bishop Mixa – more now than in the past – their friendship, their understanding and their help in guiding him back to the right path,” the statement said.

The pope reminded the faithful of their duty to help one another, the statement said. “In a time of contrast and insecurity, the world expects of Christians the shared witness that they, based on their meeting with the resurrected Lord, are able to offer and by which they help each other and the entire society find the right path toward the future,” it said.

In addition to leaving his post as head of the Augsburg Diocese, Bishop Mixa will no longer be responsible for German military personnel.