

# Pope supports Polish archbishop who resigned

OXFORD, England – Pope Benedict XVI expressed support for an archbishop who resigned because of links to communist-era secret police.

“I would like, above all, to offer words of encouragement, inviting you to stride forward with confidence and peace in your heart,” Pope Benedict said in a letter to former Warsaw Archbishop Stanislaw Wielgus. “I express the wish that Your Excellency renew your activity in Christ’s service in every way possible, so your immense and deep knowledge will bear fruit, as well as your priestly devotion for the good of the beloved church in Poland.”

The pope said in a letter published Feb. 21 that he was “fully aware of the exceptional circumstances” in which Archbishop Wielgus had worked “when the Marxist regime used all means to smother the freedom of citizens, and especially priests.” The letter was dated Feb. 12.

Archbishop Wielgus had “given proof of great piety and deep love for Christ and the church,” he added.

Pope Benedict said the archbishop’s resignation, just hours before he was to be formally installed, was an act of “deep sensitivity to the good of the church of Warsaw and Poland, as well as a humility and distance from privileges.”

The pope’s letter was read at churches throughout Poland during services Feb. 21, Ash Wednesday, which the Polish bishops marked as a day of penance for communist-era failures.

Archbishop Wielgus was named in December to succeed Cardinal Jozef Glemp, but resigned after two separate commissions said they had seen signed documents indicating he had “deliberately and secretly collaborated” with Poland’s secret police.

Although he admitted that he had met secret police agents and agreed to cooperate

in a “moment of weakness,” his lawyer later said he had withdrawn his confession and asked a court to clear his name.

The court agreed to hear the case and has requested relevant documents from Poland’s National Remembrance Institute, which has charge of secret police archives.