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Pope Francis authorizes leave of absence for 'luxury' bishop

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Pope Francis on Wednesday authorized a leave of absence for bishop of Limburg Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst from his position for the time being, according to a published press report. [1] The decision came two days after the pontiff held a private audience with Tebartz-van Elst.

"A situation has been created in which Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst currently cannot exercise his episcopal ministry," said a statement Wednesday from the Vatican press office, according to Catholic News Service.

Pope Francis, after being "continually, broadly and objectively informed" about the situation in the Diocese of Limburg, has authorized "a period of leave outside the diocese," effective immediately, the statement said.

Tebartz-van Elst has been a target of protests [2] for allegedly spending close to $40 million in renovations and new construction on his residence and diocesan offices and for allegedly making false statements in court. German media have dubbed Bishop Tebartz-van Elst the "luxury bishop."

Vicar General Wolfgang Rösch from the neighboring city of Wiesbaden was named as the temporary caretaker for the bishop of Limburg's diocese. Rösch had already been selected to become Limburg's vicar general starting in January.

It was not immediately clear how long the German bishop would be on leave, but the German daily newspaper *Bild* reported Wednesday that the leave is expected to last two to three months.

In early September, Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, sent retired Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo to visit the diocese to promote peace between the bishop and some of the diocese's priests concerned about the project.

After the cardinal's visit, the bishop agreed to publish figures about the construction project and cooperate with a commission established by the bishops' conference to audit the project and examine how decisions were made. In most cases, church law requires consultation with a diocesan finance council before large sums of diocesan money can be spent.

The Vatican said Wednesday that Tebartz-van Elst would remain outside the diocese until the results of the audit and "the connected verification of responsibility in the matter" were known.

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