

# **Priest removed from D.C. after allegations of sex with girls in Germany**

COLOGNE, Germany - A priest of the German-speaking Catholic community in Washington has been recalled to Germany after accusations that, while he lived in Germany, he had sex with young women in his pastoral care.

The priest, Father Michael Schapfel, was transferred to Washington after having a relationship with a girl in Germany while he was serving as the chaplain of a girls' movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He denies that he had sexual relations with her before she was 16, the age of consent in Germany.

In March, after additional allegations of misconduct arose, the Diocese of Mainz informed German civil authorities and immediately recalled Father Schapfel to Germany. Diocesan officials said that before they transferred him in 2004, they had not been told the case involved a minor who was in a position of dependency.

"The allegations involved young women in Germany," said a statement from the Washington Archdiocese on April 20, the day archdiocesan officials learned about the incident. "No allegations involving his work in the United States have been received by the Diocese of Mainz or the Archdiocese of Washington."

Kornelia Fischer, spokeswoman for the German-based Schonstatt movement, the secular institute that runs the girls' movement and to which the priest is attached, said the first woman who alleged a relationship decided to end it in 2004 and told the Schonstatt Institute of Diocesan Priests, with which Father Schapfel was affiliated.

At that time, Monsignor Peter Wolf, general rector of the institute, told the Diocese of Mainz, the diocese for which Father Schapfel was ordained, that the priest had an affair with a woman, and that it would be advisable for him no longer to be employed in the area. As a result, he was transferred to the community in Washington.

In March, the Schonstatt institute informed the Mainz Diocese that there were suspicions that the priest had sexual relations with other girls and young women in his pastoral care, so the Mainz Diocese suspended him and recalled him to Germany.

The Washington statement said archdiocesan officials were offering pastoral care to the 75-family German pastoral mission.

It also said that, consistent with its child protection procedures, the archdiocese had received a letter from the Diocese of Mainz affirming the priest had no known criminal background or anything that would “render him unsuitable to work with children.” He also attended the archdiocese’s mandatory child protection training and signed an affidavit agreeing to follow its child protection policy.

The German bishops’ conference said it planned to send a representative to Washington to explain the situation but had not been able to do so because of the closure of German airspace as a result of the cloud of volcanic ash from Iceland.