



The sculpture of Essen Cardinal Franz Hengsbach hangs on a crane in front of Essen Cathedral after being dismantled and loaded onto a truck in Essen, Germany, Monday Sept. 25, 2023. A statue of a deceased German cardinal was removed from its perch outside Essen Cathedral in western Germany on Sept. 25, days after allegations of sexual abuse decades ago became public. (Christoph Reichwein/dpa via AP)

by Associated Press

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Berlin — September 25, 2023

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A statue of a deceased German cardinal was removed from its perch outside Essen Cathedral in western Germany on Sept. 25, days after allegations of sexual abuse decades ago became public.

The accusations against Cardinal Franz Hengsbach, who died in 1991, added to a long-running scandal over abuse by clergy that has shaken the German church.

Last week, the Essen diocese said there were suspicions that Hengsbach may have abused a 16-year-old girl in the 1950s when he was an auxiliary bishop in nearby Paderborn, and that a woman had also accused him of abusing her in 1967 when he was bishop of Essen — a job that he held for 33 years.

In a letter to parishes released on Sept. 22, current Bishop Franz-Josef Overbeck apologized for his mistakes in handling the allegations.

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He said he had heard of one accusation in 2011 and did nothing after the Vatican determined that it was not plausible. "I must now admit that the accusations were misjudged in 2011 and that those affected were wronged," he wrote. A further allegation that came to Overbeck's attention in March prompted church officials to revisit the case.

The diocese decided on Sept. 22 to remove the larger-than-life statue of Hengsbach, which was unveiled in 2011. On the morning of Sept. 25, a crane lifted it onto a truck, German news agency dpa reported. It is to be put in storage.

In 2018, a church-commissioned report concluded that at least 3,677 people were abused by clergy in Germany between 1946 and 2014. More than half of the victims were 13 or younger, and nearly a third served as altar boys.