Pope accepts resignation of bishop who called for council to discuss women priests

Bishop Denis Theurillat, auxiliary bishop of Basel, Switzerland, from 2000 to 2021

Pope Francis on Monday accepted the resignation of a Swiss bishop who recently called for a council to discuss women priests.

The Holy See press office announced Feb. 8 that the pope had accepted the resignation from the office of auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Basel, Switzerland, presented by Bishop Denis Theurillat.

Theurillat told the Swiss Catholic Church's website kath.ch that he had asked to resign five years before the customary retirement age for bishops because of the increasing burdens of his office.

He said that following an accident last year, "I realized that the time had come to step down and think about a new chapter in my life."

In an interview last September with kath.ch, Theurillat said that he would like to participate in a council on women priests.

He said: “The facts are on the table, the time is ripe. All the bishops of the world should come together and decide: yes or no.”

He added that the question should not be decided by Pope Francis alone, “otherwise we will experience a schism.”

The interview was published as Theurillat celebrated his 70th birthday, reported CNA Deutsch, CNA’s German-language news partner.

Theurillat was born on Sept. 21, 1950. He was ordained in 1976 as a priest of Basel diocese. He was appointed an auxiliary bishop of the diocese on April 17, 2000, when Cardinal Kurt Koch, the current president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, was bishop of Basel.

In a Feb. 8 statement, members of the Swiss bishops’ conference responded to Theurillat’s resignation “with surprise.”

They thanked him for his 20 years of service, praising him as a “man of dialogue.” They noted that he had traveled to World Youth Day four times with a Swiss youth delegation and organized an encounter between 20,000 young people and John Paul II during the Polish pope’s visit to Switzerland in 2004.

In his 1994 apostolic letter “Ordinatio sacerdotalis,” John Paul II declared that “the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful.”

Speaking to journalists during an in-flight press conference in 2016, Pope Francis said: “On the ordination of women in the Catholic Church, the final word is clear, it was said by St. John Paul II and this remains.”

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