

[News](#)



Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki attends Pope Francis' weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at The Vatican, Wednesday, Oct. 5, 2022. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino, File)

Kristen Grieshaber

[View Author Profile](#)

Associated Press

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

Berlin — June 27, 2023

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

German police and prosecutors searched Catholic Church properties on June 27 in connection with a probe of the archbishop of Cologne in western Germany over perjury allegations, authorities said.

The searches included the vicar general's office and the premises of an IT company that provides email services to the archdiocese headed by Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki. They also included Woelki's home, German news agency dpa reported.

The cardinal is under investigation on suspicion of having falsely testified to court about when he became aware of reports of clergy sexual abuse in the archdiocese.

Thirty police officers and four prosecutors were involved in the raids Tuesday morning and confiscated documents, files and electronic data, Cologne Prosecutor Ulf Willuhn told reporters.

He said the material, which would take months to evaluate, was related to allegations regarding the cases of two clerics from the archdiocese. He declined to give further details about the cases.

"In terms of content, the main issue in each case is whether Cardinal Woelki had any knowledge at all, and if so, at what specific point in time, of allegations of abuse leveled against two clerics," Willuhn said.

The Cologne archdiocese, which has more Catholics than any other in Germany, about 1.8 million, has been [in a state of crisis](#) over those and other accusations related to the coverup of sexual abuse for several years.

Woelki has denied the latest allegations, which have fueled anger among Catholics toward the church far beyond Cologne.

The Cologne archdiocese confirmed the search of their premises by the public prosecutor's office, dpa reported.

"Experience shows that it will take some time before the result is available. Until then, we ask the public not to take an open-ended investigation as an opportunity to pronounce preliminary convictions," the archdiocese said.

The archdiocese of Cologne has been shaken by ongoing allegations against the cardinal since 2020, when Woelki, citing legal concerns, [kept under wraps a report he commissioned](#) on how local church officials reacted when priests were accused of sexual abuse. That infuriated many Cologne Catholics. [A second report](#), published in March 2021, found 75 cases in which high-ranking officials neglected their duties.

The report absolved Woelki of any neglect of his legal duty with respect to abuse victims. He subsequently said he made mistakes in past cases involving sexual abuse allegations but insisted he had no intention of resigning.

Two papal envoys were then dispatched to Cologne to investigate possible mistakes by senior officials in handling cases. Their report led Pope Francis to give Woelki a "[spiritual timeout](#)" of several months for making major communication errors.

In March 2022, after his return from the timeout, the archbishop submitted his offer to resign but so far Francis has not acted on it.

Advertisement

The June 27 raids are related to the question of when Woelki knew about allegations of abuse against a former leader of the Cologne carolers, Winfried Pilz, and a second cleric from the archdiocese, dpa reported.

In a criminal complaint filed by a private individual, the archbishop is accused of having made incorrect statements in a sworn deposition before a Cologne regional court in March, dpa reported. Woelki had denied those accusations.

Following the raids, Thomas Schueller, an expert in canonic law at the University of Muenster, told the newspaper Rheinische Post that "it is now up to Woelki to decide for himself whether to pull the ripcord."

"However, his behavior so far shows that he is clinging to his bishop's chair and puts his personal well-being above that of the Archdiocese of Cologne," Schueller said.

[Associated Press writer Frank Jordans in Berlin contributed to this report.]