

# Pope's election produced 'no miracles' in Germany, archbishop says

WARSAW, Poland - The head of the German Catholic bishops' conference said the 2005 election of Pope Benedict XVI produced "no miracles" for Christianity in his country and warned that the church still faced "tough challenges."

"When a German became pope we needed time to get used to this internally," Archbishop Robert Zollitsch of Freiburg said in a June 1 interview with Poland's Catholic information agency, KAI. "Joy at his election later increased, and we accepted it as a gift. But it's a fact that having our countryman" as pope "has not produced miracles in our church or society."

Archbishop Zollitsch spoke to KAI about research data that suggests the election of a German pontiff has so far failed to bring young people back to the church.

He said many Germans were happy the pope appeared "open, with a human face" during his August 2005 homecoming for Cologne's World Youth Day and a visit to Bavaria in September 2006. He noted that church leaders had been encouraged by a high turnout at the Katholikentag, the biennial German Catholic Church assembly, in May in Osnabruck.

"However, Germany is a strongly pluralist society, and this pluralism is rooted in history," said the archbishop, who succeeded Mainz Cardinal Karl Lehmann as bishops' conference head in February. "The surveys show most Germans consider themselves religious, which means people are seeking higher values and haven't lost themselves in the multitude of propositions offered by the world. I see new chances for the church here - but it's crucial we have something to offer these seekers."

Noting that a person's religiousness is sometimes concealed in a pluralistic society, the archbishop said: "The Catholic Church has a strong position in German society, and we are doing a lot on both the social and international level."

“Many people identity with the church and we have the internal strength to look to the future with optimism. But tough challenges also stand before us,” he said.

Catholics make up 31 percent of Germany’s population of 82 million.