

POLAND

Prelate resigns over sex charges

Archbishop long associate to pope

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WARSAW — An archbishop in Pope John Paul II's homeland announced his resignation yesterday after a Vatican probe and newspaper reports that he had made homosexual advances to young clerics.

Juliusz Paetz, the archbishop of Poznan, Poland, is the highest-ranking prelate to be brought down in a recent spate of sexual misconduct charges rocking the Roman Catholic Church. He was the highest since the pope forced Austrian Cardinal Hans Hermann Groer to relinquish his duties in 1998 after charges he molested boys.

Archbishop Paetz, an appointee and a longtime acquaintance of John Paul's, repeatedly has rejected the charges. Yesterday, he said he was innocent but was stepping down for the "good of the church" in the western Polish city.

"The Poznan church needs unity and peace," Archbishop Paetz said at the end of a Mass in which priests renewed their vows. "Bearing in mind the good of the beloved Poznan church, I submitted a request to the Holy Father to relieve me of my duties, and the Holy Father accepted my request."

Archbishop Paetz, 67, said he had fallen victim to misinterpretation of his "kindness and spontaneity."

Shortly after his announcement in Poznan Cathedral, the Vatican confirmed, without further comment, that the pope accepted the resignation. It named as his successor Monsignor Stanislaw Gadecki, 52, an



Archbishop Juliusz Paetz

auxiliary bishop in the nearby town of Gniezno.

Archbishop Paetz was already at the Vatican when John Paul was elected pope in 1978. He had ties with the papal entourage under Paul VI, John Paul's predecessor, and was seen at papal events after the Polish pope took over. John Paul made Archbishop Paetz a bishop in 1982 and sent him back to Poland, then named him archbishop in 1996.

Poland's Roman Catholic Church said in late February that the Vatican was looking into charges in Poland's Rzeczpospolita newspaper, which cited unidentified priests as saying that the archbishop had been accused by numerous priests and clerics of sexual harassment.

Vatican sources have said the pope is deeply saddened by the scandal in the Polish church.

The resignation came a week after John Paul broke his silence on sexual-abuse cases rocking the Roman Catholic Church, including in the United States. He said the "grave scandal" was casting a "dark shadow of suspicion" over all priests.