

17.9.2013 - Deutsche Welle

Germany's Zollitsch retires as archbishop

The Catholic head of the German Bishops' Conference since 2008, Archbishop Robert Zollitsch, has been given approval to retire by the pope. Zollitsch sometimes draws plaudits for trying to liberalize a shrinking church.

The Vatican announced on Tuesday the retirement of Archbishop Robert Zollitsch, who heads Germany's second-largest Catholic diocese, at the age of 75. That's the age under church law when a bishop can offer to leave office.

Zollitsch would remain conference chairman until March next year and would run the diocese of Freiburg in Germany's southwest as administrator until a successor was appointed, said the Vatican and the archbishopric on Tuesday.

The bishops' conference would pick a new chairman in early 2014, they added.

Zollitsch had offered to renounce his office as archbishop in August when he turned 75.

He was born in 1938 in the former Yugoslavia into a family of so-called Danube Swabians who fled shortly after World War Two to the newly-created German Federal Republic. He spent much of his clerical career in the Freiburg area.

On Sunday, Zollitsch spoke out on Syria's civil war, saying military strikes threatened by some Western powers would endanger Syria's Christian minorities in a manner "reminiscent of Iraq."

Dialogue on reform

Zollitsch in recent years initiated a five-year-long dialogue on the future of the Catholic church in Germany, where Catholic reformers object to strict rules on celibacy for male priests, the non-equality of women and remarried couples and inner-church employment policy.

Chairing a third such dialogue conference in Stuttgart on Saturday attended by 35 bishops, Zollitsch said: "We are dealing with these issues."

The lay president of the Central Committee of German Catholics, Alois Glück, a former speaker of the Bavarian parliament, said Zollitsch's dialogue series had been "very fruitful" in improving discussion in the wake of various church scandals.

Critics disappointed

The inner-Catholic reform movement "We are Church" said that although the discursive atmosphere was "good," the dialogue series was "treading on the spot," with the bishops displaying "no real movement."

On Monday, the head of the Catholic Women's Community in Germany, Maria Theresia Opladen, called for more free scope so that women could officiate at non-liturgical church services and funerals.

Last year, 118,288 Catholics quit the 27 dioceses of the Catholic church in Germany, leaving it with 24.3 million members or 30 percent of the Germany's population.

The Protestant church in Germany had 23.6 million members.

ipj/tj (kna, AFP, epd, dpa)

<http://www.dw.de/germanys-zollitsch-retires-as-archbishop/a-17093861>

Zuletzt geändert am 26.09.2013