



Archbishop Tadeusz Wojda of Gdansk, Poland, speaks during a news conference in Warsaw after being elected the new president of the Polish bishops' conference March 14. He has been accused of negligence in a sex abuse case. (OSV News/Courtesy of Polish bishops' conference)

Paulina Guzik

[View Author Profile](#)



OSV News

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

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

Krakow, Poland — May 22, 2024

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

The president of the Polish bishops' conference, Archbishop Tadeusz Wojda of Gdansk, has been accused of alleged negligence in a sex abuse case. The report, filed by a victim-survivor advocate under the new procedural norms established by the papal document [Vos Estis Lux Mundi](#), was sent to the Vatican's apostolic nunciature in Warsaw in March, according to the Polish Catholic media outlet Wiesz.

On May 20, a letter was published that Polish abuse victims sent to all members of the Permanent Council of the Polish bishops' conference May 13, asking to suspend [Wojda](#) from his duties as president of the Polish bishops' conference "pending investigation of the alleged negligence."

"In many Polish dioceses ... the welfare of institutions turns out to be more important than human suffering," victims said in a letter prepared by three vocal advocates of clerical sexual abuse survivors: Toska Szewczyk (not her real name), Jakub Pankowiak and Robert Fidura.

In an unprecedented move, 46 victims signed the letter — the first such large joint initiative of survivors of abuse in Poland that has been in a time of crisis since 2019.

"Until today, we spoke as individuals. This is the first time our voice is heard as a group in Poland. We wanted the bishops to know — we are together," Szewczyk told OSV News.

"As survivors, we are in solidarity not only with those of us from Gdansk, we are in solidarity with each other and we ask that justice be served," Pankowiak told OSV News.

In response to the publication of the letter, Fr. Leszek Gesiak, spokesman of the bishops' conference confirmed in a May 20 statement that members of the Permanent Council have "received the said letter" and added that a "date will soon be set for a meeting of the Permanent Council, which will discuss current affairs of the Church in Poland. It will also take up the issues contained in the letter."

"The doubts about Archbishop Wojda's actions were raised publicly more than two years ago," Zbigniew Nosowski, editor-in-chief of *Wież*, the Polish Catholic journal that is covering the story, told OSV News. "Now a formal notice of possible negligence by the new chairman of the Polish bishops' conference has been submitted to the apostolic nunciature officially, and we know this directly from victim-survivors."

In a report published May 9, *Wież* stated that victim-survivors told the publication that the Archdiocese of Gdansk had treated them in an "improper" fashion in the course of the church's investigation after the victim-survivors came forward to report their abuse, Nosowski said.

"Lack of compassion and manipulating official testimonies on the part of the priest who was hearing them are only two things to start with in this long litany of what seems to be really grave errors," Nosowski said.



Fr. Leszek Gesiak, spokesman of the Polish bishops' conference, left, is seen at a Jan. 9 press conference in Warsaw. He confirmed that the bishops' Permanent Council received the letter Polish abuse victims sent about allegations that Archbishop

Tadeusz Wojda of Gdansk was negligent in handling a clergy abuse case. (OSV News/Courtesy Polish bishops' conference)

Wież's editor-in-chief noted that details of Wojda's alleged negligence had first been published in February 2022 in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a Polish Catholic weekly magazine. But this news was soon eclipsed by reports of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

On May 10, Fr. Maciej Kwiecien, spokesman for the Archdiocese of Gdansk, responded to Nosowski's article, saying the writer's journalistic knowledge is "fragmentary" and that the case of the allegedly abusive priest "is being handled with due diligence and in accordance with the guidelines of the Holy See.

"This is confirmed by the documentation collected," the spokesman said.

Kwecien added that the journalist is "causing harm to victims" and that he is "creating an alternate media reality" regarding the canonical process.

In response, Nosowski told OSV News that he is "in touch with the victims of this particular priest ... and the curia did not contact them."

OSV News has reached out to the archdiocese for further comment and is awaiting a response.

In an editorial posted May 10, right after the spokesman published his statement, Nosowski, who served as a lay auditor of the Synod of Bishops in 2001 and 2005, and also was a consultant to the Pontifical Council for the Laity from 2002 to 2008, wrote that he made "no secret" in his report that his knowledge is "fragmentary."

"After all, I have not received an answer from the Gdansk curia to a single one of the 20 questions sent two weeks ago. And I was not able to find answers to all of them in other sources," he wrote.

In its list of alleged negligence, Wiéz includes bias in the preparation of protocols for canonical testimony (victims claim their testimonies were manipulated to diminish the fault of the priest); lack of response to important information sent in writing (including disregarding news of other victims who were ready to testify); and failure to provide assistance to those reporting wrongdoing.

According to Wiez, there also was a lack of supervision of a priest suspected of "serious wrongdoing," said Nosowski.

One of the alleged victims, the report sent to the nunciature said, was between 13 and 18 years old when the alleged abuse happened and the other was a vulnerable young adult who had just graduated from high school.

Related: [Editorial: Time for more transparency in Vatican handling of sex abuse](#)

Two years after the victims first gave their testimony in 2021 — and before any resolution had come from the local church's investigation that began when the victims first came forward — the accused clergyman became a deputy chaplain at a psychiatric hospital, which "gave him the opportunity for unfettered contact with people in deep mental crisis, including minors," according to Wiez.

"We don't know whether it was a decision of the archbishop to send him there or was it a self-inflicted decision of the priest to minister in the psychiatric hospital, but even if it was the latter, that means the supervision over this allegedly abusive priest was incompetent," Nosowski said.

The archdiocese allegedly also didn't prohibit the priest from hearing confessions, "although there is a serious suspicion of a breach of the seal of confession," according to Wiez.

In its May 13 letter, victims of abuse asked the Polish bishops for suspension of Wojda from his duties as conference president "until the alleged negligence is clarified," and if proved — "removal of him from his position as chairman."

They also urged the bishops to meet with their delegation at a plenary meeting "later in 2024."

They also asked to issue an institutional letter to the Vatican "in support of the idea of changes in canon law," so that victims get "the status of a party," not witness in canonical procedure. They also asked for involving "at least one woman in each diocese in the system for assisting the victims."

"It will probably be a novelty to anyone from Western countries that this did not happen yet, but the bishops' conference never met — as an institutional body — with survivors. We do have individual bishops doing it, of course, but as a conference, the bishops never met nor listened to victims of abuse," Fidura told OSV

News.

Wojda began his duties as president of the Polish bishops' conference March 14, in the midst of challenging times for the church in his country, with sexual abuse reports surfacing since 2019.

Advertisement

In the five years since the crisis came to light in the country, the church in Poland has taken up many reforms, including initiating the St. Joseph Foundation in 2019, which finances therapy and other needs of abuse survivors, and setting up the Office of Delegate of Child Protection of the Polish bishops' conference — for which Archbishop Wojciech Polak of Gniezno was reelected March 14.

In 2022, the St. Joseph Foundation had a budget of \$825,000, and a big chunk of it was spent on direct help for survivors, such as financing therapy for them. But according to an IBRiS polling institute survey from April 2023, 74,5% respondents consider the church's current efforts to help victims to be insufficient, Rzeczpospolita Polish daily reported.

Asked by OSV News on the day of his election about the way to get out of the crisis, the new president of Polish bishops said the key is "cooperation." "Everyone needs to feel responsible for the church," he said.

"The most important thing is to listen now," Wojda said in one of the first media interviews after his election. "I am trying to do it in my archdiocese," he stressed in the interview with OSV News. "I listen to understand what the world is living today."



A woman kneels in front of the cathedral in Warsaw, Poland, on the anniversary of St. John Paul II's death April 2, 2023. (OSV News/Reuters/Kacper Pempel)

"I wish they really listened, yes," Ewelina Zamojska, one of the signatories of the letter, told OSV News about the bishops' approach to survivors of abuse. She signed the letter also with her middle name — Nadzieja — meaning "hope" in Polish.

"It's baby steps in Poland," Szewczyk added. "Changes happen very slowly regarding the church answering to the needs of survivors, but they happen as we speak up strongly, so I am actually hopeful this time," she said.

Nosowski said that while he felt he was treated as "an enemy" by the Gdansk curia because of the coverage in Wiesz, he is still happy that Kwiecien's response was published.

"On the one hand, it is a sort of counterattack on the messenger, but on the other hand, it was also the first ever public admission that 'we have a problem,' and this is what matters," he said.

Several priests from the Gdansk Metropolitan Court responsible for handling the case of the victims mentioned by Wiesz magazine have been working in the archdiocesan tribunal since Archbishop Slawoj Leszek Glódz led the archdiocese. He retired in 2020.

Glódz was [sanctioned by the Vatican](#) in March 2021 for "reported negligence" and "omissions" in cases of "sexual abuse committed by some clergy against minors."